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MR. SHANKER: It's a pleasure to be here and to have this opportunity to share some thoughts with you and later to respond to some of your questions.

Some months ago, I read about research that was done dealing with the relationship of speakers to their audiences. This research revealed that most people in an audience are able to listen quite attentively for about 10 minutes. For the next 20 minutes, their minds begin to wander and they remember some of what the speaker is saying, but not very much. After 30 minutes, the majority of people in any audience will begin to experience sexual fantasies. [Laughter] I wish to assure you in advance that you will enjoy at least part of my remarks today. [Laughter]

As you heard, I was busy working on a Ph.D. in philosophy at Columbia University when I ran out of two things that graduate students frequently run out of: patience and money. I decided that I would try to do work other than the work of a student. So, in 1952, I went to the Board of Education in New York City. They had a quick way of getting people in to teaching who did not have the proper credentials -- which I did not; I had not yet taken all the education courses -- and I became what they called a substitute "emergency" teacher.

It was a school system that I had grown up in. I entered at the age of six, not speaking a word of English, and was subject in early grades to quite a bit of humiliation for that, and later for my accent. But I managed to make it to Stuyvesant High School, which is a very special and competitive school, and then went to the University of Illinois. I didn't get there when there were 7,000 students but got there the day they moved themselves up to 28,000 students.

To me, the public schools were a wonderful way of moving from one world to another, from a different language to totally different abilities and

from the rather poverty-filled life of my parents to all kinds of opportunities. Turning then to becoming a teacher, I had great hopes that I would be walking into a school and school system where I would be able to do something for the students and where I'd be doing what my teachers had done for me.

It was a rather shocking experience. It might have been like the school I had attended but it wasn't anything like the classes I was in. This was a tough school. It was right near Columbia University, but it was during the period of time when planeloads of Puerto Ricans were coming in to our country almost every day. There were language problems and problems of discipline. It was very, very tough.

I immediately joined the union, but not because the union was a big organization. The union had been around since 1916. Charter member number one was John Dewey. The union, in the years between 1916 and 1952, had managed to organize 5 percent of the teachers in New York City. Chances are, the union could have gone another 100 years and still had only 5 percent of the teachers. That is, those who joined the union were basically people who believed strongly in the labor movement. They were, by and large, Norman Thomas or Gene Debs socialists who believed strongly that teachers should have a relationship with the parents of the children they were teaching. These children were children of the working class. There was not much of a view at the time that teachers should belong to a union for their own economic self-interest or as a way of participating in the political structure.

As a teacher, I had great difficulty with my classes. The main things were the students not learning and keeping law and order in the classroom. There were all kinds of regulations. For instance, we had a local

superintendent in the district who, whenever he visited a school building, insisted that every classroom doorway he walked through should display some kind of artwork or poster that would indicate what the students were studying inside that classroom.

As I indicated, this was a very tough school, and no poster was destined to last more than three or four minutes. This was a difficult thing to do. But the teachers were pretty street smart. When you studied a given subject, whether it was Europe or Central America, the American Revolution, triangles or whatever, you devoted your first several hours to having each student make five, six, seven or eight posters dealing with the subject. Those posters were then collected and put into a closet right near the door.

Then the toughest student, a student no one could manage, was given a special task and was relieved of all classroom responsibilities, thereby making life easier for the teachers and his classmates. He was stationed by a window to keep an eye out for the superintendent's car. When the superintendent parked across the street -- in the same spot every time -- this student rang one gong throughout the building. When the gong rang, one assigned "monitor" from each classroom would go to the closet and take out a poster and put it on the classroom door, so that when the superintendent came in everything was set.

I could go on for a long time with the important educational procedures that occupied our time within that school. But during the '50s, I spent most of my time trying to convince teachers that if they had a strong organization, then they, as teachers, would be able to have a professional voice. They had many different small, ineffective organizations at that time. Through the '50s, we convinced at least some teachers that they

ought to make believe that they enjoyed the same rights, as workers in a public institution, that they would enjoy if they were working in the private sector.

