E. D. Hirsch, Jr.

Professor Emeritus
University of Virginia

Founder and President
Core Knowledge Foundation

Nominated by
DeAnn Davis

Nominee: Dr. E. D. Hirsch, Jr.
Professor Emeritus,
University of Virginia

Dr. Hirsch is the founder and president of the Core Knowledge Foundation located in Charlottesville, Virginia. He has authored two books: *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*, 1987 and *The Schools We Need: and Why We Don't Have Them*, 1996.

Dr. Hirsch's profound knowledge and research in collaboration with educators around the world has resulted in a curriculum used in more than a thousand schools across this country. Dr. Hirsch is in the forefront of the standards movement which propelled the passage of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act.

Core Knowledge is an education reform movement based on a grade-by-grade core of learning from Pre-K through grade 8, helping children establish higher literacy. Dr. Hirsch emphasizes a sequenced, specific content of learning which promotes economic equality in our multicultural society.

Dr. E. D. Hirsch, Jr.
Curriculum Vita

NAME	POSITION TITLE
Eric Donald Hirsch, Jr.	Professor of Education and Humanities, Principal Investigator

EDUCATION

INSTITUTION AND LOCATION	DEGREE	YEAR	FIELD OF STUDY
Cornell University	BA	1950	English Literature
Yale University	MA	1955	English Literature
Yale University	PhD	1957	English Literature

Positions and Honors

Positions:
1957-61 Instructor in English, Yale University
1961-64 Assistant Professor, Yale University
1964-66 Associate Professor, Yale University
1966-73 Professor of English, University of Virginia
1968-71 Chairman, Department of English, University of Virginia
1971-80 Director of Composition, University of Virginia
1981-83 Chairman Department of English, University of Virginia
1973-89 William R Kenan Professor of English, University of Virginia
1989-94 Linden Kent Memorial Professor of English
1994- University Professor of Education and Humanities, University of Virginia
1986- Chairman Core Knowledge Foundation

Honors:
1955-56 Fulbright pre-doctoral fellow (University of Bonn)
1962-63 Morse Fellow, Yale University
1964 "Best Book of Explication in 1964" for *Innocence and Experience: An Introduction to Blake*
1966-67 Guggenheim Fellowship
1968-69 Advisory Committee: Conference on Theory in Humanistic Studies, American Academy of
Arts and Sciences
1971-72 Senior Fellow, National Endowment for the Humanities
1971-73 Fellow, Center for the Humanities, Wesleyan University
1971-74 Short-Term Fellow of The Council of the Humanities
1977 Elected to The American Academy of Arts and Sciences
1980-81 Senior Fellow, National Endowment for the Humanities

1980-81 Fellow, Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Stanford University
1982 Fellow, Center for the Humanities, Australian National University, Canberra
1982 Bateson Lecturer Oxford University
1984-87 Fellow, Center for Advanced Study of the University of Virginia
1984-85 Fellow, Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences
1988 Honorand, the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences
1996 American representative: "Critica e Ermeneutica: Academia Nazionale dei Lincei, Rome
1996 New York Times : Notable Books of 1996" for *The Schools We Need*
1997 Elected to International Academy of Education
1997 The Biennial QuEST Award for Outstanding Contributions to Education, American Federation of Teachers
2003 Fordham Award for "Valor in Education".

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E. D. Hirsch, Jr., "Current Issues in Hermeneutics," *Journal of Religion*, July 1975, pp. 298-312.
E. D. Hirsch, Jr., "Reading and Writing," *The Cornell Review*, I, 4, 1978, pp. 115-126.
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E. D. Hirsch, Jr., "Past Intentions and Present Meanings," *Essays in Criticism*, XXXII, April 1983, pp. 79-98. (The Bateson Memorial Lecture, Oxford.)
E. D. Hirsch, Jr., "Beyond Convention," *New Literary History*, Spring, 1983.

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E. D. Hirsch, Jr., "Meaning and Significance Re-Interpreted,: *Critical Inquiry*, Vol 11, no. 2, Dec., 1984,
pp.202-225.
E. D. Hirsch, Jr., "Counterfactuals in Interpretation," *Texte: L'Herme'neutique Texte, Lecture, Re'ception*,
ed., Brian T. Fitch, and Andrew Oliver, E'ditions Trintexte, Toronto, 1985, pp. 15-29.
E. D. Hirsch, Jr., "The Primal Scene of Education," *New York Review of Books*, March 2, 1989, pp.29-35.
E. D. Hirsch, Jr., "About Cultural Literacy" in H.C. Cassee, D.J. van de Kaa, eds., *Cultureel Alfa-betism in Nederland*, Amsterdam, Swets & Zeitlinger, 1989, pp. 19.35. (Keynote speech at a conference on cultural literacy at the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences.)
E. D. Hirsch, Jr., "Transhistorical Intentions and the Persistence of Allegory," *New Literary History*, vol. 25, Summer 1994, pp. 549-67.
"E. D. Hirsch, Jr., La venganza de la realidad: Educacion y las principales corrientes de investigacion pedagogica," *Estudios Publicos*, No. 66, Autumn, 1997, pp. 5-72.
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Rome, Accademia Nazionale Dei Lincei, 1998.

Relevant Books:

E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).
E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).
E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *The Philosophy of Composition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977). Phoenix (paperback) edition, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).
E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1987). Paperback, with a new preface and expanded appendix, (New York: Vintage Books, 1988).
E. D. Hirsch, Jr., Joseph Kett and James Trefil *The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1988).
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E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *The Schools We Need. And Why We Don't Have Them* (New York, Doubleday, 1996).
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E. D. Hirsch, Jr., John Holdren, *What Your Kindergartner Needs to Know* (1996)
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E.D.HIRSCH: THE UNEXPECTED CRUSADER

When E.D. Hirsch, Jr. penned *Cultural Literacy* some 15 years ago, he hardly anticipated that he would soon be a best-selling author, a hands-on education reformer, and a bête noire to education "progressives." In fact, Don Hirsch was a most unlikely crusader. In two decades at the University of Virginia, he had been every bit the English professor, turning out elegant, learned analyses of literary theory and Romantic poets. Hirsch, moreover, was an improbable heretic to launch an assault on the canons of progressive education. A self-described "card-carrying liberal", he had long hewed to progressive positions on issues like gun control and abortion rights and maintained a membership in the American Civil Liberties Union.

How was a rebel born? Hirsch's awakening began one day in 1978 in a community college English class in Richmond, Virginia. He had conducted most of his research on reading comprehension and writing at the University of Virginia. On this day, however, Hirsch was testing reading assignments at the community college. The community college students, most of them black, read with roughly the same fluency and comprehension as their U-Va. peers. But to Hirsch's surprise, the students "became baffled when they had to read about Lee's surrender to Grant at Appomattox. That passage was as incomprehensible to them as a Hegel essay on philosophy was to the U-Va. students."

The students' puzzlement jolted Hirsch to a catharsis of sorts: Background knowledge, a common set of cultural facts and information mattered-not for the sake of knowing facts per se but because a shared intellectual landscape was all-important in empowering students to read and write richly. "The impact on social justice of this knowledge gap was tremendous," says Hirsch. And this fact dearth seemed particularly damaging to disadvantaged minority students. As the child of a prosperous cotton merchant in Memphis in the 1930s and 1940s, Hirsch had witnessed firsthand the horrors of racial segregation, and had eagerly read Gunnar Myrdal's 1025-page classic study, *An American Dilemma*, as a 16 year-old. Ever since, he had been infused with "Southern guilt" about race. Now he had to face the counterintuitive idea that progressive education, with its shopping mall curriculum and scorn of drilling basic skills, was itself illiberal, reinforcing the black-white test score gap and worsening racial inequality.

In the 1980s, as signs of the knowledge gap multiplied, Hirsch's doubts about progressive education grew. By 1986, national tests showed that two-thirds of 17 year-olds did not know that the Civil War occurred between 1850 and 1900. Half of the students could not identify the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. And most high-school seniors were equally unfamiliar with novelists Jane Austen and Fyodor Dostoyevsky.

The following year, Hirsch spelled out his critique of progressive education in his path-breaking book *Cultural Literacy*, one of the best-selling books on education in the last century. Parents and teachers gobbled up the book-it sold more than 400,000 copies in hardback alone-and Hirsch found an early ally in Albert Shanker, then president of the American Federation of Teachers. The rest of the education establishment, however, savaged him. "I was called an elitist, a racist, a male supremacist, an Ozzie-and-Harriett fifties nostalgia buff-every contemptuous phrase that was in the armory at the time," Hirsch recalls.

The Columbia Teachers College Record published not one but two reviews of *Cultural Literacy* in the same issue, dismissing the book as a "neoconservative manifesto" and an "upscale version of Trivial Pursuit." Though Hirsch had gone to considerable lengths to establish his liberal bona fides in *Cultural Literacy*, his critics conveniently ignored his warnings about the damage that progressive education was wreaking upon the disadvantaged. The Harvard Educational Review accused Hirsch of being part of a conspiracy of "right-wing intellectual and ruling groups to undermine the basis of democratic public life." In The Nation, a reviewer sniffed how improbable it was that, "as Hirsch would like, American youth will again crack the whip in the meadow by the one-room schoolhouse." Even the Modern Language Association denounced the book, and the literary criticism establishment drummed Hirsch off the advisory board of the University of Chicago publication Critical Inquiry.

Other critics attacked Hirsch as a modern-day Professor Gradgrind, Charles Dickens's severe schoolmaster (who declared "teach these boys and girls nothing but facts. Facts alone are wanted in life)." *Cultural Literacy* included an appendix containing a preliminary 63-page list of some 4,500 names, facts, and references entitled "What Literate Americans Know." But Hirsch's critics claimed that he had generated a Eurocentric version of Trivial Pursuit, listing everything that he thought literate Americans *should* know. "In retrospect," Hirsch says, "cultural literacy was an unfortunate phrase because it pulled the book into the identity politics of the 1980s and 1990s."

In the face of this public pillorying, many an English professor might have retreated to his ivory tower or simply banked his royalties. Not Hirsch. He had the courage of his convictions, displaying an all-too rare insistence on testing his theories in the real world of elementary schools. Through the Virginia-based Core Knowledge Foundation that he founded in 1986, Hirsch embarked on a remarkably ambitious three-pronged campaign: To create a new sequential grade-by-grade core curriculum for kindergarten through sixth grade; to develop teacher training institutes for thousands of teachers; and to establish a national network of Core Knowledge schools (which use the Core Knowledge curriculum sequence at least 80 percent of the time).

In the late 1980s, the foundation's existence was so precarious that it would have folded if not for money donated by Hirsch and his mother. Its financial stability was assured only after Hirsch completed a set of popular grade-specific curriculum guides--and then donated all of the royalties that they generated (more than $2 million) to the foundation. During the foundation's lean years, Hirsch says, "two urges led me on: The conviction that the cognitive science was right, and the conviction that the absence of background knowledge had tremendous import for social justice, particularly on the black-white test score gap and income gap."

To the consternation of his ed school critics, the Core Knowledge movement has taken hold across the nation. Parents and teachers have enthusiastically embraced it, as have the founders of many charter schools. Today, about 750 Core Knowledge schools and affiliates are operating in 47 states, and the foundation estimates that more that 1.2 million students have used parts of its curriculum sequence.

In practice, the core curriculum is rich, ethnically diverse, and challenging-a far cry from the parody of the dead white man's diorama. First graders study ancient Egypt and modern Mexico; second graders learn about Cesar Chavez, ancient India and Native Americans, and so on. Independent evaluations of Core Knowledge schools by the American Institutes for Research and other organizations have shown promising evidence of positive effects on student achievement and none of the deadening "drill-and-kill" effect that progressive educators warned was sure to result from creating a core curriculum. Parents, meanwhile, have voted with their feet, creating long waiting lists at many Core Knowledge schools. At a school in Ft. Collins, Colorado, some parents have even sought to sign up their unborn children.

Given his development of a popular core curriculum, it's no surprise that Hirsch has now moved to the forefront of the standards movement that propelled the passage of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act. In his 1996 book, *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them*, Hirsch provided the intellectual underpinnings for demanding statewide tests in reading, math, science and history at different grade levels. He has won the admiration of both George W. Bush and the American Federation of Teachers-no small feat. And as the New York Times Book Review reported in November 2002, even many progressive schools have now gone back to teaching the classics. "The debate drones on in graduate education schools," the Times reported, but "out in the world the war has been won." If not for the grit, persistence, and intellectual firepower of E.D. Hirsch, Jr., that war might well have been lost.

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About Core Knowledge®

Breadth Versus Depth: A Premature Polarity

by E. D. Hirsch, Jr.

