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WHY KNOWLEDGE MATTERS IN THE COMMON CORE ERA

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. HANSEN: Good morning. Welcome to the Brookings Institution. I'm Michael Hansen, senior fellow and director of the Brown Center on Education Policy here at Brookings. We extend you a warm welcome to be here for this event today. We're discussing why knowledge matters in the Common Core era. We will be archiving this event so that anyone who wishes to view this event after today will have an opportunity to do so through the Brookings.edu website, and we also welcome you to share any thoughts or comments or feedback through social media, including Twitter and Facebook.

So most states are about five years into the Common Core era, and it was initially intended to help standardize students' expectations across state lines based on an expert consensus. And though there have been some high profile missteps in testing, evaluations, and states backing away from those standards, it looks like most states are continuing to go forward with the Common Core. However, they are growing increasingly unpopular among the public and teachers, so there are some questions about how it's going to move forward.

Now, today we're going to hear from a well established and reputable education scholar who has a nuanced view about the Common Core. E.D. Hirsch, Jr., sitting here to my left, has authored a new book emphasizing the need for focus on core knowledge, which could be but is not necessarily congruent with the Common Core. So allow me first to introduce Dr. Hirsch.

Dr. Hirsh is the Chairman and Founder of the Core Knowledge Foundation. He is also the Professor Emeritus of Education and Humanities at the University of Virginia and is the author of several books, including the bestseller, "Cultural Literacy: The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them," and most recently the

book just released, "Why Knowledge Matters". He is widely known as one of the most influential education scholars and began his teaching career at Yale.

Also on stage with me next is Sonia Cabell, who is assistant research professor in the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia. Sonia is here with us as she is the lead investigator on a grant given to the Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning at UVA's Curry School. This \$3.3 million IES grant is here to help assess the Core Knowledge Language Arts Program, the Listening and Learning Read Aloud Program. So Dr. Cabell has some very relevant expertise to talk about Dr. Hirsch's work and this new book. Also, her research interests include preschool language and literacy development, preschool intervention effects and reading difficulties among young at-risk children.

And finally, to my furthest left, your right, we have Dr. Bill Galston, who is the Ezra K. Zilkha chair and senior fellow in the Governance Studies program here at the Brookings Institution. Bill Gaston was a former policy advisor to President Clinton and other presidential candidates and is an expert on issues including public policy, political campaigns, and elections. He was formerly a professor at the University of Maryland and is the author of eight books and more than 100 articles.

So the way we will proceed with this event is, first I'm going to give the time to Dr. Hirsch. He will have about 25 minutes to present some prepared remarks. Next we will have a 15-minute slot for response from Dr. Cabell. Then next we'll give a few minutes of response back to Dr. Hirsch, and then Bill is going to be leading us in a moderated cross talk conversation over the next 10 or 15 minutes, and then finally we will turn the remainder of the time over to audience Q & A.

So let's go to that point.

DR. HIRSCH: Thank you, Michael. I want to thank first Bill Galston for

actually making this session possible, under the influence I will say at least of Lisa Hansel, who is a great advocate of Knowledge Matters, and she is the head of an initiative called The Knowledge Matters Campaign.

I've been to several sessions at Brookings before, and they were always very lively and usually productive conversations. I particularly remember one with John Bishop where he talked about the relation between reading gaps and economic gaps with some force. And I am going to assume we want to have a good discussion going after this so I'm just going to stick to three points, which is about the only number of points that I can deal with at a time or keep in mind. (Laughter)

Let me talk first about the first strand in the book, which is the claim of scientific validity for the proposals and analyses. I claim that they are consistent with consensus science, particularly in cycle linguistics and cognitive science and developmental psychology. The scientific consensus in these fields is the nearest we come to the reality principle in education. That's why I invited well known researchers to blurb the book. I didn't ask important political figures. Steven Pinker, Susan Neuman, Daniel Willingham -- I hope those are names that you all know. I'm gratified that they have endorsed the book. And I think that claim of scientific accuracy is strategic because they are heterodox ideas this book has. But it's becoming ever more clear from our recent educational reforms that science needs to be our guide hence forth, not cherry-picked educational experiments at the school level. Education is a long range process. The uncontrolled variables in education fly in every direction. We've recently become disappointed in the methods and programs that seem promising: small classes, direct instruction, success for all. They were supported by experimental results. But in the long run they've disappointed. It's time to look at ideas that flow from general scientific principles and is supported by large scale international data. The scientific consensus

represents the reality principle, as it's currently now. An education proposal or policy that runs counter to that consensus is likely to disappoint, and it has disappointed.

My book claims that our guiding theories in the schools do not comport with that consensus, which explains why we've become frustrated with our reforms. It argues that the scientific incentives is especially important when it comes to three education ideas: developmentally appropriate practice, the achievement of all-purpose verbal skills, and the imparting of other all-purpose skills like problem solving and critical thinking.

Let me turn first to developmentally appropriate practice. Developmental psychology has undergone a significant change in recent years. Emphasis is shifting away from the word "development" and towards the word "culture." The differentness of a child's development within different languages and cultures has become a major theme. To his great credit Piaget himself heralded that change in his speech of 1964 when he conceded, "maturation is not everything". It's quite a wonderful speech, not pointed too very much because everybody associates Piaget with a distinct stage theory of development.

This points up a paradox concerning what is to be conceived as natural development. In recent years the scientific world has been turned upside down on that score. It's understood that letting a child unfold naturally according to his own time clock is quite an unnatural proceeding for human beings, not for squirrels and ants, but for human beings. It's natural for a child to be inducted into the particular language and value orientations of a particular culture, and these cultures are quite varied. Natural development for human beings implies cultural training. The word culture is seen as a co-determinant of development. So called unnatural education is inherently natural, whereas naturalistic education is inherently unnatural. That shift has pretty significant

implications for policy and practice.

A second consensus concerns the nature of skilled performance. In the current scientific literature, skilled performance is not denoted by the term "skill". The operative term is now "expertise." That shift is important because thinking about school reform and its goals has not been able to dispense with the term skill. I will just briefly read you what the various school districts say about that in their online blurbs, just a few sentences. Milwaukee says students will develop organizational critical thinking and problem solving skills. Oakland, California wants its students to read, write, speak and think critically. Tucson fosters creativity, critical thinking, and problem solving. Santa Fe promotes critical thinking, problem solving, and creativity. Richmond, Virginia imparts critical thinking, responsibility, mutual respect, citizenship, and a lifelong love of learning. And Montgomery, Alabama will encourage and support critical thinking, problem solving, and active questioning.