I don't know how many of you have read the works of Vladimir Bukovsky, but in the Soviet Union there were a number of dissidents who tried to do the same thing and were sent to psychiatric wards. We were in the United States, and we assumed we had the same rights as workers in the private sector -- and began to behave that way. In 1961, in a relatively short period of time, we were able to force the New York City Board of Education to grant collective bargaining and to hold a collective bargaining election. For the first time in the history of the public sector in the United States, public employees were granted the same kinds of labor rights that existed in the private sector.

How successful has this been? Today, teachers are the most unionized part of the workforce in the United States. Ninety-three percent of the teachers in this country belong to one of two major unions. This is a higher percentage than is true for auto workers, miners, people who work on ships or in any other field.

Who would have thought a short time ago that teachers -- who thought of themselves not as workers but as professionals -- would have become the most unionized part of the workforce in the country? Indeed, it was difficult even in a place like New York City where teachers came from union households and were the children of garment workers and workers in other unions.

The teachers were very pro-union in New York City, but they were pro-union with a twist. The thinking was: "Thank God my mother was a member of the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union and she made

enough money to send me to college so that I don't have to be in an occupation where I have to belong to a union. If I were to join a union, it would show that I hadn't really advanced from where my parents were." In a strange kind of way, there were two kinds of teachers in the country: those who were from the South or from rural or suburban areas, and they had a political sort of anti-unionism; and those who were pro-union and therefore knew it was not for them even though it was good for their parents.

At the end of the 1960s, as we came together to negotiate, we were filled with a sense of new power and optimism. We thought that with our new-found membership, money and ability, we could shut the schools down if we had to. And by threatening to shut the schools down, we could get the attention of the press and spend time on television educating the public, and, within a relatively short period of time, we would be able to bring about major and substantial improvements in the public schools.

In the very first round of negotiations there was major forward movement in salary increases and reduction of class size. We took care of all kinds of little things that bothered teachers. As this process continued, however, we noticed several things. In the first place, school boards basically refused to discuss, in a labor-relations context, any professional issues; that is, if we came in and said teachers want this, they would say, "Okay, we will talk to you about it," but if we said this is good for the children, they'd say, "That's not for collective bargaining. That's for the teachers. This is your struggle. If it's good for the children, it's none of your business. It's our business. We are the Board of Education. We are here to protect and defend the rights of children."

Collective bargaining and traditional labor relations closed down as an avenue of trying to bring about changes that were beyond the narrow questions of wages, hours and working conditions. We found this was not an avenue through which teachers could either express their views or gain the improvements they sought beyond those narrow issues.

In the 1970s, it became clear that in the long run collective bargaining had made some gains. In a short time, management hired consultants and became tough and wise. Collective bargaining, in a sense, became a treadmill; that is, in good times we got a little bit more and in tough times our strong organization prevented management from cutting back as much as they wanted to. But the differences were very, very small.

We were essentially fighting like hell in order to stand still. We were taking some setbacks, then moving forward a little bit. But by the time collective bargaining had been in place for a matter of 10, 12 or 15 years, no one who was reflective and taking a really close look could honestly say that this would become, as then practiced, any kind of vehicle for school change and school improvement.

There were other things happening in the late 1970s that were quite unsettling. Congress came very close to passing a tuition tax credit bill, which, of course, would have indicated a kind of withdrawal of support by the public because of a feeling that the public schools were doing a lousy job of giving parents who were unhappy with them a right to enroll their kids elsewhere.

The Gallup Poll, which began in the 1960s, is a rather useful poll. Each year, Gallup takes a poll asking the public how they grade the schools: A, B, C, D or F. In the 1960s, the overwhelming majority of

people said A or B. As you move into the 1970s, people started saying C, D and F. Those were major and substantial shifts.

That was also a period of a rather rapid decline in SAT scores. It was also a time when the economy of the country started turning around. There was no longer any hope that there were tremendous resources that could be put into the schools. As long as the country was more and more prosperous each year, there was a kind of generous feeling on the part of the public: We are better off, so we'll give the public sector some of the increasing prosperity. As things tightened up and as the economy stagnated, people started getting nastier. We started getting the Proposition 13s, Proposition 2-1/2s and so forth.