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In the education wars we encounter a lot of "premature polarities." This is a phrase I have adapted from I. A. Richards, the brilliant Cambridge theorist of an earlier generation, who spoke of "premature ultimates" -- those conversation stoppers which, he said, "bring investigation to a dead end too suddenly" (*Principles of Literary Criticism*, 1925, chapter 6). I would define "premature polarities" in education as the habitual, almost automatic taking of sides on educational issues based on whether one considers oneself to be a liberal or a conservative in politics. Unfortunately, such ideological stand-taking not only brings investigation to an end, it tends to replace thought.

For example, in the reading wars, premature ideological polarization has caused phonics to be viewed as an agency of right-wing suppression that deprives reading of naturalness and impairs love of literature. "Whole language" on the other hand, is attacked as a left-wing abandonment of adult responsibility. Similarly, in the math wars, memorization of the multiplication table is viewed as a "conservative" principle of teaching, whereas the use of calculators is viewed as a pernicious "liberal" pedagogical policy. It is mysterious how these educational theories came to be associated so mindlessly with politics. Ideological polarities are valuable spirit-raisers in a real war. Everyone understands that "in war the first casualty is truth." But in the "phony wars" of education, sloganized polarizations are barriers to progress. And no barrier is greater than the sloganized polarity between "deep understanding" or "learning to learn" on one side versus the "rote learning of mere facts" on the other.

Concerning this controversy there exists some relevant and reliable research that has yielded a solid scientific consensus in the field of cognitive psychology. (An excellent summary of the current consensus in cognitive psychology is provided by Daniel B. Willingham in his book, *Cognition*, 2001, especially chapter 4-7 and 10.) Yet I do not find many references to that research-consensus in journals devoted to education. The research relevant to the premature polarization of "learning to learn" versus "piling up of mere facts" can be summarized in four principles.

1. The ability to learn something new is not primarily a general, formal skill. It is chiefly a

domain-specific skill. For instance, the ability to learn something new about math or music or history is highly dependent on the knowledge that one already possesses about math, or music, or history. This means that "learning to learn" always entails acquiring relevant knowledge about specific domains.

2. General ability to learn is highly correlated with general knowledge. There is a stunning statistic on this point. The positive correlation of learning ability with socioeconomic status is .422, whereas the correlation of learning ability with general knowledge is nearly twice as high -- .811 (D. Lubinski and L. G. Humphreys, "Incorporating General Intelligence into Epidemiology and the Social Sciences," *Intelligence* 24, 1997, pp. 159-202). We are so used to emphasizing the importance of socioeconomic status that this datum comes as a surprise. Yet it is just what we might have inferred from point 1 above that learning ability depends chiefly on having relevant prior knowledge.

3. The optimal way to learn a subject is to learn both its general principles and an ample number of diverse examples that illustrate those principles. That's obvious in math. One needs to know what multiplication is in principle, but to gain real insight into what multiplication is one also needs to do a number of multiplication problems of different types. This finding bears directly on the depth/breadth issue in education. A broad range of examples should be studied, but studying too many is a waste of time.

4. Another finding is that broad general knowledge is the best entree to deep knowledge. This is a conclusion from the field of psychology called "discourse analysis." The most effective way to introduce the meaning of a discourse is to start with a summary such as an abstract found in learned journals. After the learner gains a broad context through a sense of the whole domain, he or she can mentally fit the various parts that follow into that whole, and make sense of them. An example would be introducing first graders to a globe that shows oceans and continents before going on to teach them about specific places. What do these four principles imply for the question "What Should We Teach"?

They logically force us to abandon the sloganized polarity between "deep understanding" and "the rote learning of mere facts." One cannot gain deep understanding without having broad knowledge of a lot of facts. On the other hand, it is a waste of time to pile up more and more facts that don't really add much to one's understanding or ability to learn.

So, if we wish to educate students to become competent people and lifelong learners, these four principles give us a preliminary handle on an answer to the question "What Should We Teach?" We should teach a diversity of subjects that will lead to broad general knowledge, and we should also teach in some depth a moderate number of specific examples. From this simple inference it is clear that neither the "deep understanding" pole nor the "lots-of-facts" pole is an optimal approach. Since competence and ability to learn are correlated with broad knowledge, it is plausible to infer that we should teach a broad range of subjects, not just reading, writing, and arithmetic, but also science, history, ethics, literature, and the arts.

But within those fields what shall we teach? Our four principles have already established that it is not optimal to teach either a single thing in depth or a great many things superficially. Yet we still have the problem of choosing a moderate number of topics in the different domains. How do we choose what that moderate number of topics should be?

Will any set of topics do? There is a school of thought that essentially says "yes, any set of topics will do." According to this view, studying any topic provides access to a whole domain. I have argued elsewhere that this conception is not well based in theory or in fact (*The Schools We Need*, 1996, pp. 127-175). It is a theory that has left us with sub-par achievement as a nation, and has perpetuated the test score gap between socioeconomic groups. My colleagues and I at the Core Knowledge Foundation have sponsored an alternative view. We hold that schools need to develop a specific sequence of topics at each grade level that will prepare the student to learn what the next grade has to offer.

This curricular structure is implied by principle 1 above, that new learning depends on relevant prior knowledge. That is an important reason why those nations that follow a common core curriculum in early grades have significantly higher achievement and greater equity than nations that do not. Students in core- curriculum nations enter each new grade ready to learn the new lessons (L. Woessmann, "Why Students in Some Countries Do Better: International Evidence on the Importance of Education Policy," *Education Matters*, Summer 2001, pp. 67-74).

But that still leaves unanswered the question we started with. Even if the arguments are strong in favor of a common core curriculum which covers several domains and provides a moderate number of specific topics, that still does not determine what the specific topics should be.

It is here that Core Knowledge has made a theoretical contribution. We have argued in favor of teaching topics that have the greatest potential for developing general competence and narrowing the test-score gap between groups. We made an inventory of the knowledge that is characteristically shared in American society by those at the top of the socioeconomic ladder. That turns out to be the knowledge taken for granted in American society -- in college classrooms, in conversations with strangers, and in books and newspapers addressed to the general reader. Since that knowledge is taken for granted and not explained, ignorance of that assumed knowledge will seriously handicap those who lack it. We therefore argue that this "elite" knowledge ought to be the possession of every citizen in a democracy. The desire to change and improve the character of that assumed knowledge is admirable, but until we succeed in doing so, we should not withhold it and thereby handicap those who lack it because of accidents of birth.

People who have called this approach a collection of "mere facts" or called it names such as "Eurocentric" and "elitist" have not bothered to find out just what is in the *Core Knowledge Sequence*, or to notice how carefully selective are the topics it sets forth. Our experiences in the field suggest that these guidelines strike a reasonable balance between deep, large scale generalizations and specific factual knowledge. We know from independent evaluations that teaching the Core Knowledge topics in a coherent and cumulative way enhances student achievement and narrows the test score gap between socioeconomic groups.

About Core Knowledge®

You Can Always Look It Up—Or Can You?

by E. D. Hirsch, Jr

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Fifty-eight years ago when I was in ninth grade, I attended a progressive school in New Orleans called Metairie Park Country Day School. If you saw the movie "Auntie Mame" with its Park Avenue version of my progressive experience, you will know that progressive theories in the 1940s were mainly confined to private schools; they hadn't seeped very far into the public-school domain. At Metairie Park, my entire 9th-grade curriculum consisted of two "integrated," "multidisciplinary" projects, as they would now be called. They were: participating in the school production of Gilbert and Sullivan's "The Mikado," (I can still sing many of the solos and choruses by heart), and building a complicated scientific instrument called a "phonodyke. "I was excused from ordinary classes. It was great fun. Fortunately for my education, I spent just one year at that school. My earlier years had been very fruitful ones spent in a regular public school in Memphis, Tennessee, the Lennox school, where we studied Shakespeare in fourth grade.

The progressive theory that students should gain knowledge through a limited number of projects instead of by taking courses in separate subjects is based on the following reasoning. If you learn a bunch of facts in separate, academic courses you will passively acquire a lot of inert, fragmented knowledge. You will be the victim of something called "rote learning. "But if you engage in integrated, hands-on projects you will achieve integrated, real-world knowledge. By this more natural approach you will automatically absorb the relevant facts you need.

To pursue a few projects in depth is thought to have the further advantage of helping students gain appropriate skills of inquiry and discovery in the various subject matters. One will learn how to think scientifically, mathematically, historically and so on. One will learn, it is claimed, all-purpose, transferable skills such as questioning, analyzing, synthesizing, interpreting, evaluating, analogizing, and, of course, problem-solving -- important skills indeed, and well educated people possess them. But the consensus view in psychology is that they are gained mainly through broad knowledge of a domain. Intellectual skills tend to be domain-specific. The all-too-frequent antithesis between skills and knowledge is facile and deplorable. In any case, with these abstract skills in hand, the theory goes, one is prepared for a lifetime of learning. Any specific facts that you didn't gain you can look up later in a reference book or, nowadays, on the Internet. Broad,

factual knowledge, it is said, is mostly pointless because the facts will be "out of date" within five years. Last January, an education professor was quoted as saying that "detailed information need no longer be taught because it can easily be garnered from the computer and the Internet."[1] "You can always look it up" has always been a watchword of the progressive approach. Certainly, preparation for a lifetime of learning is one of the most important purposes of schooling. In a changing world we cannot learn in school everything that we need to know in life. This has always been true and is undoubtedly even more true today. But the important question is, how do we best prepare our students for lifelong learning? Is the in-depth study of a few topics, practice with a variety of "thinking skills," and access to the Internet the best formula? Cognitive psychology suggests it is not.

There is a consensus in cognitive psychology that it takes knowledge to gain knowledge. Those who repudiate a fact-filled curriculum on the grounds that kids can always look things up miss the paradox that de-emphasizing factual knowledge actually disables children from looking things up effectively. To stress process at the expense of factual knowledge actually hinders children from learning to learn. Yes, the internet has placed a wealth of information at our fingertips. But to be able to use that information -- to absorb it, to add to our knowledge -- we must already possess a storehouse of knowledge. That is the paradox disclosed by cognitive research.

Take for example some research conducted by Professor George A. Miller and his colleagues, who studied what happens when children actually do look things up. George Miller is one of the great pathbreaking figures in cognitive psychology. In 1987, he and Patricia Gildea published a report on children's learning that included some experiments in their use of a dictionary to learn word meanings.[2]

The normal child's aversion to doing this, Miller found, was amply justified. In the time it took children to find the dictionary word and construe it's meanings they usually forgot the original problem context and never found their way back.
They mainly experienced frustration. That difficulty was exacerbated by the inherent uncertainties and ambiguities of word definitions. As a consequence, children consistently produced sentences like:

"Mrs. Morrow stimulated the soup." (That is, she stirred it up.)

"Our family erodes a lot." (That is, they eat out.)

"Me and my family correlate, because without them I wouldn't be here."

"I was meticulous about falling off the cliff."

"I relegated my pen pal's letter to her house."

Of course, Professor Miller is in favor of dictionaries and encyclopedias in appropriate contexts where they can be used effectively by children and adults. But those contexts turn out to be somewhat rare occasions when which nuances of meaning can be confidently understood. Reference works including the internet are immensely valuable in those constrained circumstances. But Miller has shown very well why, outside those

circumstances, adults use reference resources so infrequently. His observations are well supported by other areas of cognitive psychology.

For instance, there is a domain of cognitive science called "expert-novice studies." Two of its leading figures are Herbert A. Simon, the Nobel prize winner, and Jill Larkin, who has co-authored articles on this subject with Simon. Their studies provide an insight into the paradox that you can successfully look something up only if you already know quite a lot about the subject. In these studies, an expert is characteristically a specialist who knows a lot about a field -- say a chess master or a physicist, whereas a novice knows very little. Since the expert already knows a great deal, you might suppose that she would learn very little when she looked something up. By contrast, you might think that the novice, who has so much to learn, ought to gain a still greater quantity of new information from consulting a dictionary or encyclopedia or the internet. But, on the contrary, it's the expert who learns more that is new, and learns it much faster than the novice. It's extremely hard for a novice to learn very much in a reasonable time by looking things up. [3]

Simon and others point out that one reason the novice has this difficulty is that the human mind is able to assimilate only three or four new items before further elements evaporate from memory. The expert had already assimilated most of the elements being looked up, and therefore needed to pay attention only to one or two novel features which could easily be integrated into his prior knowledge. In a famous experiment by de Groot, a chess expert could learn a complex new chess position after just a few seconds exposure, whereas novices could remember very little. That was because the novices had to remember ALL the unfamiliar positions (which the human mind simply can't do) whereas the experts had to notice only a few salient departures from a wealth of positions they already knew. [4]

The analogy between the chess experiment and looking things up is quite apt. Imagine an expert and a novice looking up the entry "planets" on the internet and finding the following:

planet -- any of the non-luminous bodies that revolve around the sun. The term planet is sometimes used to include the asteroids, but excludes the other members of the solar system, comets and meteoroids. By extension, any similar body discovered revolving around another star would be called a planet.