The verbal contrast in the scientific literature between the word "skill" and the word "expertise" is important because that term, skill, has now as you see allowed educators to adopt the convenient but incorrect principle that the actual content of education is less important than the development of general skills, like finding the main idea or problem solving or critical thinking. It turns out that the supposedly general competencies simply do not exist as all-purpose skills independent of particular knowledge domains. A skill is dependent on specific knowledge. There are few, if any, all-purpose free floating skills.

A key descriptor in the scientific literature is the term "domain specific." Almost all the sub-competencies that children need in order to become participating members of society are domain specific competencies. The title of my book, "Why Knowledge Matters," is not really pointed enough. It's not any sort of knowledge, but only

specifically relevant knowledge that matters in each case. This finding has exceptionally strong implications for schooling. If skills matter, as everyone conceives, then domain specific knowledge must also matter a great deal. The specific content of a school curriculum crucially matters. The claim that you can always look it up is an out loaded slogan because you can't. You can only look things up effectively if you already possess domain specific knowledge about the topic. Our slogans about general skills and about developmentally appropriate practice and our brave new world of instant internet communication need to be reexamined. Psychologically they are not reality-based. Above all, though, it's our faith in natural development, the view that, as Wordsworth put it, that "Nature never did betray the heart that loved her," that has chiefly misled us.

The story I tell in this book has two subplots. How are small-scale classroom practice, like developmentally appropriate practice, has been ineffective because of our large-scale convictions. The intellectual history subplot could ultimately be the crucial element if we need to change our fundamental ideas because absent changes in our underlying convictions about nature and individualism, we are unlikely to make fundamental changes in school practice.

I think I can identify, after a lot of years in the education debates, I think I can identify the main idea that needs changing. I call it providential individualism. The idea that some larger force, like nature or the free market, will guide our educational goals and make them come out right. On the contrary, it's not providence or nature but adults who need to decide what our children should know and be able to do. I accuse both the left and the right of misplaced providentialism. I know that my critique is -- both the left and the right pretty much includes everybody, and that will doom the popularity (laughter) of the book, but to offend everyone is a prerogative of old age. As I say, the left, but also many on the right believe that nature will provide if only we encourage the

individual child to unfold in his or her natural way according to his or her natural tendencies, talents, and home culture. We have a conviction in the United States that we must follow the talents and the preferences and the stages of development that are appropriate to the individual child and should not impose uncongenial or unnatural subject matters. And that explains the omnipresent graded readers so that the children can choose their own books, because under providential individualism the children sort of decide their own curriculum.

We continue to adopt every new version of this individualistic, naturalistic point of view. It's been around a long time in the United States. It began to influence our schools in the late 19th century when Colonel Francis Parker took over the school system of Quincy, Massachusetts. Colonel Parker had honed his Hegelian ideas at Hegel's former university in Berlin. And in the '70s and '80s he spread his influence through his own books and through the effective advocacy of Charles Francis Adams and then John Dooley, who was also a Hegelian. Sort of natural growth principle of education. These writers influenced American education on into the 20th century to change from a training model of education, focused on virtue building and acculturation to a natural growth model of education focused on the growth of the individual child.

More recently another kind of providentialism has appeared. It says that not just nature will provide, but also the genius of the free market will provide. Milton Friedman has argued that given the right incentives, the free market automatically exercises a beneficial influence on educational practice across the nation. Policy makers do not need to delve into specific educational theories. If the bottom line competencies are specified, and if the right incentives and punishments are imposed, then the genius of the market will yield a better result and bureaucratically imposed regulations.

But the charter school movement has not produced an average result

much better than so-called government schools. There are excellent charter schools; for example, the Icon Schools and the Success Academies. But given the overall disappointments of the charters, their occasional success doesn't seem to be inherently owing to the fact that they are charter schools, but to the fact that they're good schools. Regular public schools, under forceful principles, have been able to pursue exactly the same educational methods as the best charter school has. By the way, if you're skeptical of that point -- I see some head shaking already -- I ask you to read the book where I describe a couple of those schools in the book. The benefit has come from the educational principles that the schools are following, not from the genius of the market. I mean charter is not an educational category, it's an organizational category.

Most schools and teachers do not need special incentives. They are eager to succeed with children. They mainly need sounder ideas. Neither nature nor the market will provide those ideas automatically. Idea change comes with exhortation, illustration, just as in the case of Quincy, Massachusetts. So what then are the better ideas? To indicate their character by a first approximation, I draw attention in the book to the scientific consensus, but also to the international scene, to the PISA scores for 15 year olds in various nations, and those that score best in achievement also now the achievements gaps between demographic groups, very significant correlation. High achievement, narrowing of demographic gaps.

Well, there's a characteristic that these high achieving countries have. According to PISA these nations specify curricular content in the early grades. That's what these high achieving countries do. When asked how Germany accomplished this, after Germany made tremendous strides -- it had low scores in 2000, but by 2012 it had risen into the top group of countries, and how did they do that? Manfred Prenzel, the head of German PISA Studies had a quick answer. Germany has now adopted a specific

cumulative curriculum for all students in the early grades. Prenzel said, "The teachers now specifically know what to teach, and the students know what they have to learn". Germany is an interesting case because it moved from an individualized approach to curriculum to a common curriculum, whereas France in the same period did exactly the opposite. France had a common elementary curriculum in the '60s and '70s, just when international comparisons were beginning to be conducted. And then after 1989 when they sort of Americanized and individualized the curriculum, it managed to achieve the most significant drop every recorded in PISA scores. When the 2012 PISA results were announced, the big headlines in French newspapers read, "We are the champions of academic inequality." It was a stunning reversal. It had been achieved by instituting the providential individualistic principle and abandoning a coherent common curriculum.

Let me end then by a few words about the centrality of verbal expertise, which is also Sonia's special subject. To improve student achievement in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, is to gain the keys to the kingdom. A lot follows from verbal achievement. They are the competencies on which most other academic achievements rest, but these language competencies are not formal skills. They depend on wide ranging knowledge. High reading ability means the ability to read about different topics. And that ability is topic dependent. There is no general universal reading skill. I outlined dramatic experiments showing that normally poor readers outperform normally good readers when the poor readers have relevant domain knowledge and the good readers don't. That also even extends to IQ levels. Low IQ students read better than the high IQ students when the low IQ students possess more domain knowledge. The centrality of domain specific knowledge and language comprehension has immediate relevance to school policy. If a student comprehends speech better when primed with domain relevant background knowledge, then that student will understand what the

teacher is saying and what the textbook is saying if primed with the needed prior knowledge. Better overall student learning occurs when all students are so primed. From week to week and year to year, the sequence of learnings by all students will ultimately determine the excellence and equity of academic achievement in the school system. What is learned beforehand determines the rate and equity of the learnings that come after.