People were not as generous when their own situations, in terms of economics, were not improving. The nation then started moving on an agenda that did not include schools very much. We moved toward reindustrialization; we neglected our plants. We must put our money there. Rebuilding the infrastructure was another one. When Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan ran for president, both agreed that we had dismantled the military after the Vietnam War and that there would have to be major increases in defense. So we had an economy that was in very poor shape, and the general agreement was that there were all sorts of big missions that had to be accomplished in terms of the military, the infrastructure, the economy and in terms of industrialization. This meant that the monies that were not really there would go into a whole bunch of other fields and not into education.

This was a rather sad time for people in the schools. It was a sad time for other reasons, too. The decline in the birth rate meant that something really shocking had happened. As I was growing up, my mother



would say to me, "Become a teacher. There will always be a job for teachers." People who went into teaching did so certainly not because they were going to make a lot of money or because it was a very pleasant job but because they felt they would at least have security. Yet teachers were being laid off. The one thing teachers felt they had made sacrifices for and bargaining for wasn't even there for them. It was a very tough time.

As we move into the current period, a number of things are clear. First, an honest look at the traditional objectives of teachers shows that they just cannot be accomplished. There are 2.2 million teachers in this country. Teachers are 1 percent of the entire population and a huge percentage of all college graduates in the country. It is unrealistic to think that the nation is going to take a sum of money and give it to teachers. Even a \$1,000 salary increase -- which doesn't increase one's salary very much -- for 2.2 million teachers, comes out to be \$2.2 billion. A 50 percent increase in salaries nationally would cost about \$30 billion, excluding the costs of taxes, Social Security, pension and other fringe benefits. The entire Chapter 1 program is about \$3 billion. That is the richest program for all elementary and secondary students. So the notion that we are going to take huge sums of money and give it to 2.2 million people is rather unrealistic, given the state of the economy at almost any time. It would represent a rather massive shift.

The second thing most teachers want is smaller class size and the time to maybe mark some papers, talk to a couple of students individually to explain why they did a certain problem wrong, and engage in some coaching.

We are now in a period where half the teachers in America will be leaving teaching during the next six years. We're going to need 23 percent of all college graduates in America each and every year for at least the

next 12 years to replace those teachers who are leaving. It's easy to get people into teaching from the bottom 25 percent of those graduating from college because most of these students cannot count, read or write very well. They should not be teachers. But it's not easy to get 23 percent of the top college graduates, basically half of the talent in the whole country.

The question is, in a period of shortage, how is it possible to reduce class size? To reduce class size you not only must get the 23 percent that you need to replenish your current ranks, but you need another 5, 7, 12 or 15 percent to teach the smaller classes. As you employ more people, you dig lower and deeper into the talent pool. The tradeoff you make to get smaller class sizes is that you need to hire some people that you would not want to get very close to kids. You reduce the quality of teaching.

Another thing that teachers want is not to teach five periods a day, which is a very heavy load. They would like some time for planning, thinking, developing material and talking with their colleagues. They would like to maybe teach only four periods a day instead of five. That would mean finding another 400,000 teachers just to accomplish that goal. In order to find another 400,000 teachers, you have to lower standards because if you hire new teachers you're not going to bring in nuclear physicists, physicians, lawyers, dentists or engineers; you're going to be bringing in people who are thinking of going into other fields that offer compensation, rewards and a training level that is parallel to that of teaching. There is no way of accomplishing this.

This is essentially from the point of view of a leader of a union who believed that all these things were possible in the 1960s. I haven't gone back and done a re-analysis to see whether I have only become wrong now or whether I was wrong then. But at least it's very clear now that, in terms

of the three major objectives, if you were to go around the country and ask most teachers, "What is your heart's desire? What would really improve education?" they would say higher salaries to attract better people, smaller class size to enable them to do things on a more individual basis and to engage in coaching as well as large-scale lecturing, and more time away from the classroom so that they'd have more time for planning and collegial relationships.