A well-informed person would learn a good deal from this entry if, for example, he was uncertain about whether asteroids, comets, and meteoroids should be called planets. A novice, even one who "thinks scientifically" would learn less. Since he wouldn't know what planets are, he probably wouldn't know what asteroids, comets, and meteoroids are. Even the simple phrase "revolving around another star" would be mystifying, since he probably wouldn't know that the sun is a star. Equally puzzling would be the phrase "other members of the solar system," since the term "solar system" already requires knowing what a planet is. An imaginative novice would no doubt make some fortunate guesses after a rather long time. But, looking things up turns out to have an element of Catch 22; you already need to know something about the subject to look it up effectively.

There's a third area of research that is relevant to looking things up, and it's especially interesting to those who are concerned with helping schools narrow the achievement gap

between social classes and ethnic/racial groups. It is recent work on vocabulary. The biggest academic gap between groups in the early years -- a gap which grows ever bigger -- is the vocabulary gap. It's hard for a child or adult to look things up if vocabulary limitations keep them from making basic sense out of the words in the reference book or on the internet.

Betty Hart and Todd Risley, in their important book *Meaningful Differences*, have shown that enormous vocabulary differences develop between children before they they reach kindergarten. In the absence of compensatory schooling, this initial disadvantage will grow, because the low-vocabulary child will learn less than the high-vocabulary child when exposed to the same lessons. 5

To reduce this difference requires better parenting, better preschooling, and more systematic teaching of school subjects in the early grades. Vocabulary is a reflection of knowledge. Only when children learn subjects in a cumulative way can they build up their vocabularies rapidly, and remedy their deficiencies. Specialists in vocabulary estimate that in order to understand something that is read or heard or looked up, the percentage of already-known words necessary for comprehension is around 95%.That's a rough, if simplified, principle to keep in mind. To make it worthwhile to look something up, you already need to know 95% of the words. 6

To end this report from the research literature, I'll mention two more research programs that it will be useful to know about when you hear slogans about looking things up. Thomas Landauer is a brilliant psychologist at the University of Colorado who, with his colleagues, has made a lot of progress in devising a workable computer model of how children's minds manage to learn the meanings of as many words as they do. Many aspects of the model reflect what we know children in fact do, and it is the only successful model of the astonishing rate at which children learn the meanings of words.

Landauer's work is complicated and highly mathematical, but its essence is this. We learn and refine word meanings that we have experienced in the past even when we are not experiencing those words in the present. The mind unconsciously assigns a word that it encounters to a domain of related words, and on each occurrence of the word, the mind not only refines the meaning of the word being encountered but also the meanings of other, previously-experienced words that belong near its domain. 7

The mind is constantly modulating and readjusting all those neighboring words, even when we're not paying attention to the process. That's the key insight about the rapid rate at which we learn words over time. Although the average rate is amazing, the process is gradual and cumulative as we experience thousands of words a day. The words that I am paying attention to refine and calibrate the meanings of previously-experienced words that I'm NOT attending to.

This means that dismissive talk about "mere facts" is hugely oversimplified. Facts, like words, are rarely inert or isolated. A child's (or adult's) mind is in a constant flurry of subterranean integration and hypothesis-making. And a person's success-rate in making sense of words and facts increases with a person's knowledge.

This fascinating work of Landauer's brings into relief a critical characteristic of human

learning -- its gradual and cumulative nature. We extend and refine our knowledge and our vocabulary slowly over time -- but only to the extent that we have the opportunity to do so. We cannot extend our knowledge if we are not being exposed to new knowledge. Most of the unusual words which educated people know are words that are rarely heard in ordinary conversation. They are picked up in reading. We should encourage children to read in a wide diversity of topics in order to build up their treasury of knowledge and words. We should take great care in the books we make available, assign, and recommend. The ongoing, cumulative process of building knowledge and vocabulary cannot be replaced by brief incursions into the dictionary or the internet.

An advantaged 17-year-old high school graduate usually knows about 80,000 words. That means, from age one, 80,000 words have been learned in 5,840 days, which averages out to about 13 new words a day. Of course that's the average rate for an advantaged child after 16 years, not the actual rate at which new word-meanings are acquired at the end of each day. The child as listener, reader, and speaker is experiencing thousands of words every day, and is gradually enlarging and mapping a huge continent of word/meaning associations. [8]

To the extent that other forms of learning follow this same slow pattern of accretion, these results argue in favor of a broad, curriculum in the early grades, and one which would also, of course, encourage children to probe deeply into subjects that interest them. A broad curriculum builds vocabulary. The critical academic difference between advantaged and disadvantaged children is a difference in vocabulary size. Imparting broad knowledge to all children, starting in preschool, is the best way to enable all children to acquire a broad vocabulary, and, more generally, achieve equality of educational opportunity. This evidence for a broad-gauged curriculum in the earliest grades is strengthened by the finding that students cannot learn or probe deeply into material that is largely new to them. Studies show that the most effective learning environment is one that guides a student through manageable, incremental advances in knowledge. Other studies show that the most effective learning materials are those which offer the student a relatively small proportion of new content.[9]

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The progressive idea of pursuing a few projects in depth is not an implausible theory. The breadth-versus-depth problem in education is perennial and real. So is the problem of the integration of knowledge. Any teacher of science who fails to offer concrete experiences that manifest the feel and heft of things is missing a big opportunity for helping students gain conceptual insight. Any teacher of early math who doesn't challenge students with real-world problems that require a translation back and forth between the physical world and the abstract relations of math is leaving out an essential element of good math teaching.

But teachers prove every day that lively teaching techniques which motivate students and enhance their active participation in learning are entirely consistent with imparting broad knowledge effectively to young children. The best teaching methods do not have to be coupled with an anti-fact or anti-academic mentality.

Lively teaching is quite consistent with making sure that a broad yet selective array of

topics is taught and learned in each subject, so that students will not be ignorant at graduation of key topics like photosynthesis.

Unfortunately, this moderate position on combining lively teaching techniques with broad knowledge is considered a cop-out by progressivists who caricature the teaching of facts as "rote learning," and "inert" knowledge. Teachers at Core Knowledge schools, where there is an emphasis on broad factual knowledge, as well as on lively teaching, have uniformly observed that their students haven't become rote-learning robots after all. On the contrary, factual knowledge has made them more engaged and curious than they were before. On museum visits teachers notice the difference between kids who formerly ran around randomly pushing buttons, and saying "gross" when they saw invertebrates, and children who become deeply absorbed in the museum experience because they have learned what vertebrates and invertebrates are.

Breadth, as it turns out, is not the enemy of depth. According to independent evaluations of Core Knowledge schools conducted by Johns Hopkins researchers, Core Knowledge students use the library and look things up more than control students, because they have gained selectively broad knowledge in history, and science, and literature. Knowing about the Nile river makes them want to learn more about the Nile, and their breadth of knowledge enables them successfully to look things up. Since they already know something about the Nile and Egypt, they are able to contextualize what they find out when they do look it up.

This brings me to the last example of research on looking things up. One of the most important principles of psychology is that knowledge builds on knowledge. The more you know, the more readily you can learn something new, because you have a lot more analogies and points of contact for connecting the new knowledge with what you already know.

Another way of stating this is simply to say that the more you know, the smarter you are. Our students become more intelligent when they know more. So does everybody. Researchers have been telling us this fact about human intelligence for many years. Intelligence increases with knowledge. General knowledge is the best single tool in a person's intellectual armory.

It's often asserted that a student's home environment and socioeconomic status are the dominant factors in determining school achievement. But it turns out that an even more important factor is a student's breadth of general knowledge. The correlation between academic achievement and socioeconomic status (.42) is only about half the correlation between academic achievement and general knowledge (.81)."MERE facts" indeed! General knowledge proves to be more important for learning than parents, peers, and neighborhood combined (though of course those factors influence one's breadth of knowledge).[10]

So I'll close with a little anecdote. A few days ago, a student asked me to fill out a recommendation form for admission to my university's school of education, where disparagement of "mere facts" may still be heard. Nonetheless, the very first item on the admissions form asked for an estimate of the candidate's breadth of knowledge. This is standard practice on admission forms, because studies have shown that general knowledge

is the single most reliable index to a person's ability to perform a variety of tasks. I wouldn't have noticed this glaring inconsistency if I hadn't been writing this piece, and clearly the contradiction hasn't struck anyone in the education school. To avoid contradiction, our ed schools will need to change their anti-fact slogans or they will need to change their admisssion forms. It's clear from the consensus of scientific opinion that it's the anti-fact slogans that ought to be changed.

In sum, anti-fact slogans and the polar oppositions between breadth and depth are misleading. Readiness to learn means already knowing a lot of what you are trying to learn. Learning to learn is not an abstract skill. It entails already having the preparatory knowledge that enables further learning to occur. Possession of this enabling knowledge is the most reliably accurate meaning that can be attached to the term "learning to learn."

Hence the current discussion of the "Digital Divide" -- the inequalities in access to computer technology -- does not go deep enough. To give all children a chance to take advantage of the new technology means not only seeing to it that they have access to the technology but also ensuring that they possess the knowledge necessary for them to make effective use of it. Our responsibility as educators is to define the knowledge our students need and -- through a lively variety of pedagogical techniques -- to help them master it. If we don't, the Internet will only exacerbate the "Matthew effect. "Those who know a lot will be able to learn a lot more. Those who know little will add little, and will will face instead a frustrating confusion of information that they will be unable to sort, evaluate, or absorb. We must not let that happen. We must start early, in pre-school, to build the fund of knowledge that provides the only real chance for bridging the digital divide at its more profound level.

If we teachers convey general knowledge to our students in a coherent and effective way, and encourage them to read widely, we will give them the tools they need for lifelong learning. We will truly enable them to look things up.

Ed. Note: This article was adapted from the closing address to The Ninth Annual Core Knowledge Conference in Anaheim, CA, March 18, 2000.I am grateful to Professors Thomas Landauer, George A. Miller, and Herbert A. Simon for their comments on the text. Any errors that remain are entirely my own.

1. Quoted in the Greensboro, North Carolina "News and Record," January 2, 2000, by Charles Davenport, in a review of "The Conspiracy of Ignorance," by Martin Gross.
2. G. A. Miller and P. Gildea, "How Children Learn Words," "Scientific American," September, 1987, pp. 94-99.
3. J. Larkin, H. A. Simon, et al, "Expert and Novice Performance in Solving Physics Problems," Science," 208, (1980), 1335-42.
4. W. G. Chase and H. AS. Simon, "Perception in Chess," Cognitive Psychology, 4, (1973), 55-81.
5. Betty Hart and Todd Risley, "Meaningful Differences," Baltimore, 1995.
6. B. Laufer, "The Lexical Plight," in J. Coady and T. Huckin, eds., "Second Language Vocabulary Acquisition," Cambridge, England, 1997.
7. A useful summary can be found in: T. Landauer and S. Dumais, "How Come You Know So Much?From Practical Problems to New Memory Theory," in D. Hermann et al., eds., "Basic and Applied Memory Research," Vol. 1, Mahwah, NJ, 1996.

8. Computations from several sources converge on 80,000 words, and Miller (1987) estimates twice that rate for high-vocabulary children.
9. Wolfe, M., B. Schreiner, M. E., Rehder, B.,Laham,D., Foltz, P. W., Kintsch, W. & Landauer, T. K (1998). Learning from text:Matching readers and texts by Latent Semantic Analysis. Discourse Processes, 25, 2&3, 309-336.See also B. Rosenshine and R. Stevens, "Teaching Functions," in M. Wittrock, ed., "Handbook of Research on Teaching," New York, 1986.
10. D. Lubinski and L. G. Humphreys, "Incorporating General Intelligence into Epidemiology and the Social Sciences," in "Intelligence," vol. 24 (1997) pp.159-202.

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ESSAY REVIEW

Dr Hirsch's diagnosis and remedy for the ills of American schools

FRANCIS SCHRAG

I'll begin by saying that E. D. Hirsch's *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them* is an impressive and provocative book. Although I will challenge the validity of some of its most important claims, and cast doubt on some of its methods of argumentation, I consider the book to be a model of public discourse about American schooling, accessible to any educated reader willing to make some effort, yet without the patronizing tone that sometimes emanates from critics of public schooling. Hirsch thinks US public schools need a dose of tough love, not abandonment.

Hirsch is a democrat with strong egalitarian inclinations, but his educational views are avowedly conservative. 'There is an *inverse relation* between educational progressivism and social progressivism', declares Hirsch (p. 7; emphasis in original). He directly confronts three formidable groups of antagonists: leaders of the institutions that presumably wield control over teacher training and school district administration, the growing chorus of voices urging that vouchers be used to support private schools, and the new social Darwinists who believe investment in education is wasted because genetic factors cannot be overcome.