If all students are primed to learn what is to come, gaps will be greatly narrowed between haves and have-nots. This principle alone explains the PISA findings that countries which score the highest in achievement also score the highest in equity. They're all using the coherent curriculum so that everybody is then able to catch up at least on that particular topic.

In the U.S. the main objections to specifying the content of the curriculum are very well known to everybody here. Different strokes for different folks. A student's personality and interests and IQ should determine the topics that best suit that student. In language arts the teacher will teach best the text that are of greatest interest to the teacher, and the localities not the national government should determine the topics of the curriculum as is proper in a free society.

But here's the enabling clause that allows those views to proceed is a convenient idea that we now know to be incorrect. It's the idea that the specific content of schooling isn't critical. What's critical is the general know how which enables a student to handle any content. Hence, we must teach general reading skills, like the ability to find the main idea, the ability to handle complex text, all greatly facilitated by Google and the internet. To these will be added critical thinking skills and general problem solving skills. And these 21st century skills, which actually go back to the 19th century, are not to be disparaged. Actually they do in a way exist, and some people have them. I'm sure most

of the people in this room have those skills, but they are not domain general. They're domain specific, they depend on your knowledge of the topic that's being discussed.

That shift in an understanding of what 21st century skills really are explains the rise of Germany in PISA rankings, the fall of France. It explains why all the top nations have common curricular sequencies. And I devote my seventh chapter mainly to France, but the positive example of Germany is equally informative. By the way there's a negative example of Sweden as well, which is quite interesting. Because Germany is educationally structured like the United States, we have states, they have Lande and each individual Land does its own curriculum. But when the various Lande got together and decided to bring some commonality into what they did and make more specific what students are learning grade by grade, and their PISA scores shot up.

So I'm saying we need to do the same essentially. I mean, sure, the states are going to decide, the states run things, but there needs to be some sense at least within a state or at least within a district of what constitutes a coherent and progressive and cumulative curriculum from the standpoint of content.

So I'm closing my little talk then with this: consensus has taught us that mastery of language requires this shared background knowledge, shared assumptions. And the shared knowledge that's needed for acculturation determines the core of what needs to be taught in the schools of a nation. That shared knowledge where everybody is primed, so to speak, is the knowledge that the schools should be giving kids. A lot hinges on our willingness to accept the idea that knowledge matters a lot more than all purpose skills and these, as it turns out, do not even exist.

MR. HANSEN: Thank you. Sonia, you have a response?

DR. CABELL: Thank you. My name is Sonia Cabell, and I'm a reading researcher at the University of Virginia. My focus is on preventing reading difficulties in

young children, particularly among children living in poverty. And specifically my work focuses on ways to improve schools and teachers to help children improve their reading comprehension abilities through enhancing children's vocabularies from the early years, starting in preschool. And I want to point out that my work is completely independent from Core Knowledge and the Core Knowledge Foundation. And our work in this area. Although we talk with the Foundation, we don't discuss the design of our study or our sites or anything that has to do with our research. So it's independent from the Foundation. I just want to bring that up before we get started.

The book, "Why Knowledge Matters", by E.D. Hirsch is insightful yet thought provoking, convincing yet challenging. On the one hand, several key ideas resonated with me: systematically building children's knowledge, deemphasizing the overuse of reading strategies, like finding the main idea and summarizing, and looking at the global historical picture when it comes to educational practices. But this book also made me question my own deeply held beliefs and assumptions about teaching and learning. I found myself automatically reacting to assertions such as reducing the use of leveled readers, doing less differentiated instruction, increasing whole group instructional time. I'm guessing that several ideas in the book will probably hit a nerve with you too. But then I thought what we're currently doing in the American public school system is not working. We need more than tweaks to our system; we need transformation, which I believe is the case that Dr. Hirsch is trying to make.

So the goal of my response today is twofold. First, I want to affirm the big idea in this book, specifically that systematic building of a common cultural set of knowledge is a key missing component in our schools. And that also, secondly, I also want to bring to bear a body of work that's not fully discussed in the book, and that is developing young children's oral language skills during preschool and kindergarten years,

to help you understand how language and knowledge are related and not fully distinct. Often we talk about vocabulary as its own thing and knowledge as a separate thing, and vocabulary belongs to reading education and knowledge belongs to science. But that's just not the case. I find the body of work in this area, in the area of language, complementary and convergent with the ideas that Dr. Hirsch discusses.

So my first exposure to Dr. Hirsch's ideas was actually quite a negative one. Sorry. (Laughter) It was the mid to late '90s, and I had seen his books, like I'm sure you have, in Barnes and Noble, "What Your First Grader Needs to Know," "What Your Fifth Grader Needs to Know." And I was student teaching at my college's lab school. I went to Smith College, and they took pride in having a very progressive lab school. At the time my supervising teacher exclaimed, I can't believe that someone thinks they know what every fifth grader should know! So to her it was completely appalling. And, you know, that exemplified for me the controversy surrounding E.D. Hirsch's work. That somehow having a common set of knowledge takes away from teaching and learning. And who chooses what that knowledge is a subject of much scrutiny and debate.

Well, fast forward almost 20 years and here I am, very much bought into the idea of systematic knowledge building to improve reading comprehension. And I'm studying this very approach in my own work. And we're now in a different national setting where the idea of systematically building children's knowledge and having a common curriculum have culturally become more acceptable than in the past. And, as Dr. Hirsch points out, it's even written into our Common Core state standards. By reading text in history, social studies, science, and other disciplines, students build a foundation of knowledge in these fields that will also give them the background to be better readers in all the content areas. Students can only gain this foundation when the curriculum is intentionally and coherently structured to develop rich content knowledge within and

across grades.

So let's talk for a moment about how language and knowledge are related. I'll review briefly what Dr. Hirsch says about this relationship in his book. He says vocabulary size is the outward and visible sign of an inward acquisition of knowledge. Knowledge and vocabulary are intertwined. The vocabulary size of 17 year olds is not determined at age 17 or 16 or 15. It's a plant of slow growth that is determined by the knowledge that has been gradually acquired from the child's overall experience from birth to age 17. Dr. Hirsch mentions the much discussed 30-million-word gap, which I'm sure you've heard of. This is from Hart and Risley's seminal work examining children's home environments. By age 4, they found that children from more economically advantaged backgrounds hear 30 million more words than children who are living in poverty. In addition, children's vocabularies, the words that they can speak, are quite different. There's a big gap there. So that difference in sheer quantity of words heard in the home environment is shocking. So many in the public sphere have really picked up on this idea, and there are a lot of initiatives going on around this idea. It's leading many people to think about, how do we increase the vocabularies of children who live in poverty?