Even if we could find more teachers, this is not a very promising way of doing it. If you're a secondary school teacher and have 30 students in a class and five classes a day, you teach 150 youngsters a day. If you give the students an assignment to write an essay, it takes you maybe five minutes to mark each essay and you might spend five minutes with each of them asking, "What is this about?" "What is your lead sentence?" "Is this clear?" So if you spend ten minutes on each of these 150 youngsters, you are talking about roughly 30 hours.

Even if you could reduce class size in half, which would mean doubling the number of teachers and huge reallocations of manpower, resources and money, you would still need 15 hours to do your work. You would reduce the task substantially, but it would still be an impossible task. You still would not be able to assign a set of papers three times a week and spending 15 hours marking the papers and coaching the students. That was the teachers' point of view in the early 1960s. At least some of us reached the realization that the things we had been fighting for and believed in couldn't be achieved. I'm not saying couldn't be achieved, period, but couldn't be achieved as long as schools were being organized the way they are now organized.

We are talking about all teachers being on a single salary schedule

and about a certain structure of schools. I'm not saying these things can't be accomplished. I'm saying they are impossible to accomplish within the current structure.

Now let's look at this for a few minutes from the point of view of what is happening with students. We're having a lot of discussion in this country about "at-risk" youngsters or dropouts. All of this assumes something. What it assumes is that, by and large, we have a pretty good school system. Almost everybody is learning -- and learning pretty well. But, of course, they could do a little bit better. Off in this corner we have the dropouts. If only we could convince a few of them to stay a little longer we would be much better off. And over here are the "at-risk" youngsters who have all these special problems. The notion is that the problem students are somewhere at the fringe, that they are a small number and that the system is by and large successful.

It would be great if that were true. The whole question of how well or how poorly our schools are doing is an essential question. If you're running a plant or a factory or if you are manufacturing procedures or are selling things or providing services, by and large, 90 percent of the time everything is fine and you ought to continue doing what you're doing but try to do it a little better. You are almost there; you are very close to doing it right.

On the other hand, if you find that most of what you're doing is no good, that you're only producing one in 10 or two in 10 of the right thing, then you need to ask a different question. You have to ask yourself, "How can I turn this whole process of production around?" Because now it's no longer a question of finding a few lemons. Basically, you're creating lemons and you've got a lemon factory. You have to rethink much more

fundamentally what you're doing. The question is whether we need to reform schools, that is, to bring about some minor modifications, to propose some regulations and some constraints, and to tighten up a little here and there, or whether we need to fundamentally rethink them. That will all depend on the answer to the question: "How well are we doing?"

Well, how well are we doing? We do have some information, fortunately, but it's not great. Here we spend over \$2 billion a year and we don't know as much about what is happening in education as we have information in the Bureau of Labor Statistics or the Departments of Agriculture, Trade or Commerce. We have all kinds of collections of interesting and important information in our society but not that much information about how well we are doing in education.

Fortunately, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) does assess large samplings of youngsters at ages 9, 13 and 17. I'm going to share with you, for a few minutes, the results at age 17, because the 17-year-olds give a very good indication of what our graduating high school seniors are like.

Twenty-five percent of the kids who drop out have dropped out by then, so we're now looking at the 75 percent who are the "successful" youngsters. They will graduate. We have positive selection here, and we should have very good news. What is the news? The most difficult writing assessment given is asking the youngsters to write a letter to the manager of a local supermarket applying for a job. "Remember, there will be many youngsters applying for this job, so you must try to convince the manager that you're the one who should be hired."

What the NAEP considers acceptable is this: You may have some spelling and grammatical errors; what they're looking for is one good reason why you

should be hired. For example, "I used to work in my father's grocery store, and I know how important it is to come to work every day because it's hard to get help at the last minute. You can count on me." Or, "I used to be the treasurer of my Boy Scout troop and I know how much money you can lose if you don't count change correctly. I did it for a number of years very well and, believe me, you won't be worried if you hire me for this job." Something like that is all the National Assessment is looking for.