Hirsch offers a prescription for the revitalization of US public schooling, the principal elements of which are a national curriculum, a pedagogy focused on transmission of core knowledge, and conversion of the teaching corps to a more defensible set of ideas about teaching and learning. One might note that this bears a resemblance to Margaret Thatcher's prescription for England. Hirsch is mindful of this and urges the USA to follow Britain's example. (I'll leave it to British readers to decide if the turn was for the better or worse in her own country.) Turning to the diagnosis on which these prescriptions are based, Hirsch, unlike many American school reformers who focus on altering the legal, financial, or administrative structures of schooling, keeps his eye firmly, and I believe correctly,

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The book reviewed here is E. D. Hirsch, Jr, *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), xiii+ 317 pp., $24.95 (hbk), ISBN 0-385-48457-7.

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centred on the core educational issues – what is taught and how it is taught.

Hirsch believes ideas matter. He believes that American teachers and administrators but, more particularly, American professors of education, though well meaning, have been captured by a mistaken educational ideology, an ideology that has been hegemonic for about three-quarters of a century: 'Our educational failures reflect reality's revenge over inadequate ideas' (p. 128).

Hirsch's brief for the prosecution challenges several of these ideas while attempting to account for their persistence. Among the most important are localism, developmentalism and the 'tool metaphor' for learning. Put simply, *too* simply in a brief review, the first common misconception holds that curricular decisions should be decided at the local district if not the school or classroom levels. The second is that conventional academic learning is not natural to children, certainly not to young children; they ought to be spared its necessary rigours for as long as possible. The third misconception is that the particulars children learn are not very important – what they really need are some general-purpose 'tools' of learning and thinking as well as a generic love of learning.

Whereas in his earlier book (Hirsch 1987) the responsibility for formulating and disseminating these flawed educational ideas was laid at John Dewey's doorstep (where else?), Hirsch has now done more – but, perhaps, not enough – reading in the history of education to identify a more likely suspect, William Heard Kilpatrick, inventor of the famed 'project method' and teacher of thousands of teachers during a long, illustrious career at Teachers College, Columbia University. Hirsch does not rest content with identifying a single demon, however. In what I found to be one of his most persuasive and informative chapters, Hirsch exploits his mastery of literacy history to trace to their ideological forebears the romantic, individualistic and anti-intellectual aspirations that undergird progressive pedagogy: the romantics in Europe and Britain and their American progeny, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman.

According to Hirsch, these romantic educational ideas took hold in the USA rather than in Europe where they were always held in suspicion, partly because of the belief in 'American exceptionalism' – the notion that US society is fundamentally different from other technologically advanced societies – and partly because the educational professoriate is not sufficiently integrated with the rest of the university.

Hirsch's critique of what he calls the 'educational thought world' is unsparing. He argues that reality provides the best critique to both developmentalism and the 'tool metaphor' of learning. According to his account, the experience in some Asian countries shows that it is possible for the average academic accomplishment to be higher than ours is, *and* at the same time for the disparity between higher and lower achievers to be *smaller* than ours is. Moreover, the experience of French preschools shows that a serious diet of academic learning purveyed by well-trained professionals can substantially mitigate the disadvantages that poor, immigrant children bring to school.

According to Hirsch, 'mainstream' researchers from departments of psychology, where science, not ideology, reigns, have reached a consensus: the ideas that lie behind developmentalism and the 'tool' metaphor for learning are invalid. The demonstrable geographic mobility of the American population renders the idea of a locally designed curriculum not just anachronistic but destructive. The current wave of repugnance towards standardized testing blames the messenger rather than confronts the message.

The indictment is well argued and even impassioned, but some of Hirsch's rhetorical strategies began to raise my hackles early on. For example, Hirsch consistently contrasts 'educational' research with 'mainline' or 'mainstream' research conducted by professors in psychology departments. Of course, as a professor in a school of education, I am sensitive to this, but what became troubling was not the distinction itself but Hirsch's selective identification of researchers with their affiliation when it suited his polemical purpose. For example, on p. 79, David Elkind is accurately represented as a supporter of 'developmentalism'. What isn't mentioned is that Elkind has no degrees in education! After an internship with Jean Piaget in Geneva, Elkind has spent his entire career as a professor of *psychology* – not educational psychology. On the other hand, the research of Jere Brophy, Thomas Good and their associates is cited favourably (pp. 161 ff.), but Hirsch does not identify them as educational researchers in schools of education, publishing almost exclusively in educational venues. To take another example, while Hirsch scoffs at efforts of 'two education professors from Teachers College, Columbia University' (p. 67) to challenge the findings of Marilyn Jager Adams related to teaching reading, he fails to mention that Jeanne Chall, favourably cited along with Adams, spent a long and distinguished career at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Not only is Hirsch's reading list selective – whose isn't? – Hirsch sometimes represents authors in a tendentious way in order to enlist them as witnesses for the prosecution. Consider his treatment of Piaget, for example. A 1935 essay by Piaget is quoted to buttress Hirsch's claim that the need to defer academic learning for young children is without scientific support. In the quotation Piaget acknowledges that mental stages of development are not immutably fixed so that 'sound methods can ... even accelerate their [children's] spiritual growth' (p. 85). This leaves the very mistaken impression that Piaget himself might endorse direct methods of teaching young children. How far this is from the case is clear not only from Piaget's essay as a whole but from the essay written 30 years *later* and published in the same volume. Here is a single quotation that is much more representative of Piaget: 'if the aim of intellectual training is to form the intelligence *rather than to stock the memory,* and to produce intellectual explorers rather than *mere erudition,* then traditional education is manifestly guilty of a grave deficiency' (p. 51: emphasis added).

One would almost think that Piaget had learned about education from Kilpatrick.

Although Hirsch has read more educational history since writing his previous book, acknowledging that Larry Cuban's *How Teacher's Taught*

and Arthur Zilversmit's *Changing Schools: Progressive Education Theory and Practice, 1930–1960* offer at least *apparent* counter-evidence to his thesis that progressive pedagogy has triumphed in American classrooms, he appears not to have come across Herbert Kliebard's widely praised *The Struggle for the American Curriculum 1893–1958* (1986). If he had he would have noted that Kilpatrick's version of progressive pedagogy not only failed to dominate actual classrooms but did not even enjoy hegemony in the rhetorical and institutional spheres. As Kliebard (1986: 173) writes of the project curriculum in its heyday:

> The developmentalist interest group, once a specific child-study movement rooted in genetic psychology but now a more broadly based group of child-centered educators with Kilpatrick at the helm, existed, after all, alongside other powerful interest groups with at least different and often contradictory conceptions of how a curriculum should be wrought.

One of the curriculum movements that competed quite successfully at the rhetorical, institutional and school classroom levels with Kilpatrick's was that of 'scientific curriculum making' (Kliebard's label) with Edward Lee Thorndike as one of its foremost exponents. I cite Kliebard's (1986: 107) description of Thorndike's image of the mind, because it shares many of the features that Hirsch, himself, embraces and identifies with contemporary cognitive psychology.

> The mind that Thorndike envisioned was a machine in which there were thousands – millions – of individual connections, each one bearing a message having little in common with the next. The mind in his view consisted not of large capacities such as memory and reasoning waiting there to be developed, but of 'multitudinous separate individual functions', a kind of switchboard with innumerable wires (bonds) connecting discrete points.

The reason I say with some confidence that Thorndike's view of the mind was a *successful* competitor to that of Kilpatrick is that one can readily see its link to multiple-choice and other forms of objective testing that became ubiquitous in American classrooms after Thorndike, a form of testing still rarely found in other countries.

Once my suspicions about Hirsch's selective reading and identification of individual authors had been raised, I became more suspicious of his substantive claims. I wondered, for example, if the outcomes of French preschools were as impressive as he had let us believe. Lamentably, I was able to locate only one of his sources, Alain Norvez's *De la Naissance a l'ecole* (1990). According to Hirsch, 'The French have been keeping educational data on a national scale for many decades and can justly pride themselves on having greatly diminished the socially induced learning gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children' (p. 42). Imagine my surprise, then, at finding the following in Norvez (1990: 413; translation mine; emphasis added): 'Contrary to what is still sometimes affirmed, the preschool does *not* allow the reduction of scholastic life chances between children coming from different social environments'.[1]

To show that Hirsch avails himself of a number of rhetorical devices in his brief and quotes selectively is not sufficient to undermine his basic

argument. To do so, we need to challenge some of his assumptions: Let me challenge three. One I have already alluded to, the assumption that progressive pedagogy dominates US classrooms. Unfortunately, there is not a great deal of systematic evidence about what happens in school classrooms – certainly Hirsch did not avail himself of any – but what there is contradicts his allegations. One of the most cited studies, John Goodlad's *A Place Called School*, is now 17 years old but its age should actually make its conclusions more valuable from Hirsch's point of view. The data were collected at what Hirsch claims to be the nadir of recent school performance, when, according to this thesis, progressive ideas were *most* influential. Goodlad's team conducted in-depth observations of over 1000 classes in representative elementary, middle and high schools in 13 communities around the country. Here is their general conclusion (Goodlad 1984: 105, 108, 109):

> The data from our observation in more than 1,000 classrooms support the popular image of a teacher standing or sitting in front of a class imparting knowledge to a group of students. Explaining and lecturing constituted the most frequent teaching activities, according to teachers, students, and our observations. . . . Three categories of student activity marked by passivity – written work, listening, and preparing assignments – dominate in the likelihood of their occurring at any given time at all three levels of schooling. . . . Except in the arts and vocational education, students were not very often called upon to build, draw, perform, role play, or make things. . . . A great deal of what goes on in the classroom is like painting-by-numbers – filling in the colours called for by the numbers on the page. This begins in the primary grades. The child colours the house yellow, following instructions, and writes the word 'yellow' beside the corresponding colour. Later, with acquisition of greater reading and writing competence, he or she answers questions, in sentences, after having read several paragraphs. . . .
>
> A similar thing occurs orally. Most of the time teachers tell or explain, providing students with both figure and ground. . . . Students rarely . . . ask questions. Nor do teachers often give students a chance to romp with an open-ended question such as 'What are your views on the quality of television?' The intellectual terrain is laid out by the teacher. The paths for walking through it are largely predetermined by the teacher.

So much for the ubiquity of the project method and other progresssive pedagogy. The ubiquity of classrooms based on the transmission of 'factoids' appears to be a fact, one that, itself, demands explanation in view of the fact that progressive rhetoric is certainly *one* rhetoric to which almost all prospective teachers are exposed. Why, then, is this rhetoric so impotent? One reason already alluded to may lie in the way this rhetoric is countered by the more 'scientific' rhetoric prospective teachers are exposed to in the psychology courses found in schools of education. A second may lie in the nature of the conventional didactic teaching that is found in most universities and schools of education. Here, schools of education are only too closely tied to the rest of the university. A third explanation – one I personally favour – lies in the selective advantage of conventional, direct pedagogy in the face of the pervasive threat of non-compliance and disorder that every teacher confronts.

A second major claim in Hirsch's book is that the decline of US performance is associated with the degree to which US teachers have embraced 'progressive' pedagogical ideas. This implies that there was a substantial decline in the performance of US students over about a 20-year period beginning in the mid-1960s. Hirsch's main evidence for this is the decline 'in verbal SAT scores in the United States between 1966 and 1980. . .', especially the '64% decline in the absolute number of high-achieving students' (p. 39). Let us, for the moment, agree that these facts do signify decline. With what curricular regime did that decline coincide?

Consider: the SAT is generally taken in the fall of the senior year in high school, so let us say that US schools offered the *strongest* preparation to students who were in twelfth grade during the years 1960–65. According to Hirsch, it is the elementary school that is most responsible for disseminating the core knowledge needed for later academic success. When were these seniors in elementary school? They would have been in grades one to six during the years 1948–59. Now, to identify the period when public schools were at their academic acme with the period in which 'life adjustment education' had its heyday is odd to say the least. October 1957, after all, was the year of Sputnik, the shot heard round the educational world, the moment, if there ever was one, in which it was widely perceived that the public schools had to be *rescued* from the clutches of the '*progressive*' educators and some intellectual sanity restored to their operations. Arthur Bestor's Educational *Wastelands: The Retreat from Learning in our Public Schools,* in many ways an ancestor of Hirsch's own book, was published during this period as was Admiral Hyman Rickover's stern warning about the intellectual flabbiness of our schools in the face of the Soviet technological threat.

A third major claim lies in Hirsch's assumption of academic decline, itself, especially relative to the success of children from other countries. The topic is both large and controversial, and I don't want to identify myself with any party to the continuing debate – only to raise a single point germane to Hirsch's argument. Hirsch believes that 'every child reading at grade level by the end of first or second grade . . . would do more than any other single reform to improve the quality and equity of American schooling' (p. 148) and of reading he notes that, 'There is no way to describe reading as a purely formal skill, or to remove from it the information-based knowledge disparaged as "factoids" '.