Some solutions have strictly just focused on quantity, increasing the amount of talk at home between parents and children. But it's important to know that that's not the whole story. Not only Hart and Risley's findings, but other findings converge on the fact that it's not only the quantity of talk that matters; the quality of talk to which children are exposed matters maybe even more. And this is also a key finding from Hart and Risley that's somewhat overlooked, building vocabulary is not occurring in a vacuum devoid of content. So just talking more and having more conversations, while it might be a start, cannot fix the issue of the vocabulary gap.

I found this in my own work in preschool classrooms with 3- to 5-year-old children living in poverty. In general, the language learning environments in the preschool classroom is low. Teachers are generally not exposing children to rich vocabulary and children are not engaging in a lot of conversation with their teachers, particularly in environments that are serving low income children. Under the leadership of Dr. Laura Justice, we train teachers to be conversationally responsive partners with children. And we trained them in techniques that they could use throughout the day. We didn't think about content. One set of techniques related to the quantity, having more conversations, thinks like waiting for children to initiate the conversation, following their lead, asking them questions to keep the conversation going back and forward, pausing and waiting for children to respond.

And a second set of techniques related to the quality of talk, exposing children to advanced language models, like repeating and expanding on what children are saying and extending their ideas, providing extra information or explanation about a topic. And we hypothesized that it was this latter group of things that actually make a difference to children's vocabulary learning. Well, in our year-long randomized control trial we had lackluster findings. Although the teachers in our study did engage in more conversations, they had difficulty implementing those more challenging techniques that would improve the quality of talk. And so the intervention didn't really show an impact on children's vocabulary. And it actually appeared to benefit only those children entering preschool with better language skills in the first place, serving to widen that gap.

At the same time we were reporting our work, other researchers were finding the same thing: that they were having limited success in helping accelerate young children's vocabulary learning. The interventions involved reading books aloud to children and selecting words to teach seemed to have the greatest impact on vocabulary,

but the findings generally have been pretty consistent across studies. Children learn the words you teach them, but it doesn't really generalize to more distal vocabulary learning. And what I mean by that is we're having trouble understanding how to accelerate scores on what's considered our gold standard of vocabulary testing, which is the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, or the PPVT. In this test children hear a word like "tunnel" and are asked to point to the picture that best illustrates the word. The items go up in complexity from there. And this test actually seems to be tapping into more than vocabulary but rather into knowledge to which children have been exposed since their infancy. Children obviously make gains on this measure with age, but we want to accelerate the progress for children, and we can't seem to do so.

When we presented our findings at the Society for Research on Child Development, the world-renowned literacy expert, Catherine Snow, made a profound comment. She was our discussant. She said maybe we have to give teachers something to talk about. (Laughter) She suggested that the content areas may offer the best solution for improving vocabulary even among preschoolers. You know, there's a preschool intervention that didn't focus on vocabulary per se, but it kind of put all of us who were just doing language interventions, to put us all kind of to shame. This intervention was by Doug Clements and Julie Sarama; it was a math curriculum for preschool children. And it accelerated vocabulary scores. There's a lot of conversation going on the use of this curriculum, and I find it very interesting that a content-focused curriculum was able to do -- incidentally not trying -- was able to do that without our language-focused interventions doing that.

Catherine Snow's comments inspired me to look at different classroom contexts and see whether the quality of teachers' language interactions with their students differed. In other words, I wanted to know, are there contexts in which teachers

naturally have richer language interactions with children? Because I'm really concerned about teachers. I'm concerned about, how do we improve the way that they're actually doing these language interactions and building vocabulary with children? Well, in a study that looked at preschool classrooms across the country, I found that teachers naturally have higher quality interactions when they're teaching about science in preschool. Imagine that. And what are they doing when they're teaching science? They're reading books aloud to children. This finding matters because it may be easier for teachers to actually change their language learning environments for children when they have rich content knowledge to impart.

So let's talk briefly about what kind of talk can actually help accelerate children's vocabularies. Dr. Hirsch stated, we know that advantaged children are ahead in vocabulary because they have heard many more total words and many more different words than disadvantaged children. We need a program that enables them to catch up little by little, but at the same time it's interesting and appropriate for their more advantaged peers. And it's been demonstrated that the very best way to ensure to high reading comprehension in the long-term is to ensure high oral comprehension in the earliest grades. And the best way to do that is to make sure our children learn a lot in the early grades through listening and talking, as well as through reading. As their knowledge expands, so do their vocabularies. He really stressed that reading aloud to children in the early grades is essential.

So you might think read-aloud is a ubiquitous practice. It is, it's a ubiquitous practice occurring in our elementary schools. And while this is true, though, the read-alouds to which children are exposed are often like a patchwork, a quilt, with little guidance as to sequencing or topics. And to be fair, teachers don't really have access to the books they need to do this type of approach. So for the teachers who are

teaching words explicitly in their classrooms, they're taught to choose useful words that children will encounter again and again. But this lower learning is quite isolated. As Dr. Hirsch stated in his book, in the absence of well-integrated curriculum, reliable vocabulary gain currently depends on isolated word study, which is a method of limited effectiveness.

Dr. Hirsch calls his ideas "domain immersion," that teachers give a sustained focus on a topic like plants and farms for several days. Read-alouds would be focused on this topic. And since vocabulary encompasses both breadth -- the number of words you know -- and depth -- how deeply you know those words, without the discussion on sustained topics it's hard to see how children's vocabulary grows in breadth and depth.

Just think about children's vocabulary learning like a spider web. At the middle of the web there's a topic, such as winter, and around the word there are other words related to winter, such a windy, blizzard, freeze, snowman, seasons, and so forth. For a child with a lot of exposure to the concept of winter, there would be a lot of words on those webs, and it would be like a tight, beautiful spider web. But for a child who might live in a warm climate, who doesn't really have that much exposure or hasn't read a lot of books about winter or seen it on TV, the web would be much looser. And the looser the web, the more new knowledge and words can pass on through and don't get caught.

Susan Neuman and her colleagues have demonstrated success in a read-aloud approach to vocabulary building among preschool children, called World of Words, that teaches vocabulary through conceptual categories that contain semantically related words. The curriculum focuses on read-alouds in science, social studies, and math topics. And there's a growing body of evidence for this approach from Dr. Neuman's work as well as many other prominent researchers.

I know Dr. Hirsch is careful to state in his book that his approach is not the only approach. But what about the research on the Core Knowledge approach? Dr. Hirsch stated that the lack of massive randomly assigned research into core knowledge has enabled educational experts to state skeptically that there isn't any massive randomly assigned large-scale proof (laughter) that the Core Knowledge sequence works brilliantly. That's very true.