The percentage of graduating seniors who are able to write such a letter is very low. And, believe me, if you saw what NAEP considers an acceptable letter, most of you would not consider it an acceptable letter. The standard is very, very low. Only 20 percent of those graduating from high school are able to write such a letter. Twenty percent!

We will now take a very complicated mathematical problem. You give the kids six ordinary fractions, the kind you bump into all the time, nothing fancy:  $1/2$ ,  $2/3$ ,  $5/6$ , etc. The question is: Arrange these six fractions in size order. Place the smallest fraction first and the largest last. The percentage of 17-year-olds about to graduate who were able to do that is 12 percent.

Then you give the students a railroad timetable displaying the run from New York City to Washington, D.C., and ask: "Which train do you need to catch in Philadelphia in order to arrive in Washington, D.C., just before 6:00 P.M. on a weekday evening?" This is an interesting problem. The train runs in one direction at one end and in another direction at the other end. There is a holiday schedule, a Saturday schedule and a weekday schedule. So the questions are: Can you open up a World Almanac or a newspaper and understand a chart or graph? Can you look at a spreadsheet? The percentage of successful, graduating seniors who are able to figure out

which train to take from Philadelphia is 4.9 percent.

In case you think blacks and Hispanics are really dragging white folks down and that white folks are really terrific at this type of problem solving, well, white folks score 5.9 percent rather than 4.9 percent. Minorities are catching up fast, and the story here is that when all minorities catch up with all the white folks, we will still have an educational disaster on our hands.

Minorities do need special help and have special problems -- and will continue to. But they are catching up. These results are not a minority problem. What this study says is that the overwhelming majority of white, middle-class kids from suburban areas -- this is the mass -- are not learning. I haven't talked about anything intellectual yet -- no Shakespeare, no Dickens, no calculus, no algebra -- nothing beyond the kinds of things we should expect ordinary citizens to have in terms of competencies.

The latest results in science and mathematics show that only about 5 percent of the graduating youngsters are really able to answer the beginnings of a college-level program in science and math. Five percent! That's the percentage of kids who could find the Atlantic Ocean on a map of the United States; the percentage that know what half-century World War II was fought in. It's all there.

Of course, there are practical things to look at, like what happens if you give one of these kids a menu in a cafeteria and he wants to buy a bowl of soup, a sandwich and a cup of coffee. Can he estimate how much change he's going to get from a \$10 bill? Can he look at the supermarket advertisements and figure out his grocery list and what it going to cost? Can he read an editorial in a newspaper and understand what it's about?

These are the kinds of things asked, and you get some pretty shocking results. The conclusion from all of this depends on how high your standards are.

Another area to look into is the process of mass production. Along came the Japanese who showed that you could have a mass production process where you have quality control, which is substantially different from what we consider to be decent quality control. They also have different concepts in Japan about quality control. Our concept is that you make it as quickly as you can, sell it and then bring it back and rebuild it. It is remedial education, right? [Laughter] Compensatory education. The Japanese say to do it right in the first place so you don't have to call it back.

What sort of hypothesis can we put forward? Well, I like this one. For several thousand years, people who were not feeling well went to doctors and hoped to be cured. But throughout most of the last couple of thousand years, if you went to a doctor you had a pretty good chance of being harmed and maybe even killed. Why? Because doctors just didn't know that they were supposed to wash their hands and sterilize their instruments. There were some very simple things that they did wrong. It wasn't because they were evil. It wasn't because they were trying to harm people. It was because that was the state of knowledge at the time they practiced. There were certain things they did that were harmful without thinking or knowing that was the case.

I'd like to ask this question: Are there certain things that schools do that are the educational equivalent of not washing your hands and not sterilizing your instruments? In other words, do we, in some sort of a regular way, do things that prevent kids from learning?



Let me interject, before I get into this, that I am not saying we are now doing worse than we used to do. I'm not saying what Bill Bennett said, that once upon a time we had a "Golden Age" of education and all the kids went around talking algebra to each other -- [Laughter] -- or that all of a sudden along came Al Shanker and the teachers union, John Dewey and progressive education, minorities, drugs, broken homes, television sets and all sorts of other things, and all of a sudden down we went, or that if only we could go back to this "Golden Age" and restore it everything would be fine. That's nonsense.