If Hirsch is right about this, and I believe the evidence supports him here, and if his critique of schooling is on target, US children ought to test poorly relative to children from other nations on tests of reading. What does the evidence show? According to *How in the World Do Students Read? The IEA Study of Reading Literacy* which tested thousands of nine-year-old students from 32 nations, the USA was placed *second,* ahead of every other nation excepting Finland, and *including France,* Hirsch's presumptive model for early education. Ironically, France is mentioned as a nation that had an unusual number of students over 10 taking the test. Note, finally, that the standard deviation, which is a measure of the spread of scores, is identical for France and the USA. So much for US failure to teach reading

effectively. (To be fair to Hirsch, I should point out that the positions of French and US students were reversed by age 14.)

If Hirsch's major claims are contestable, to say the least, why are so many of his assertions lacking the kind of nuance and qualification his scholarly training must have insisted on? Perhaps some of the polemical tendencies of his 'ed school' mentors Chester Finn and Diane Ravitch rubbed off on him. I believe the reason lies in a more fundamental ambivalence that pervades the entire book. On the one hand, as I've already suggested, Hirsch is the zealous prosecutor who needs to get a conviction.

The control exercised by 'the coordinated groups of people who control the institutions of the education world. . .' (p. 63) rests ultimately with schools of education:

> Education schools and their allies in state departments of education perpetuate themselves. . . . The millions of teachers who pass through this certification process become a captive audience for indoctrination. . . . Like any guild that determines who can and cannot enter a profession, the citadel of education has developed powerful techniques for preventing outside interference. . . . (pp. 63, 64)

There is clearly no room for nuance and qualification in confronting such an enemy.

But there is another Hirsch in this book, one who notes that since we cannot eliminate these 'coordinated groups', our best hope is to convert them. Here is the Hirsch who in a masterful chapter provides a balanced, thoughtful view of the benefits and liabilities of standardized testing. Here is the moderate Hirsch who noted that progressive pedagogy contains at least partial truths, that Dewey had some worthwhile things to say about education, that the middle road in reading instruction is the one that needs taking, that learning by discovery has benefits as well as liabilities. Here is the Hirsch who describes himself as neither a liberal nor a conservative but 'perhaps more accurately, an educational pragmatist' (p. 6). Unfortunately the two E. D. Hirschs are at war with each other and lend a certain incoherence to the book.

I began the review by acknowledging my respect for Hirsch's book, but my review has, so far, been mostly critical. Is there anything in Hirsch's diagnosis and prescription I agree with? There is. I find his argument for a national curriculum to be a powerful one, one that both the educational right and left, hostile to national government for quite different reasons, need to address. It is possible, even, that the absence of a national curriculum helps explain what otherwise is a mystery that disciples of Dewey – and here I include myself – have never successfully explained. If school classrooms are, for the most part, 'factoid'-based, why do American high school and college students not know more facts?

Do students simply reject the knowledge that schools (and Hirsch) want them to ingest? It may be that the amount of repetition and the gaps that Hirsch alludes to are attributable to curricula whose primary failing is not so much that they are based on progressive ideas about learning but that in the absence of any overall coherence, they cannot generate any *cumulative* mastery.

Despite my criticisms of Hirsch, what I find most admirable about *The Schools We Need* is not that its central theses are correct, but that it succeeds as well as it does in what is an unusually daunting and even daring enterprise. E. D. Hirsch has mastered an enormous body of literature in fields ranging from cognitive science and standardized testing to intellectual and institutional history, a literature that includes sources in French, German and Italian. He has digested this complex corpus and, without condescension, produced a brief demanding a profound change in the way many of us think about education, a brief that is argued and documented, rather than just asserted, a brief that contains much good sense and one that is refreshingly free of jargon and platitude. It is a brief addressed to a broad, educated citizenry who, after all, are the ultimate judges of American public schools. I wish my colleagues in schools of education were writing briefs of this kind, albeit briefs that represented a more careful and balanced review of the evidence.

Notes

1. 'Contrairement a ce qui est encore parfois affirmé, l'école maternelle ne permet pas de réduire l'inégalité des chances scolaires et sociales entre les enfants issus de milieux sociaux différents.'

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Record: 4

Educating the educators. By: Hanus, Jerome J.. Public Interest, Winter97 Issue 126, p124, 4p; (*AN 9705295142*)

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EDUCATING THE EDUCATORS

Opinion polls routinely find the quality of American education to be a matter of grave concern among the public. For example, a September 1996, Washington Post poll found that over 60 percent of its respondents worried "a great deal" that the educational system will get worse. That the public had reason to be worried was confirmed at almost the same time by the release of a report by a national commission calling teacher standards "a national shame." And, if polls and reports were not enough to convince us that this is a genuine concern, we need only to observe the numerous books published each year criticizing the educational system. Reform proposals, of course, are not lacking, but they seem to have the same ethereal quality that we associate with good-government reforms. Both are such complex entities that it is difficult to figure out what to do first.

In The Schools We Need: And Why We Don't Have Them,[a] E. D. Hirsch, Jr., provides the logical structure that tells us what segment of education should have priority and then summarizes the empirical evidence that tells us, first, why the dominant educational philosophy is corrupting and, second, what works in the classroom. The book is aimed at educators and opinion leaders in the hope that a grassroots movement will ensue demanding the rejection of current educational myths and the adoption of rational policies.

Hirsch has tried to challenge the reigning pedagogy before. In his highly regarded earlier book, Cultural Literacy (1987), he showed that there exists a common core of cultural knowledge in America and that a person's mastery of it correlates well with academic achievement and with annual income. The book's appendix listed several hundred concepts that specialists in various academic fields believed a literate American citizen should know. Hirsch argued that these concepts should be learned by high-school graduation, implying the need for a national core curriculum.

His new book goes beyond his earlier one in that it challenges the American educational establishment to restructure the philosophy of education that has been dominant for the last 70 years--the tradition of romantic progressivism.

The core thesis of the romantic movement in education, as summarized by Hirsch, is that "the child is a special being in its own right with unique, trustworthy--indeed holy--impulses that should be allowed to develop and run their course." In short, it is child-centered education, in which the nature of the child must not be inhibited by imposing artificial restrictions on him. Romanticism rejected the traditional Enlightenment view, in which the educational process was understood to be a difficult one, designed to civilize the child, frustrating his natural instincts to engage in play and other pleasurable activities. The consequence of romanticism was to disparage book learning, memorization, and subject-matter requirements in favor of learning from life-like exercises, such as learning arithmetic by pretending to shop in a grocery store.

Inequities flow from the romantic perspective despite its good intentions. The students who do learn standard grammar, spelling, phonics, and multiplication do so only because they come from educated families where they receive instruction at home. The disadvantaged child, on the other hand, who would most benefit from traditional schooling, doesn't receive it. And to rationalize his lack of accomplishment, he

is offered the excuse of lack of self-esteem. As Hirsch notes, this excuse "shifts the cause away from the actual procedures of schooling to something that is beyond the ability of schools to remedy." In short, education took on the trappings of therapy instead of schooling.

Since mainstream research has shown the superiority of traditional educational approaches and the generally dismal performance of the romantic process-oriented education, why haven't educators demanded a revision of the current doctrine? Hirsch attributes the lack of demand to the opposition by what has been called an "interlocking public school directorate" that has institutionalized romantic progressivism. We are familiar with the usual suspects (professors of education, public-school administrators, and state and federal bureaucrats in their respective education departments), but Hirsch draws our attention to two particular culprits: the National Education Association (NEA) and private foundations.

The source of the intellectual conformity that spread weblike to embrace these groups was Teachers College at Columbia University. From it the ideas of romantic progressivism were promulgated in the 1920s and 1930s by its students who became professors in the rapidly increasing numbers of college education departments. The curricular ideas on which these departments came to be based were regarded with some amusement by other departments of the university, leading to the virtual intellectual isolation of education departments. (The classic expression of this derision was offered in 1933 when Lawrence Lowell, the president of Harvard University, remarked that its department of education was a "kitten that ought to be drowned.") Nevertheless, the result was that the education departments continued to turn out the like-minded professionals who were later to staff all the other educational organizations. These staffs reciprocally reinforced the assumptions of romantic progressivism, thus making the "directorate" virtually impervious to change.

This intellectual monopoly, as described by Hirsch, permits the educational community to rely on rationalizations to excuse poor educational performance. For instance, we are told that we cannot really be compared to other countries because we are such a dynamic people and, therefore, our curricula too must be dynamic. Consequently, it is fruitless to emphasize content or facts since these are all changing, especially as we enter the "information age." Or, again, human beings have "multiple intelligences," so there can be no "right" way of teaching pupils. As Hirsch points out, there is no evidence for the existence of those "intelligences," yet educators have used it as an excuse to avoid teaching a common core of knowledge. Or, an even better example, educators often assert that there is no subject inherently superior to another. As one educator wrote in 1944, "Mathematics and mechanics, art and agriculture, history and homemaking are all peers." This leveling process has led to the suppression of traditional subjects in favor of such nonacademic ones as consumer practices and personal adjustment.

Hirsch would replace romanticism and its rationalizations with a common curriculum. This would admittedly allow the advantaged to progress even faster, but it would also allow the disadvantaged to improve their chances in life. In the struggle to attain a common curriculum, he implores us not to "accept the claim that knowing how to learn (which is an abstract skill that does not even exist) is more important than having a broad foundation of factual knowledge that really does enable further learning."

One can only say amen to Hirsch's efforts; he has indeed made an inestimable contribution to our understanding by summarizing the extant research data on the key educational controversies. This is consistent with his belief that once we become aware that research does not sustain the pedagogy of the education establishment, the latter will be forced to restructure its ideas to conform with the research. He recognizes that this will be a slow process, probably a school-by-school one, and argues that we ought not to expect general reform "until there is a change of mind by the general public."

But this is an incomplete response to the problem. While it is true that the failures of public education are intellectual ones, those ideas are perpetuated by political institutions. Thus the existing intellectual monopoly will be broken only if the governing systems of the schools are restructured or if an end-run is made around the "directorate." While we may grant that there is no silver bullet of reform, surely a tax-funded school-voucher system that included all schools, religious and secular, would offer at least some buckshot. The political monopoly would be broken, the NEA would find its powers of obstruction weakened, and government officials, elected and unelected, would be forced to reach out to more constituents.

As a consequence, schools, now in competition with one another, would be encouraged to act on the best

interest of the child, rather than ideology. This, in turn, would force college education departments to reconsider their educational philosophies, for there would now be a demand for teachers with traditional teaching approaches.

The expansion of educational opportunities offered by a voucher system would probably also dilute the fear of a common curriculum, a fear that was given substance in the dispute over history standards. But there would be little dispute if the curriculum were understood in the way that Hirsch understands it and as it has operated successfully in other countries. He is calling for an emphasis on basics in schooling, a view not unfamiliar to most conservatives. A self-described political liberal, the irony of his proposals is not lost on him: "The only practical way to achieve liberalism's aim of greater social justice is to pursue conservative educational policies."

a Doubleday. 317 pp. $24.95.

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By JEROME J. HANUS

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Author(s):	Woo, Elaine
Abstract:	Discusses the transformation of E.D. Hirsch, Jr. from being a bane of public education to becoming an intellectual guru of education reform in the United States. Hirsch's belief in a core of knowledge every American must learn to succeed in school; Hirsch's book entitled `The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them'; Wrong focus of the progressive theory in education; Educational goals of the Bill Clinton administration.
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Stresses Core Knowledge, Faults 'Educational' Progressivism

EDUCATOR HIRSCH WINNING CULTURAL LITERACY DEBATE

E.D. Hirsch, Jr., once was the boogeyman of public education. Although conservatives embraced him, liberals--meaning most of the mainstream education world--considered him a Neanderthal, a pedagogue, an elitist.

They bashed his 1987 book, Cultural Literacy, as a Eurocentric tract that would have students reading about dead white males and conjugating verbs in Latin. They sneered at his next bestseller, the Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, as a boon mainly for enthusiasts of Trivial Pursuit.

They feared that if he had his way, the "open" classroom would revert to its dreary former self with bolted-down desks and chairs, and students performing mind-numbing memory drills.

The Harvard Educational Review lambasted Cultural Literacy as "one of the most elaborate conservative educational manifestoes" in years.

A decade later?

Grateful School Hails Him as Hero

Well, Hirsch was the star of a recent forum at Harvard's Graduate School of Education, swarmed by fans wanting him to sign his latest book. Then he was feted at the faculty club.

But that was nothing compared to the reception a few miles away at the Morse School, one of 350 schools around the country following his grade-by-grade prescription for what children should learn. Here, hand-

painted banners trumpeted his name. Here, grateful teachers and parents offered juice and homemade bread. And here, gaggles of exuberant fourth-graders begged for his autograph as if he were Pluto in Disneyland.

"I regard him as a hero--an intellectual hero," said John Kelleher, a Morse parent who bucked the liberal tendencies of the Cambridge community to bring Hirsch's curriculum to this once-downtrodden public school.

What gives?

Ten years and several cultural wars later, Hirsch, a balding, 68-year-old English professor from Virginia, has emerged as an intellectual guru of education reform.