There is some recent work with findings just coming out, a project funded by the Institute of Education Sciences, led by UVA researcher Dr. Dave Grissmer that examined the Core Knowledge sequence among nine charter schools. The Core Knowledge sequence is a framework on which to base instruction, and schools develop their own curriculum around the framework. And very recent findings indicate that this approach had impacts on third grade reading comprehension state scores. This finding is promising given that implementation across these schools -- like I said it varied because a particular curriculum wasn't provided, but rather the schools themselves created their own curriculum based on the sequence. And Dr. Hirsch has said scientific curiosity has not induced the much-needed larger study until now. There hasn't been a large rigorous experimental study of a language arts approach that has examined how knowledge-building over a period of several years affects children's vocabulary, listening comprehension, and eventual reading comprehension. We don't know the cumulative impact of a sustained intervention like this on children's reading comprehension.

My current project, funded by the Institute of Education Sciences, is a \$3.3 million project that is testing the efficacy of the Core Knowledge Language Arts Program. This curriculum systematically embeds the Core Knowledge sequence into language arts, and through read-alouds builds knowledge in science, social studies, and literature. What we're doing is we are randomizing 48 schools, and we'll follow children

over 3 years as they move from kindergarten through second grade. Along the way we'll be testing children's expressive and receptive vocabulary knowledge, comprehension, listening comprehension, and knowledge each year. And eventually we're going to test their reading comprehension at the end of second grade and hopefully beyond. We're just starting this study and we're excited about what we'll be learning.

And before I conclude, I'd like to give some thought to the idea of knowledge-building as a solution to help narrow the gap between children living in poverty and their more economically advantaged peers. Dr. Hirsch emphasized throughout his book that systematically building knowledge for all children in school settings can effectively narrow this achievement gap. And although he presents cogent and plausible arguments, I think that this is still an empirical question. Would a common curriculum serve to narrow the gap or would it maintain or potentially widen the gap? As I've discussed, children with tighter webs of knowledge around topics may be able to catch more information and vocabulary into their webs, while other children, the information might just pass through.

So this is a question I'm looking forward to investigating in our project. But there's no doubt in my mind that all children are enriched from a common knowledge-building approach. Just listen to this example shared with me last week from a district literacy leader. She was so impressed by what she saw. Their district was implementing the Core Knowledge Language Arts Program. She said, "We had second grade students debating whether they would rather be a child in ancient Sparta or ancient Athens, and had to use specific examples from the texts that they had been reading for days." Can you imagine the kind of vocabulary that they would need to use to participate in that kind of discussion? Can you see how engaging this approach could be for them?

In closing, I really like what Susan Neuman has said: Vocabulary is just

the tip of the iceberg. It's tapping into much more than words, but rather showcases the knowledge to which children are exposed. I'm convinced that systematic knowledge-building approach, for which Dr. Hirsch advocates in his book, can help children become better readers. It has the potential to accelerate vocabulary learning for those who need it the most. And what we're doing right now just isn't working. We need a transformation of our system. And perhaps Dr. Hirsch has landed on a solution that can help support both teachers and children.

Thank you.

MR. HANSEN: Okay. Dr. Hirsch, to you for a short response.

DR. HIRSCH: I'll be very short because I obviously agree with Sonia.

It's called a rebuttal, but I have very little to rebut, obviously. I thought maybe I'd add the issue that she raised but neither of us dealt with very clearly, and that is well, what should this common shared knowledge be? It seems to me there isn't much of a theoretical framework for that that's been carefully produced. But I think we certainly know that there is a de facto body of shared knowledge because we are able to talk to everybody in this room, and you are able to understand what we're saying because we know what can be taken for granted in this group and they are producing, creating the meaning out of the words that we're saying. Similarly, out of the words that we discussed when we talk to each other in this kind of environment.

So it is possible because it's widely shared that this needed knowledge -- to be able to carry on discussions like this -- is finite. It's not in the millions; it's probably in the hundreds of thousands of -- or maybe even just the thousands of topics and words and sort of general domains of knowledge. So that can be inventoried. It's a fact. In other words, we exist in a culture, and we exist in an American culture with a standard American language which has de facto those characteristics of share knowledge because

it's working. It's the only way it could work. And so I think we need to tap into that and recognize more that multiculturalism as an approach in the schools also includes American culture. That is, there is an American culture necessitated by this linguistic necessity. The necessity to create –

And by the way, I didn't mention, but I should have, the work of Ernest Gellner, particularly his generative first book, called "Nations and Nationalism," where essentially he says this is scheme of things where the schools of a nation in the post-agrarian era have to sort of teach the same things so that the economy can work and the political system can work and people can interact. So there isn't a sort of Tennessee or California orientation to American schooling fundamentally; there's also a national orientation implied. And that doesn't mean -- I'm not saying that the Federal government needs to come in and decide what the curriculum should be, that's a non-starter. It's not even necessary because there are a lot of different ways of getting to that shared knowledge.

But until the children who are excluded from that knowledge are included, it's hard to see theoretically how can have a higher performing and more equitable school system. So a lot of attention needs to be paid not just to the idea but also to the contents of the knowledge that built up in the early grades and to teach the most enabling knowledge. And that deserves a lot of thought and study. And it's been a topic that people have of course shied away from because it's a fraught topic. But it's logically necessary.

That's my only comment.

MR. HANSEN: Go ahead, Bill.

MR. GALSTON: Well, because we're running a little bit behind, I'm going to confine myself to just one question that I'll put to all three of you. You needn't all three of you answer if you don't want to, but the question is this. Professor Hirsch, you talked

about a shift of fundamental ideas and orientation from the idea of development, natural development, to the idea of acculturation. And that dyad really frames, shapes the development of your entire argument.

I'm not a disciple of Piaget. My mother, a child development expert was, but that's a different matter. But my question is this: is there no validity whatsoever to the idea of naturally-based human development? Is there no scientific validity to that? Is there no practical and pedagogical validity to that? Because all of my instincts, not just instincts but a lot of modern brain science, suggests that there are physiological developments in the human being that do indeed shape what we're capable not only of doing but also knowing. And they don't all proceed at the same stage for every individual, but the idea of developmental stages is not a crackpot idea; it's more like what every parent can observe for him or herself.

So I'll put the question to you first: is this idea of the dyad, the sharp contrast too extreme?