He has become a force by standing firm on two points he first made in 1987: that there is a core of knowledge every American must learn to succeed in school and function responsibly in our democracy, and that a wrong-headed educational theory called progressivism--i.e., that teachers should be attuned to the social and emotional needs of children and should nurture their creativity--has kept schools from teaching that essential knowledge.

With talk of national academic standards permeating discussions of how to fix America's schools, Hirsch's message resounds today not as a right-wing rebuke but as common sense, educationally and politically correct.

"I think the world is coming closer to E.D. Hirsch," said Marc Tucker, president of the National Center on Education and the Economy in Washington, D.C., and codirector of a national project to write standards for schools. "He is driving his point home at a time when the United States has standards on its agenda."

Progressivism Exalts Process Over Content

Hirsch's new book, The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them, contends that America's students rank at the bottom internationally because "progressive" theory has led schools to exalt process over content.

The result, he says, has been watered-down courses and ineffective teaching practices, such as cooperative learning, "interdisciplinary" instruction that blurs math and science or English and art, the naturalistic "whole language" approach to reading, and math programs that shirk mastery of basic skills.

He lays all this out in plain language that cuts through the fog of education jargon and hits home with parents and teachers. "A systemic failure to teach all children the knowledge they need in order to understand what the next grade has to offer is the major source of avoidable injustice in our schools," he writes, calling U.S. schools "among the least effective in the world."

His book is showing up as required reading on the desks of school board members superintendents, policy wonks and politicians across the country, particularly in California, where the so-called traditionalists in the math and reading wars look to Hirsch as a voice of reason.

Maureen DiMarco, Gov. Pete Wilson's education secretary until last year, bought 50 copies and gave them to the governor, legislators and lobbyists. Democrat Delaine Eastin, the superintendent of public instruction, is urging every member of the state Board of Education to read it. Bill Honig, the former superintendent who last year admitted he led the state down the wrong path with whole language teaching, recommends it wherever he goes, calling it "a good corrective." Every member of the new state commission on academic standards had a copy at its first meeting last December.

Hirsch still has his critics. Harvard education professor Howard Gardner admires Hirsch's call for a beefier curriculum. But he views Hirsch's attacks on schools of education as ill-informed and mean-spirited. He

thought that Hirsch's singling out of a long-forgotten New York professor as the root of American educational evils bordered on the absurd.

"Hirsch," Gardner said, "has swallowed a neoconservative caricature of contemporary American education. If this kind of angry, stereotypical thinking is what results from a 'core knowledge' orientation, then I want no part of it."

Hearing such broadsides, Hirsch sighs and quips, "It's not very nice to be such a Simon Legree." Yet the self-described political liberal and educational pragmatist notes that, in contrast to the vitriol aimed at Cultural Literacy, he is encountering little open resistance this time.

Indeed, he has even been invited to speak at Teachers College, Columbia University, the place he portrays as the evil empire of progressive thought. The New York school's president, Arthur Levine, does fault Hirsch for failing to give progressivism credit for rising test scores during its heyday, the three or four decades leading up to World War II.

But Levine declares the rest of Hirsch's book "fascinating. ... He's gone far beyond talking about the mere accumulation of facts."

So, today, "I think he'll be received very nicely," Levine said. "I don't think people are lying in wait for him."

Country's Mood Has Changed

Hirsch agrees: "The mood has changed--something has changed."

That "something," some would assert, is the new mood about academic standards. When President George Bush called the nation's governors to an education summit in 1989, he set in motion events that led to a set of education goals. Adopted by the Clinton Administration and Congress, they include raising the achievement of U.S. students to "world-class" levels by 2000 and standardizing what every child should learn.

The movement riled some conservatives, who saw it as federal encroachment on a local prerogative, and it has produced some notable failures. (Remember the history standards that critics said slighted George Washington and the English standards that failed to mention one great book?)

But 48 states have or are devising standards for teaching every major academic subject.

"The whole country has moved into a more educationally conservative stance. Who would have imagined that we would have national education goals? That would have been anathema 10 or 15 years ago," said David Breneman, dean of the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education.

"The whole battle over standards seems settled, and now we are just debating the details. I have to believe that E.D. Hirsch has been a fairly significant force, among others, in altering that debate."

In The Schools We Need, Hirsch says progressive educational ideas emanated from Teachers College in the early part of this century. Although the movement is often associated with John Dewey, Hirsch sees the most influential proponent as William Heard Kilpatrick, who taught at the college in the 1920s and '30s.

Many Teaching Strategies Not Supported by Research

Kilpatrick believed that learning should occur at each child's natural pace. It's this philosophy, Hirsch says, that led to such current practices as the "developmental" report card, which replaces letter grades with an elaborate rubric of skills and goals; "constructivism" or "discovery learning," in which students arrive at their own understanding of key concepts through hands-on activities, projects or problem-solving; and "multi-age"

classrooms" in which children are grouped not by age but by their "readiness" for learning.

Hirsch pans such teaching strategies as largely unsupported by research. That is a key point that reformed reformers, such as Honig, have taken to heart. But what is more troubling to Hirsch--and reveals what he says are his true political leanings--is the belief that approaches such as multi-age classes are inherently unfair and exacerbate the social inequities rife in the nation's classrooms.

Fundamental to his analysis is the idea that knowledge builds on prior knowledge, that facts learned in one grade, for instance, form the "mental Velcro" on which the next grade's lessons attach and grow.

A child from a disadvantaged home, deprived of cultural opportunities available to the more prosperous, enters school with less "Velcro." It is far better, Hirsch argues, to have every student on the same page, tackling demanding subject matter, than to have Jimmy on page 20 because he's a slow learner and Susie on page 40 because she's quicker.

The egalitarianism of his message heartens parents like Martha Schwartz of San Pedro, a former high school teacher who has fought the dumbing-down of math instruction in California.

Schwartz, who describes herself as a liberal-to-moderate Democrat, says she and her cohorts began to doubt whether they were still liberals when proponents of reform math attacked their advocacy of basic skills as reactionary. "Hirsch's boon documents for us that we are still liberal people concerned with the poor and that taking a conservative educational stance was a natural and productive thing to do," she said.

This was Hirsch's message back in 1987 too. But it was buried under the mud slung in the raging culture wars, with multiculturalists fixating on the Western Civ orientation of Cultural Literacy, which had a 4,500-item appendix of facts every American should know, such as that "Gunga Din" was a poem by Rudyard Kipling.

Now, some observers say, Hirsch's new book makes clear what motivates him. "I don't see him as conservative or traditional at all," said Stanford educational expert Michael Kirst, a former California Board of Education president who became friends with Hirsch when both were fellows at a Pale Alto research institute. "He thought you needed a certain number of facts to place reading in context. ... There is a very compelling rationale to what he has to say."

More Than 300 Schools Use Hirsch's Guide

Another reason Hirsch is getting a second look may be that, when it comes to what works in schools, he no longer is just a theorist.

More than 300 elementary schools in 40 states--including a Catholic academy in San Diego--have bought Hirsch's argument, along with the $17 curriculum guide he sells through his Core Knowledge Foundation, which he runs out of a small, Tudor-style building next to a bagel shop in Charlottesville, Va.

At the Morse School, principal James Coady and his teachers swear by the results. Four years ago, the school had so few students that closure seemed likely. Today, after three years of using Hirsch's curriculum, its test scores rank among the highest in the Cambridge system. There's a waiting list for admission.

These promising signs are occurring in a predominantly minority school, where half of the 300 students qualify for subsidized lunches and a quarter speak limited English. Morse students, Coady says are a living rebuttal of the charge that Hirsch's knowledge-based approach is elitist.

Teacher Andrea Downie agrees.

On a recent morning, her students were happily filling in green poster-board maps of Italy with the locations of ancient Roman cities. They had been studying the Punic Wars, Hannibal, Julius Caesar, the destruction of

Pompeii and the decline and fall of Rome. All this in the third grade

Downie and other teachers say they now know exactly what they must cover grade by grade. That may seem a surprising admission. But one of the great myths in education, according to Hirsch, is that all schools follow a curriculum. What most have is a poor imitation, so vague that first-graders might spend weeks studying dinosaurs in one classroom while others next door might not study the subject at all. It's potluck rather than a set menu of learning, Hirsch says.

At Morse, Downie has noticed students retaining more of what they learn from year to year, lessening the need for review. They also seem excited about studying, proud to be tackling subjects their siblings didn't encounter until later years. Ashlei Levesque, an energetic 8-year-old, knew why Julius Caesar uttered, "Et tu, Brutet." "It was his friend who betrayed him, and those were his last words," she said.

Course outlines for other grades, K-6, are as ambitious, covering world and American civilization, geography, language, literature,art, music, math arid science. They also have a multicultural flavor absent from Hirsch's earlier lists of essential knowledge.

Thomas Jefferson And Diego Rivera

His guidelines recommend that kindergartners learn about Thomas Jefferson and Diego Rivera, that third-graders read Lewis Carroll and Nikki Giovanni, and that fourth-graders study Marco Polo and Ibn Batuta, an African geographer and explorer.

What may also surprise some is that Core Knowledge schools employ the "touchy-feely" techniques that Hirsch questions.

At Morse, teachers use projects to stimulate excitement about learning, such as building a guillotine for a lesson about the French Revolution. Desks are clustered in groups of three or four to promote cooperative learning.

Hands-on activities, such as counting money to learn a math lesson, are carried out in every classroom. "It's not drill and kill, it's not rote," said Shivanthy Srikanthan, a second-grade teacher. "The teacher gets to choose and decide how to teach it." Seeing this activity doesn't necessarily please Hirsch, but neither does he condemn it. In fact, before the crowded forum at Harvard last month, he declared that he had no strong feelings about how his curriculum ought to be taught.

Some critics suggest that Hirsch is guilty of having his cake and eating it too.

"Is Hirsch saying that he will go along with any teaching approach, and any set of curricular materials, so long as they have substance? If so," says Gardner, "then there is no responsible educator anywhere who would disagree with him."

Hirsch sees no contradiction. "I say, do whatever you want, as clearly as possible. If you define in a very specific way what your goals are for your hands-on projects and monitor to make sure all children achieve the learning goals, I have nothing against the hands-on and the projects."

The rigorous curriculum he favors has been a magnet, in some cases drawing white middle-class parents back to schools that had been falling. "We watched our kids really fall in love with learning in a content-rich curriculum," says Mark Sullivan, a Boston business executive who enrolled his two daughters at Morse. "Just seeing the Aztecs and Mayans on the scope and sequence for kindergarten was tremendously exciting."

Although the record is far from complete on Core Knowledge schools, Morse is not the only one with positive initial results. A handful of independent studies show that the achievement of students at all levels--but especially the disadvantaged--rises under the Hirsch curriculum.

At the Mohegan School, which serves poor Latino and black youngsters in New York's South Bronx, the average improvement in language ability was more than twice as great as the district average in 1993. The lowest quartile made gains 30% greater than their counterparts.

Teachers and principals are reporting that discipline, along with academics, is improving. Coady says he typically suspended about 10 students a year before Core Knowledge. That number has dropped to zero.

Coady speculates that's partly because students are reading Greek mythology and other cultures' folk tales that focus on traditional virtues, such as honesty and diligence. David Gibson, who taught at a Core Knowledge school in Franklin, Mass., believes that kids absorb a message of respect inherent in the demanding program: "It sends a clear message that they are important, that they are to be taken seriously, that they can learn."

Armed with such signs of success in the crucial elementary, grades, Hirsch isn't slowing down. But he's lowering his sights--literally.

Get ready for ... Shakespeare for the see-saw set?

"We're doing preschool next," he said the other day, disclosing plans to develop a curriculum guide for children under 5.

Hirsch is aware of the uproar he could cause by insisting that such tender minds need to be loaded up with facts and figures. But he points to France, where 90% of 3-and 4-year-olds attend school all day, 12 months a year. He cites studies showing that such early schooling permanently boosted the achievement of children of low-wage workers and immigrants from North Africa.

That is what Head Start in this country set out to do--provide disadvantaged youngsters with a stimulating environment to prepare them for school. But studies show that the benefits are temporary, a problem Hirsch believes could be solved with a core curriculum.

"One has to go by reality, rather than ideology," he said. "That is my hope."

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): The Schools We Need & Why We Don't Have them by E.D. Hirsch, Jr.

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): Author and English Prof. E.D. Hirsch, a political liberal, has "emerged as an intellectual guru of education reform," writes Elaine Woo.

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): Third-graders at Morse School, which follows E.D. Hirsch's educational philosophy and has a predominance of minority students, happily study the history of ancient Rome, including the Punic Wars, Hannibal, Julius Caesar and Pompeii, which was destroyed by Mt. Vesuvius (pictured above) in A.D. 79.

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By ELAINE WOO

Miss Woo writes on education for the Los Angeles Times, from which this article is reprinted with permission.