DR. HIRSCH: Sure, it is. But I give Jerome Bruner the sort of last word on this because his point was there's no topic that is inherently developmentally inappropriate. The issue is how the topic is dealt with. And that makes perfect sense to me. He's an expert in that field. And I was going to defer to Sonia, who this is her field; it's not mine, but from what -- just take the topic of Mesopotamia. This was a big developmental issue in New York State because for years the first graders in "What Your First Grader Needs to Know" and in Core Knowledge schools have been studying Mesopotamia. And all of the sudden somebody said in New York -- and New York State had adopted the Core Knowledge Early Reading Program -- and there was a hell of a lot of discussion about whether Mesopotamia was developmentally appropriate or not. Well, it's pretty obviously developmentally appropriate because a lot of first graders were

learning about Mesopotamia and doing it harmlessly and had done for about 20 years by that time.

So the worry is not that the idea is totally wrong, of course it isn't. Everybody admits that staging exists in some way or other, and that accommodation has to occur, otherwise a child won't learn. I mean that would be the proof of the pudding; if the child is learning about Mesopotamia happily and talking about Mesopotamia, apparently it wasn't developmentally inappropriate.

And so it was bothersome because it supported the use of that phrase, supports a highly anti-intellectual, anti-knowledge-rich point of view for early childhood, whereas what disadvantaged children deeply need is a highly, is a rich and -- so why should it be that it's developmentally appropriate for advantaged kids to learn about Mesopotamia but it's not appropriate to age groups for disadvantaged children? That is the thing that I think is worrisome about the overuse and the really unsystematic and unscientific use of the phrase "developmentally inappropriate." It's just what your gut feeling is. These kids shouldn't be learning about Mesopotamia. Well, they haven't gotten any basis for saying that. In fact, they're wrong.

So that was my reason for saying it. Because obviously any school policy that isn't taking it because the kids are too young, is instantly a failed policy. But if the kids are taking it, obviously it's developmentally appropriate. They took it.

DR. CABELL: So I think that there's a distinction between developmentally appropriate practice when it comes to topics like you're talking about and using that term as a loaded term to mean some set of knowledge I can't teach you yet because it's not developmentally appropriate. I think there's a difference between that and what's widely accepted as developmentally appropriate practice, or how children's development unfolds over time. I think in terms of reading children's

development, teachers' understanding of how decoding and spelling unfold over time allow teachers to scaffold children in ways that help children gain, um, accelerate their progress. So I do think that understanding of development and child development is extremely important, but I don't know that that's at odds with what Dr. Hirsch just said, where some people might be using it for topics that might not be developmentally appropriate and topics of knowledge. So I think there's a distinction.

DR. HIRSCH: I think that's a useful distinction.

MR. GALSTON: Mike?

MR. HANSEN: Nothing there.

MR. GALSTON: Okay. Then, patient audience, it's your turn, and there will be a roving microphone. When you're recognized please state your name and if you have an institutional affiliation that you think is relevant, you can mention that too. If your question is directed to a specific person, please state that. If it's a general question that's fine as well. I will recognize this gentleman right here.

MR. RABINOWITZ: Thank you. I'm Dave Rabinowitz; I'm retired. And I have two questions. First, the question of what should be taught. I know a lot of the knowledge that I got when I was in grade school has since been reinterpreted or actually refuted. So the question, what do you teach that's going to be relevant. I remember many years ago hearing a radio program discussion about education, and an educator was complaining that his students didn't know who Richard Rogers was. And I remember thinking, I wonder if he knows who Fred Rogers is. And which is actually relevant? So the question is what is the core knowledge that people should learn?

And the second one is, I actually taught under the old French system; I taught math in the '60s. And I remember after I gave my first exam, the students complained that there were problems on the exam that they had never seen before. And

they weren't complaining about the type of problem, they were complaining about the actual numbers in the problem. And the director of the school supported them. And obviously if they're going to be tested on the content that they learned in class they're going to do very well on the exams, but it's not going to be of any use to them or the rest of the world in the rest of their lives. And the question is, if somebody can parrot stuff they learned about Mesopotamia, does that really mean they learned anything?

DR. HIRSCH: So I think that was directed mostly at me. (Laughter) I tried to deal with the question about what should be learned. And you'll notice I took it to be how to bring everybody into the conversation as an equal, as a test case for what the background knowledge would need to be. That would be a good first cut at the democratic approach. So you don't have different classes of people who can't meet each other as an equal verbally but can actually talk to one another and also be enabled from the standpoint of learning; because obviously speech comprehension and ability to learn are very closely connected. So that's why I focused at the end of my talk on the system, focusing very strongly on speaking and reading and writing abilities and listening abilities. Because that's in the end what is going to be the outward form of competence for somebody, both to go on to higher education -- you know, people talk about college and career readiness, but that's going to be the mark of college and career readiness: whether you can learn from the books, talk, and so on. So the verbal competence is an extremely important part.

But that also gives a theoretical clue as to the question, what should be learned? So your point about is that what changes is emphatically the case because the culture changes over time. And if as I'm saying in my little talk here, the aim of schooling is acculturation; it's not unfolding of the child, it's inducting the child into the wider culture in society. If that is the thought model for what education is then the child needs to be

inducted into this body of shared knowledge that enables speech and comprehension to occur.

So every decade it might be very well a little bit different. On the other hand, there are a hell of a lot of things that don't change in that culture. And I think it would be a very interesting exercise to take that old 1987 list that is -- the only thing that turned that book into a bestseller was the fact that it was a cocktail party activity to say, do you know these things on this list, which is fortunate in a way. I could found the Core Knowledge Foundation with that (laughter). But anyway, it would be interesting to see how much of that is now passé, defunct, and how many new things come in. But the test case would be in a room like this, do all of us know this thing, is this something that we share and can allude to in our conversations? So if the aim of schooling is acculturation, then the culture will determine what those contents will be. And the culture at a particular time and the schools can have a very important and significant influence on making it better. Why not? You didn't seem convinced. (Laughter) I would like to know.

MR. GALSTON: Look, it would be great to continue this as a dialogue, but I suspect that Professor Hirsch is not going to be running away immediately when we reach 11:30, so people who either want to lavish praise on him after the formal session is over or want to debate him further, I suspect will have that opportunity. But please, let me go to the next question.

MS. RICE-THURSTON: I'm Dalabian Rice-Thurston. I'm working on, I hope, a doctorate in political science, looking at the politics of education and federalism. And this is my concern, the basis of what you're talking about, I think, is dealing with low income kids and how to help them.

Number one, if your parents are poor. that is the basic problem you have, and you are not talking at all about changing our economic system so that the

parents are home and are able to talk to their kids and have a great vocabulary, et cetera. You're not saying we should be sending parents to college when they're poor so that they have the background that they can give to their children.

I'm also concerned because you're not looking at the reality that there are states that do really well with white kids and really badly with white kids, states that do really well comparatively with black kids and badly with black kids. And we're looking at this, for example, through the National Assessment of Educational Progress, NAEP. People never break this down by race and state. What makes a state do well with its black kids or badly with its black kids, and I wish you would deal with that. If you look at national merit scores, there are states that have tons more kids in the top 50,000 testers than you would expect, and states that have far fewer, even if you look at parent education and income. We never look at what we do as a country that's disadvantageous at the top, because those are the kids you were talking about. Problems? Those kids have no problems at all, why are they not doing equally well in Louisiana when their parents are well educated as they are in New York, in Massachusetts. Why do we never talk about this?

And in terms of education, what people should know, remember when Bob Dole was furious about our state national education standards for social studies? Would we tell kids that we are here because we killed 80-90 percent of the natives of this continent? Is that core knowledge that we should know? That we put Japanese in internment camps? Is that core knowledge we should know? These are the kinds of things -- our new museum on slavery. A black person, a young woman came to -- why are all these white people here? This is white core knowledge. Is that going to be part of what you, Mr. Hirsch, are going to put in your things everybody should know?

MR. HIRSCH: You're not interested in that. (Laughter) Well, first of all,

before we get into the specific content, whether we should know about Trail of Tears or the kind of unfortunate things -- Japanese internment and that sort of thing, sure, I think we should, and a lot of schools teach that. But I don't want to let that kind of easily polarized right/left debate allow us to evade the larger question of will it help poor kids or disadvantaged kids to have a definite, defined curriculum that's oriented to the -- which Mike called the "shared culture," white, black or anything, when we're talking here in this room, which you're able to do so very well.

I would say that the evidence right now, not only the international evidence and the NAEP scores and so on, which you refer to, but also the international evidence is very clear that the most advantageous mode of schooling for disadvantaged kids is a coherent knowledge-based early schooling. And I go into the reasons for that in some detail in the book. What those particular contents are up to debate. They should be solved, but I thought you were saying at first that the real root problem was poverty, not the mode of schooling. I think that's a half truth. I think obviously there's a lot of truth in that statement, but it's also true that we can do a heck of lot better than we're doing now in helping kids from poor homes. And the evidence is pretty strong, that I've seen, that this more definite approach to knowledge is a very powerful help to disadvantaged kids. We do have a lot of evidence on that. It hasn't been all random-assigned evidence, but there is a heck of a lot of evidence. And there's every theoretical reason to believe that's the case too.

MR. GALSTON: I will now entertain the third question. Yes, sir.

MR. GLAZER: My name is Ken Glazer. So going back to your example of the kids arguing about Athens versus Sparta, I'm just trying to get a feel for that. Are we talking about kids reading a couple of pages or having read to them a couple of pages about Athens and Sparta and then they get into a debate about that, and then the next

day or maybe a few days later they're talking about Christopher Columbus, or are you talking about getting deep into ancient Greek history?

DR. CABELL: Yes, the latter.

MR. GLAZER: Because what do we mean by content, in other words?

DR. CABELL: It's the latter. So the program, which was developed by the Core Knowledge Foundation, focuses on the principle of immersing children in a particular domain. So children would learn over -- and a domain might last for a week to 10 days, something like that, where they would have read-alouds each day and engage with topics. And so their read-alouds from that week or those last several days would have focused on those kinds of things to give them the vocabulary and knowledge that they would need to talk in those terms.

So it's a very different approach than what we often see in schools, which is the former, what you mentioned, which was one day we're talking about this and then during my social studies time I'm talking about this, and then the next day we're reading about something completely different on Columbus, I'm teaching Columbus Day. This approach actually would be the opposite of that, where it's sequentially building knowledge both within a year -- taking your Columbus Day example, or Columbus example, children would first learn about kings and queens and Native Americans before they get to the idea of Christopher Columbus in kindergarten.

MR. GLAZER: So they have a richer content?

DR. CABELL: Yes, that's the design. That's the inherent design of the program.

MR. GALSTON: There's a woman over here who has a question.

MS. CHENOWITH: Karen Chenowith from the Education Trust. So the argument that I keep hearing is that we need to teach kids stuff that's useful. And that

Sparta/Athens, what's useful about that? We need to teach them the transferrable skills that they're going to need, I don't know, sitting around with chips in their heads, collaborating on projects around software or something. You know, whatever it is that is considered useful. And so could you address this useful versus not useful?

DR. HIRSCH: Well, I would argue that Sparta and Athens are really useful because people at cocktail parties and dinner parties and workplaces -- the top people know about Athens and Sparta. I would not argue for the intrinsic superiority of Athens and Sparta to Timbuktu; my argument has been that the wider culture has been developing that kind of value system, but what the schools have an obligation to do is to initiate its children into that wider culture so that nobody is at a disadvantage. I don't think one needs to get into the argument about whether A is better than B if in fact A is -- and this is a perfectly functional defense and proposition, very practical one that, yes, it's very practical to know about Athens and Sparta because you're more highly regarded. Other people in this society know about it. They use those words; you can talk with them on an equal footing if they use those. Those are all highly practical things. You know, I'm happy to see Athens and Sparta sort of have their places taken by others, but to get rid of Athens and Sparta and introduce Timbuktu is a long range project a lot of people have to agree on. And meanwhile, you don't want to withhold this enabling knowledge, it seems to me, from children who are going to benefit from it. It's an entirely functional and practical defense of Athens and Sparta. It's not saying oh, there's some rarified thing. I mean the ultimate defense of being acculturated into the top sphere, if you want to call it that, of a particular culture, is the practical benefit that comes from it.

There are also of course a lot of other reasons to study art, history, and any other subject, but I think that there's a practical and there's an egalitarian and a democratic reason for doing these things.

MR. GALSTON: Next question? Yes, I see a hand right in front here.

QUESTIONER: Hello. My name is Lennon; I'm here from the Brookings Institution as an intern. So when I first started my education, I started reading books such as, you know, "Captain Underpants" and "Harry Potter," the sort of fun books. And I know I had a lot of friends who read a lot of different books, and they got their origins in, you know, different sorts of stories and they were attracted to that. With common sort of standards, I feel like a lot of those students who may not necessarily have been attracted to these books that are being standardized would get -- no pun intended -- left behind. What would you do with those students who just don't fit into the system of common standards?

DR. HIRSCH: Sonia, did you understand what the issue was?

DR. CABELL: Yes, I had kids in my second grade classroom who read "Captain Underpants" and things like when I was a second grade teacher.