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SCHOOLS THAT WORK

Two titans of education square off on school reform. But both have important lessons to impart to the nation's troubled schools

They are two guys in tweed jackets. Ivy Leaguers. Professors. Grandfathers. They are also vocal critics of America's schools, in a year when education looms as one of the largest issues in the presidential race. Both are convinced that public school performance is lagging because many schools are, to put it bluntly, miseducating kids. And both have spent more than a decade trying to help schools out of the wilderness.

But E.D. Hirsch Jr. and Theodore Sizer, each weighing in this fall with a new book on education, take strikingly different routes to reform. Hirsch is an educational traditionalist, Sizer a progressive. To Hirsch, knowledge is education's brass ring. The sorts of classroom strategies best suited to knowledge building are often old-fashioned ones: a tough course of study, book learning, in-charge teachers and lots of testing. To Sizer, schools ought to be about teaching students mental skills, like independent and creative thinking. Students' curiosity should drive the curriculum. In-depth projects should replace standardized testing. And single-subject teaching ought to be abandoned in favor of interdisciplinary study.

At schools Hirsch has nurtured, like Roland Park Elementary and Middle School on Baltimore's West Side, his philosophy is on display. Students in Regina White's fifth-grade classroom perform a scene, theater-in-the-round style, from Don Quixote. Elizabeth Aliberti's sixth-grade pupils practice songs from the musical version of Oliver Twist. Each day is an expedition into core knowledge, from Bach to Michelangelo to the science of rainbows.

The atmosphere at Hope Essential High School in Providence, R.I., where Sizer's ideas flourish, reflects his emphasis on developing students' minds. Housed on the top floor of an inner-city building, the 370 mostly African-American and Latino students of this school-within-a-school move through their day in 90-minute sessions. There are few textbooks. Teachers rarely lecture. The curriculum is divided into four large blocks--math, science, English and social studies. In many courses, students study only a few topics intensively.

Two blueprints for reform. Two visions of what the basics of education should be. While Bob Dole and Bill Clinton tantalize voters with pledges of billions of dollars for new tuition plans, new schools and new technology, Hirsch and Sizer address the most fundamental questions facing the nation's classrooms: What should teachers teach, and how should they teach it? Smart answers to these questions are a sure way to improve schools, with or without infusions of money or machines.

For decades, schooling battles have been fought along progressive and traditionalist lines, and today the two camps are locked in opposition on major issues ranging from national standards to the teaching of reading. Yet school reform doesn't have to be an either-or proposition. In fact, it shouldn't be. Both Hirsch, with his traditionalist allies, and Sizer, with his progressive followers, have valuable contributions to make.

Plato, not Play-Doh. "Vermouth. Half dry. Half sweet. Straight up. Chill it," says Hirsch, Linden Kent Memorial Professor of English at the University of Virginia, red half glasses dangling on his chest. He's sitting in a Washington, D.C., restaurant, talking about education and battling a nasty cold. "Medicinal," he explains, as the waiter leaves.

Nearly a decade ago, the Yale University-trained expert on the English Romantic poets vaulted into the leadership of the traditionalist movement when he published a bestselling--and controversial--book, Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know. In it, he argued that the nation's democratic institutions were threatened by a citizenry lacking a shared cultural vocabulary. The schools' "holiday curriculum"--cutting out paper turkeys at Thanksgiving and the like--wasn't doing the job.

In his new book, The Schools We Need & Why We Don't Have Them, Hirsch, 68, blasts the progressive teaching methods he says stand in the way of the wide-ranging cultural knowledge he advocates. Schools rely too much on progressive techniques like interdisciplinary instruction, ungraded work, "hands on" units and "cooperative" learning, he asserts, and such techniques are often used badly. Instead, Hirsch stresses the value of recitation, memorization, standardized tests and other traditional devices. Verbal instruction, he says, should be an "essential and even dominant focus of schooling."

Hirsch supports national education standards because he believes that to give kids the knowledge they need, a school's curriculum has to be prescribed. "What kids should know each year should be engraved in stone because the year is the unit of accountability." Able to navigate through Latin (as well as German, French and Italian) and always ready to take a computer apart, Hirsch rejects the notion of the "child centered" curriculum, in which subjects like ancient history and science are withheld from kids in early grades in favor of material focused on the students' world. "The presumption that the affairs of one's neighborhood are more interesting than those of faraway times and places is contradicted in every classroom that studies dinosaurs and fairy tales," he writes.

In 1986, Hirsch created the Core Knowledge Foundation to help schools implement his theories. The foundation, funded in part with the educator's book royalties, is now working with 350 schools in 40 states, including Baltimore's Roland Park. At such "Hirsch" schools, teaching cultural knowledge is indistinguishable from teaching basic skills like reading, writing and speaking. A culture-rich curriculum is crucial, Hirsch argues, because a shared cultural vocabulary is a cornerstone of literacy. "To grasp the words on a page we have to know a lot of information that isn't set down on the page," he writes. That knowledge then serves as a kind of intellectual Velcro, to which new learning can cling.

Cultural Literacy landed Hirsch in the middle of the then raging culture wars, with multiculturalists and others on the left denouncing the book as elitist and authoritarian. But it was in reality a product of Hirsch's long interest in the theory of writing, a polemic less about the shape of the cultural canon than about how kids learn to read and write. In fact, Hirsch says, a traditionally taught core curriculum helps disadvantaged students the most: "Kids from affluent backgrounds get knowledge from outside school; those who rely on school to give it to them--disadvantaged students--don't get it" because schools aren't teaching it.

Habits of mind. Ted Sizer, 64, has been called an elitist nearly as often as has Hirsch. Like Hirsch, he believes all kids should get a demanding intellectual education. But Sizer, a Yalie who was dean of Harvard's graduate school of education in the 1960s and headmaster of prestigious Phillips Academy in Andover, Mass., in the '70s, thinks the way to a good education lies in progressive reforms. In a blistering

1984 study of the nation's public schools, Sizer deemed the typical high school "a place of friendly, orderly, uncontentious, wasteful triviality," notable mostly for "the docility of students' minds." In classroom after classroom, he found a "conspiracy of the least"--an unspoken pledge by students and teachers to demand little of one another.

Like Hirsch, Sizer sought a way to help schools reform themselves. Backed by major foundations, he launched the Coalition of Essential Schools, an organization housed at Brown University, where Sizer served as education department chairman. Twelve years and $60 million later, Sizer's coalition has grown to 238 schools, including Hope Essential.

In his new book, Horace's Hope: What Works for the American High School, the educator reflects on his years in the school reform trenches. He again takes aim at educational traditionalism in public high schools, attacking the "lecture-drill-and-test systems" of many schools, "with their swift march over lists of topics and unconnected material." The average school, he charges, is "stuck with the notion that a curriculum is primarily a list." To Sizer, true education means students who exhibit the right "habits of mind," ask inquiring questions and utilize knowledge in thoughtful ways.

Crucial to such thoughtfulness, he says, is interdisciplinary instruction. Grasping the complexities of a topic like immigration, for example, requires investigating a host of other seemingly unconnected subjects, such as history, economics, statistics, geography, even ecology. To encourage such probing, he urges schools to reorganize each day into longer blocks of time and to increase team teaching.

High on Sizer's list of educational crimes is the reliance on standardized testing, a practice he dismisses as "giving at best snippets of knowledge about a student and at worst a profoundly distorted view of that child." He calls instead for measuring students' achievement by having them present "exhibitions" to their classmates. He strongly opposes national and state education standards, arguing that parents should control what their kids learn through local school boards. To impose nonlocal standards, he says, is a form of intellectual censorship, "a dangerous and potentially undemocratic road."

Common ground. School reform is a difficult road, as Sizer and Hirsch readily acknowledge. Sizer's book is far less sanguine than its title suggests. "We are sobered by how hard it is to accomplish change," he writes. With Sizer's reform measures come new classroom roles for students and teachers, and the task of battling union rules and school regulations. Faculty turf battles, tradition and simple cynicism have slowed the "Sizerization" of many coalition schools: Only a fraction have introduced his entire plan. Not by accident, a portrait of Don Quixote hangs in the coalition's offices. Hirsch's curriculum, for its part, demands a far greater grasp of subjects like ancient history than the typical elementary teacher possesses, and it often runs head-on into local curriculum edicts.

Where the educators' efforts have been successful, however, the results have been impressive, suggesting that reform is not an either-or proposition, not a matter of selecting one philosophy over the other. To be convinced by Hirsch's argument for a core curriculum, one need look no further than schools like Roland Park, with its diverse student body. Classroom life in such schools is hardly the drudgery Hirsch's critics claim, nor is the course material "Eurocentric" or otherwise elitist. There are units on African-American scientists, African and Norse myths, Maya culture and more. Diversity rules even in gym class, where students perform American Indian dances.

Roland Park's curriculum is a far cry from the school's pre-Hirsch version, which was essentially a fat list of skills the Baltimore school system wanted students to master, such as identifying the main idea in a story or locating a body of water on a map--in other words, a curriculum built on the belief that skills mattered more than what kids studied. The new curriculum is far more demanding, but students rise to the challenge. "I never thought of teaching astronomy or the Roman Empire in the third grade," says teacher Pat Wolff. "Originally, I said the kids are not going to read this," adds fifth-grade teacher Regina White, whose students read abridged versions of classics such as Julius Caesar and the Iliad. "Now I know differently. Even in remedial classes, there's a lot of enthusiasm."

Test scores suggest as much. In the two years since the core-knowledge curriculum began, the proportion of fifth graders passing Maryland's state social studies test has jumped from 27 percent to 44 percent; passing

grades in science have risen from 34 percent to 47 percent and in language usage from 18 percent to 49 percent. Other core-knowledge schools with large populations of disadvantaged students report similar gains.

Attendance up. But if Hirsch's schools prove that traditionalism doesn't equal mind-numbing learning, Sizer is right to make the culture of schools a priority. Too many schools are large, impersonal places; too many students are alienated and apathetic. In many classrooms, the instruction is as dry and lifeless as Sizer paints it; students are required merely to parrot surface facts and figures, and many never learn how to put their minds to good use. Sizer's assessment of standardized testing also has merit: Tests drive down the level of instruction in many classrooms as teachers match their teaching to the low-level skills often being measured.

At Hope Essential, breaking the school day into large blocks makes relationships between students and teachers more personal. In turn, student attendance is up, discipline problems are down. Interdisciplinary instruction gives students a richer understanding of what they are learning, exemplified in the student exhibitions so important to Sizer as alternatives to standardized tests. Last year, with the O.J. Simpson trial in the news, a month's study of Shakespeare's Othello in an 11th-grade English class at Hope Essential culminated not in a multiple-choice test but in a mock trial of the Moor for Desdemona's murder. Students explored the tragedy's insights into marriage, jealousy and responsibility. Their tasks included reciting portions of the play, writing papers in the form of opening and closing legal arguments and a host of other activities.

Such intensive study pays off: Nearly 90 percent of Hope Essential's students are admitted to college, up from 18 percent at Hope High School before Sizer arrived. Hirsch himself is not opposed per se to exhibitions or other Sizeresque methods--if they deliver enough of the right content.

Even Hirsch's conviction that knowledge building is schools' primary task can be partly reconciled with Sizer's view that knowledge is secondary to the teaching of mental skills, or "habits of mind." Hirsch's focus is elementary school; Sizer's is high school. Indeed, when he talks about high school, Hirsch moves closer to Sizer's stance, suggesting that older students, secure in a broad knowledge base, be encouraged to "focus more narrowly and probe more deeply."

Nowhere is the value of merging the best of traditional and progressive strategies better illustrated than in the thorny question of how best to teach kids to read. Overwhelmingly, studies suggest that kids need to learn phonics, the building blocks of sound-letter relationships, as traditionalists argue. But equally compelling evidence exists that kids learn such skills faster and more thoroughly when teachers use progressive techniques to teach phonics, such as asking students to write stories using phonetic or "invented" spelling.

In the reading debate, as in other school reform issues, many progressives and traditionalists seem more eager to fight than to find common ground, routinely misrepresenting each other's views and needlessly polarizing debates at students' expense. It is left to the rest of us to break through the overheated rhetoric, finding in both sides important pieces of a national solution.

TESTING

HIRSCH	SIZER
Objective tests are fair, inexpensive achievement measures; they spur students to do their best work.	Many standardized tests trivialize learning and give a badly distorted picture of students' intellectual skills.

CURRICULUM

HIRSCH	SIZER
A wide-ranging but explicit set of topics should be taught in each grade, from Plato to	Schools should teach a small number of subjects in depth. Topics should be dictated

modern art.

by student interest.

TEACHING

HIRSCH
Old-fashioned methods such as recitation work. And in the hands of innovative teachers, they are fun.

SIZER
Frequent "hands on" projects, with teachers acting as "coaches", are a good way to help students learn.

PHOTO (COLOR):Mix it up. Sizer's interdisciplinary approach is at work in Dan Bisaccio's class at Souhegan High in New Hampshire.

PHOTO (COLOR):E.D. Hirsh Jr. Knowledge is education's brass ring; What students learn is most important.