MR. GALSTON: You have the relevant content knowledge for this conversation. (Laughter)

DR. CABELL: No, I don't think it's an either/or. I think that teachers use the materials that they have available to them. And for many years that's whatever on Scholastic. As a teacher I had to purchase my own books for my children. My district didn't have money to supply my classroom with books. So Scholastic books, things like -- I'm not sure if I had "Captain Underpants," to be honest with you, but things like that -- "Junie B. Jones" -- are things that were readily available to me. I think part of this is access. Children, particularly boys, often want more nonfiction texts. And there just haven't been as many that are offered to teachers that are high-quality nonfiction texts for the second grade reader that they can pick up independently. And I think that that's quite unfortunate.

And I also don't think it's an either/or. I don't think Dr. Hirsch is saying withhold those books from children at all. And I see a place for both wide reading of many different kinds of books as well as a common core kind of knowledge. So I don't think it's an either/or.

MR. GALSTON: Well, while you're all trying to think of your next question, let me take the liberty of posing one. And, Mike, if you have a question that you want to pose, there should be time for that as well.

My real academic discipline is political philosophy, not any of the stuff I'm paid to do at Brookings. And the core idea of culture or acculturation raises the question of whether all cultures are created equal. Or to put it really bluntly, are there certain cultures that parents find themselves in the middle of that they have good reasons not to want their kids to become acculturated to.

So it's 1935, and you're a parent in Moscow. And the common culture is defined by the Stalinist regime. And it embeds a number of features that parents who haven't been completely taken over by the system may have valid conscientious objections to having their children absorb. Is there a background assumption in your account that all cultures are above some sort of moral or human line, such that acculturation is a good thing wherever you are?

DR. HIRSCH: That's obviously a super question. To the extent that I thought about it, I'm so America-centric that I haven't tried to translate it into international terms what this view of education would imply. But I certainly think that the great thing about the American version of the kind of nation that was trying to be built was that it was disassociated from religious doctrine and from any particular race or any particular -- it was that enlightenment idea of a kind of universalist culture and the ideals of freedom and let a thousand flowers bloom, that sort of thing. So I myself am so committed to that

fundamental idea that I think that I'm not greatly worried about the indoctrination side of schooling if they're being indoctrinated into the originating American ideals, the enlightenment ideals of the country.

So I freely admit that that's the orientation I have. And I think there hasn't been any better kind of political experiment than that. And I do think that ours is not working as well it could. Originally, the originating idea of this particular kind of political culture was that it depended on the common school; it depended on the states having their own power but also a commitment to the unity of the whole. And Washington in his will said, well, I think we have to have good schooling where everybody understands they should have adherence to this larger idea. And yeah, I think that kind of indoctrination in schooling is -- yeah, if everybody agrees with that indoctrination, it seems to be a pretty good one. That's okay to be politically indoctrinated in those ideas.

I see at times that kind of indoctrination, and of course if it's a really, really bad system and you have some who want to fight it, I believe in fighting in too. But in this case we're not doing anything very coherent because we're working on sort of abstract. I mean Dooley was once abraded when he was a sort of a spokesman for the kind of American schooling we now have. You say that the aim of American schools is growth, but growth where, growth how? I mean it wasn't very clear. And I think he was rightly abraded for that. You do -- if there's something in American culture that should be resisted and changed when you are doing this acculturation, let's do it. That's a function of schooling itself. But the basic principle that you should be left free to change it and should have adherence to that founding idea seems to be a perfectly good basis for schooling. I haven't heard anybody really challenging it the way that you would want a challenge in Moscow. I think there's a difference.

MR. GALSTON: We could have a long discussion. Mike, do you have a pent up question?

MR. HANSEN: I'd like to ask about how we should think differently about curriculum, and should we change the way the curriculum decisions are being made. If they're currently happening mostly at local levels, are you arguing that we should be thinking more state level? What are the inherent drawbacks of local-level decision making that is resulting in this inefficient outcome?

DR. HIRSCH: I think the real drawback is the unwillingness to admit that the basic culture that needs to be learned is a national culture. The nation is the functioning unit in the modern world. Globalism is internationalism. If you go to a website across the world, the website is not in Esperanto; it's in some national language, and that national language implies and takes for granted a national culture of some kind. So to the degree that there's a correlation between national language -- you cross a border, and suddenly the kids are no longer speaking Italian, they're speaking French. I mean it's all very artificial but it's all -- and sustained by school systems. So that the idea that our main function is state-oriented is not accurate. The people are moving around in this country from state to state and so on. They still need to be able to communicate, and they need to be able to function. So it's still a national culture that the schools have to teach as a core for sure. Sure, the states can add to that, the localities can add to that, but basically if there were not an American culture de facto, we could not be talking like this. That's all.

I think the fact that we are able to do so means well, you know, everybody here has had a pretty good education.

MR. GALSTON: Yes, the last question goes to the woman over here.

MS. JACKSON: Hi, I'm Zukia Jackson. I work in education advocacy

helping faith-based organizations advocate for low-income schools. I think your question as well as this woman's questions, and someone else's over there, I think we keep getting back to this content piece because I would have to say that I do worry -- I like -- there are some parts of this that I really like as a model, but the content that you didn't want us to get distracted by in the model, that's really huge. I think there are a lot of us who would say we're worried about this acculturation piece for black and brown kids and what that means. So I just wanted to offer that as I think there's more unrest and worry about that perhaps than you realize.

But my question is actually for you, Sonia. You mentioned that you're not sure yet that this model lessens the achievement gap. If it doesn't reduce the achievement gap, is there still value to it if even if the kids are more educated but the achievement gap stays the same? What is your thought on that if your research gave you that finding?

DR. CABELL: So I think that in the same way that there's value to the vocabulary instruction we're doing and to the wide reading children are doing, even though we know that the children who are better readers when they read widely, they gain more vocabulary than children who are poorer readers. We wouldn't stop the better readers from wanting them to read more widely. So the gap either maintains or sometimes widens. In that same vein, I would hope that this would not be the case here, but again does that mean that imparting a coherent and knowledge-based curriculum doesn't add value? I wouldn't go to that conclusion. I would say that the solutions that we need to accelerate progress for the children who are most disadvantaged need to be examined, and we need to think through how we can do that better and think through new ways to do that. And it might be that a whole -- whatever we're doing with the whole class is not enough dosage for children who need to have an accelerated. And I think we

need to also look beyond the school context to the home and community contexts.

Thank you.

MR. GALSTON: Well, with that please join me in congratulating Dr. Hirsch and Dr. Cabell for truly thought-provoking presentations. We're honored to have them here at Brookings. (Applause) And as I said, I'm reasonable sure that they're not rushing off to catch planes, trains, and airplanes, so if you want to continue the discussion.

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