PHOTO (COLOR):Theodore Sizer. Education ought to stress thinking skills; How students learn is key.

PHOTOS (COLOR):Core knowledge. Hirsch schools, like Roland Park Elementary and Middle School in Baltimore and Crooksville Elementary in Ohio, teach young students about subjects as diverse as the Revolutionary War, life sciences and the digestive system

PHOTO (COLOR):Forging bonds. At Souhegan High, the Sizer-inspired curriculum encourages team building. Adventure activities foster trust. An advanced class plays Jeopardy in Spanish.

PHOTO (COLOR):Go, team! Sizer believes teachers should act as "coaches." At Hope Essential High School in Rhode Island, students work together in English class.

By Thomas Toch and Missy Daniel

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An Interview with E.D. Hirsch, Jr.

DOING WHAT WORKS

While E.D. Hirsch, Jr., continues to see himself as a maverick, he is beginning to warm to the idea that expert sentiment is moving his way.

MANY EDUCATORS first heard of E. D. Hirsch in 1987, when Cultural Literacy was published. But Don Hirsch's interest in K-12 education predates that book's publication by more than a decade. In the late 1970s, E. D. Hirsch, Jr., had a professional experience that "shook me up and changed my life." Already a full professor of English, holder of an endowed chair at the University of Virginia, and the author of five scholarly books and many articles, Hirsch had become interested in how students read and write and what the foundations are for those skills. As part of a study he conducted, he gave reading samples to students at a community college in Richmond and to students at the University of Virginia. He soon discovered that "the kids at the community college in Richmond could read -- could decode -- just as well as the kids at the University of Virginia. They just couldn't understand as many texts."

Hirsch discerned that it wasn't the decoding skills that presented problems for the mostly black youngsters at the community college. "It was the prior knowledge they brought to the page," he says. The particular incident that shook Hirsch to his intellectual foundations was the assignment of a passage on Lee's surrender to Grant at Appomattox Court House. "The university students read it with ease," he recalls. "The community college people could not read it, because they had no idea who Lee was, who Grant was, what the context was -- and in Richmond, Virginia!" This result, so surprising to Hirsch, fit perfectly with developments in psycholinguistics in the 1960s and 1970s that showed that background is critical to reading, that literacy is not an abstract skill, and that "the tool metaphor of education," as Hirsch calls it, "is actually incorrect."

In 1944, when Don Hirsch was a 16-year-old growing up in Memphis, "in the highly segregated South," Gunnar Myrdal's enormously influential book, An American Dilemma, was published. Reading the book made clear to young Don for the first time that racism was a serious deterrent to democracy. He recalls Myrdal's book as "the single book that made the greatest impression on me." Although both the general southern culture and his own prosperous family had taught him that the status quo must be preserved, "I disobeyed all those rules after I read this book." Hirsch argues that much of his concern with progressive education and its ill effects grows out of his social conscience and his deep belief that "avoidable injustice" must be eradicated. It is simply not fair for schools to withhold from disadvantaged children the background knowledge that the most successful advantaged students accumulate from their homes and, to varying degrees, from their schools over a period of years.

Teachers College at Columbia University and its two great educational leaders of the 1920s and the 1930s, John Dewey and William Heard Kirkpatrick, are in Hirsch's view unwitting villains. In fact, both Dewey and Kirkpatrick believed in high standards, and Hirsch is quick to acknowledge that, "when they work, progressive methods are superb. It's a big mistake to read my books as being anti-progressive methods. What they're 'anti' about is what Dewey himself said about such methods: these methods are great as long as the kids learn." Hirsch is distressed that the progressive "project method" is

often not carefully monitored to see whether students are actually learning. He is particularly troubled by the "anti-subject-matter orientation" of progressive education, in which many upper-middle-class youngsters succeed because they get so much education and information at home, whereas students from "uneducated backgrounds are going to get needed information only from school," and they're not getting it.

Hirsch contends that children really attend two schools: "the home-school and the school-school." Middle-class students get a good education in the home-school, "which makes up for some of the deficiencies in the content-poor school-school. Disadvantaged kids have a poor home-school -- content-poor as far as academic knowledge goes --and they also attend a content-poor school-school." This "social justice gap" is of greater concern to Hirsch than the fact that the middle-class students could be doing better if their schools were good, though he believes that they deserve better schools, too. From Hirsch's point of view, most elementary schools have a fragmented and incoherent curriculum. There is too much emphasis on such "tool skills" as accessing information, critical thinking, cooperative learning, and problem-solving skills and far too little emphasis on solid academic content taught in tandem with those skills that are needed to learn the content. He further argues that "the research literature offers not one example of successful implementation of progressivist methods in a carefully controlled longitudinal study," and therefore, he argues, it is time to cast off the progressive, anti-subject-matter ideas that have kept educators in thrall for seven decades.

In the early 1980s, Hirsch began to investigate what educated people in our society actually know. Several beliefs provided the underpinning for this project. First, "background knowledge is critical to understanding, and this knowledge has to be shared in order for communication to take place." Second, background knowledge is continually changing and always needs to be updated, though not dramatically. "It's like a battleship. It doesn't turn in the water instantly. There's always considerable overlap between generations in a literate culture." Third, a democracy cannot function well unless the schools take care of providing background knowledge. This is simply a core fact of social justice. Finally, "if you're not broadly knowledgeable, you are less able to learn new, unexpected things." Hirsch believes that the progressive motto "learning to learn" is accurate. "Unfortunately, it is interpreted as just learning critical-thinking skills and empty abstract skills." Hirsch is not critical of any of the progressive methods, so long as they are based on content. "If you know something about a subject, you can build on that fast to learn something else. I doubt there's a cognitive psychologist who would disagree with that."

One of Hirsch's most severe criticisms is directed toward the curriculum of American elementary schools. "I assumed that there was a curriculum in the schools. What you find out is that this is a myth. Kids in the same school building in the second grade are learning very different things from kids in another second grade in the same building." One teacher does a long unit on dinosaurs, while another teacher spends a month on farm animals, and a third spends the same time teaching about machinery. This means that the students get no common preparation for the next grade, and the situation is simply a disaster for children who move to a new school or district. "The kids who are most disadvantaged are those who are moving around, and they move mostly within a single district. They need to have at least a solid core curriculum." Unlike students in, say, Switzerland, youngsters move quite frequently in the U.S. -- from school to school, from town to town, and from state to state.

THE CORE Knowledge Foundation in Charlottesville, Virginia, the organization that publishes materials for an elementary core curriculum, is housed in a small Tudor building shared with two realtors, an insurance agency, and some licensed massage therapists. It is a rabbit warren of small rooms, housing eight employees and thousands of books and pieces of curricular material illustrating what is commercially available to children. The goal of the foundation is to supply the core knowledge in a fairly simple form for half of the curriculum. "If we said the core was 100%, we know that that would not be politically acceptable. Furthermore, it's not necessary. This is a very solid 50%. If kids know this material -- and we now have evidence about its cumulative effect -- then it's fine for localities to add whatever interests they have or for the teacher to add whatever interests he or she has."

Schools from San Antonio to the South Bronx are reporting improved test scores, higher attendance rates, greater student enthusiasm, and increased collaboration among teachers who share and appreciate clear content guidelines. James Coady, principal of the Morse School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, states that, "with the acquisition of the Core Knowledge curriculum, our scores have jumped, really jumped. We were always in the middle of the schools in our division, but now we are in the top quartile and often the number-one or number-two school in a category."

In 1987, when Cultural Literacy was published, some readers criticized it as elitist and too strongly oriented toward whites and Europeans. Hirsch sees that charge as a red herring. He never argued that the curriculum must be static, only that there should be a common body of knowledge in order to have consistency, to create a level playing field for all students, and to ensure that moving from school to school did not invite educational trauma. In fact, in 1988 Hirsch assembled a

multicultural committee in Charlottesville to advise him, including Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, experts on Native American history, and specialists on Latino culture. "I mean, we didn't have the Lithuanians, but we did have 24 working groups," he recalls. "You had to persuade your subgroup that something was worth including. The core had to be realistic. If you're going to add something, you need to give up something. You can't make fourth-graders learn everything." The core-curriculum draft that came out of that 1988 meeting was then made the subject of a much larger conference in 1990, and out of that came the core curriculum that remains pretty much intact today.

Hirsch has also often been criticized for the methods he suggests. It is true that he favors whole-class instruction most of the time and sees nothing wrong with drill and practice. "It works in football and in piano playing, so why should it work everywhere except in math and English?" he wonders. But E. D. Hirsch is primarily interested in results. "I don't believe there's any one right way in teaching. It's such a complex act, the interchange between children and a teacher, that it would be a grave mistake to impose a monolithic method on the teacher." What he demands is accountability and demonstrable results based on a content-filled core curriculum. "I'm a pragmatist, and I'll welcome any method that truly works."

To learn what should be included in that draft curriculum, Hirsch and his colleagues "did a lot of testing. We were actually quite scientific in trying to get the range of this knowledge that successful people knew in common." The four years of testing with parents, educators, students, educational organizations, other stakeholders, and experts, along with the 1990 convocation, form the foundation of the Core Knowledge Sequence and a series of resource books with such titles as What Your First-Grader Needs to Know and What Your Fifth-Grader Needs to Know. This material is clear, detailed, and very concrete.

Hirsch rejects curricular guidelines that say such things as children in first grade should identify beliefs and value systems of specific groups. He much prefers the specificity of such guidelines as: introduce ancient civilizations and the variety of religions in the world, using maps of the ancient world. Topics are Egypt: King Tutankhamen, Nile River, pyramids, mummies, animal gods, hieroglyphics; Babylonia: Tigris and Euphrates, Hammurabi; Judaism: Moses, Passover, Chanukah; Christianity: Jesus; Arabia: Mohammed, Allah, Islam; India: Indus River, Brahma, Hinduism, Buddha; China: Yellow River, Confucius, Chinese New Year.

The teacher is assumed to be generally knowledgeable but also willing to learn along the way. Helpful materials are provided, and the extreme vagueness of a "politically unobjectionable" but essentially empty guideline is avoided.

Almost every state is now working on standards for higher achievement, and there is currently great interest in E. D. Hirsch's work. The sixth National Core Knowledge Conference was held in Denver in March 1997. Some 1,300 people attended, a great increase from the 50 who attended the first conference held six years earlier. More than 400 schools in 40 states now use the core curriculum, and that number grows by several schools each month. Yet Don Hirsch remains bemused by the education establishment's early and virulent rejection of Cultural Literacy. There was a "strong discrediting campaign saying the book was 'trivial pursuit' and Eurocentric." Both the Harvard Educational Review and Teachers College Record ran strongly negative reviews -- the Record running "two slashing reviews in one issue."

Hirsch's newest book, The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them (Doubleday, 1996), has largely been ignored by the education community, although it received good reviews in the New York Times, the American School Board Journal, and the popular press. Early in 1997, Hirsch had what the Los Angeles Times called "a triumphal visit to Harvard," which causes him to believe that the consistent message espoused by his movement is very much in tune with the country today. Yet when I contacted Hirsch to do this interview, so convinced is he that the general education community still wishes to shun him that he expressed doubt that the piece would actually be published.

Don Hirsch is a welcoming, friendly man who is more than a little frustrated by all the criticism he has received from professional educators. He believes that it is the essence of common sense to reject the idea that critical thinking consists in mastering a set of abstract procedures, as opposed to, say, learning how to think critically by analyzing the contradiction between the principle of equality expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the existence of slavery when the Declaration was written. He respects and welcomes Robert Slavin's "careful research and scholarship" on reading, but he rejects Alfie Kohn's "highly romantic and scientifically unaccepted" notions about how children should be rewarded and disciplined. Quite simply, Hirsch wants every elementary school to have a core curriculum "that is based on what really works, that is demanding and rich, that is coherent, and that all elementary students can be exposed to." If that were the reality through grade 8, Hirsch would favor a more flexible system in the upper grades, in which students could follow their own intellectual bents.

While Hirsch continues to see himself as a maverick and certainly outside the mainstream in education, he remains utterly convinced of his beliefs and is beginning to warm to the idea that expert sentiment is moving his way. "In the basic elements of the reasoning behind Cultural Literacy and the new book, I really don't believe I'm wrong. You're interviewing me, and the Kappan is willing to publish the article, because there has been a movement in my direction." People want a coherent, clear curriculum based on solid content.

Hirsch told me that his primary influence was his father, who taught him to "follow a conviction even if it's not what the crowd believes." So young Don entered the navy, stood for political liberalism, rejected his father's prosperous cotton brokerage business, became an academic, married a professor's daughter, and raised three children with her. And throughout his long academic career he has followed his deepest intellectual beliefs and convictions. Hirsch contends that his work was never refuted on scientific grounds; the objections were always oddly ideological or moral. "Teachers, who have always wanted what is best for children," he says, "are now ready to hear my view: let's do what works."

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE): E.D. Hirsch, Jr.

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