I went through the kind of school system that Bill Bennett talks about. There weren't many broken homes. It was a poor, working-class neighborhood, and I never heard of drugs in all the years I went to school. We had a good, standard classical curriculum and we did so much homework that there used to be little bits of blood coming out of this finger after all the writing I did with the old pens. If I went home and complained about school to my mother, I got a beating.

Nobody was automatically promoted or automatically graduated, and they took the kids who were not so good and put them in another room called the "opportunity class." That was a class for kids who would never have any opportunity. [Laughter] They did all sorts of things like that.

Was it a good education? Sure it was, for me. What percentage of the kids graduated from high school in this country in 1940? Twenty percent. The first year the majority of youngsters graduated from high school in the United States of America was 1953. We had a tough system, and it was a good system for those who were able to manage it. And most of the students couldn't manage it.

Today, 25 percent drop out, and we keep them longer. Still only about 10 to 20 percent are really learning. What is it that schools may be

doing? Before we get into this question of what they may be doing, we need to have a conception of what education is all about. It's my view that what's wrong with most discussions about education is that we have a fundamentally flawed analogy of what the process of education is about and what the schools are about. The fundamentally flawed analogy we have is that school is a place where kids are raw materials; they pass through and are worked on by "experts" called teachers. You get teachers saying, "I taught them, but they didn't learn it." I don't know what that's supposed to mean.

That is the process. Therefore, what you need to do is keep the raw materials on the assembly line a little longer and to give the teachers a chance to work on the raw materials a little longer; teachers need more hours during the day and more months during the year to get a better quality worker; give teachers better training, select higher quality teachers, and you'll get a better quality of craftsmanship. What's missing in this whole thing is something all of us know: All education is ultimately self-education. Education isn't something that someone else pours into you, does for you or does to you. Education is something that is a result of work that you do. You have to read, think, listen, write, question, manipulate, build, imagine and criticize. If you do all these things in enough ways and over a long enough period of time, then it has an effect on you and you're building yourself as a person.

Teachers can make learning easier or they can make it confusing, frustrating, or they can make you want to stop learning. There are all sorts of things that people around you can do. But one of the things they can't do is learn for you. If you have a picture of education as a result of the participation of youngsters in their own education, then you must

view the school as a workplace in which the students are the workers. Any school where the students aren't the workers, where the students sit passively and are not engaged is not a school in which any educating is going on. The teachers are, in a sense, the managers. Just like managers in a factory, teachers must figure out how to make the workers come to work every day, how to make them want to work, and how to get them interested in the quality of their work. Teachers can't watch students all the time or force them to do things all the time. How can teachers develop a system where students, relatively speaking, enjoy what they're doing, a system of incentives and disincentives that comes out with the right results?

What I'm about to point to are a number of things we do regularly in schools that essentially get kids to stop trying. Once a kid stops trying, once he says, "Hey, this isn't my game. I'm dumb. I'm stupid. I'll never learn how to do it because every time I try I'm embarrassed and humiliated in front of all my friends," that's it and there isn't anything you can do as a teacher until the kid decides he wants to play again. Unless the kid is in the game, that's it. You can educate teachers, lengthen the school day or year, but it doesn't make any difference. What is it that we are doing that makes some kids say, "It's not my game and I'm not trying any more?"

I'll point to a few of these things, and I'm sure you can leave here, in terms of your own experience and that of your own children, and be able to come up with many others. One is quite obvious. We all know that each of us learns at a different rate, yet the primary way of teaching in our schools is by lecturing. Eighty-five percent of the time in elementary and secondary school is spent with the teacher lecturing to the students. It's been researched a number of times and is a very solid figure. What does

that mean? It means there will always be one-third of the kids who know the material already. There will always be some range of kids here. I have to decide: Should I talk to the kids who are ahead a little bit or to those that are behind or to those in the middle? Whichever group I speak to, there are two-thirds who are out of it.

If I talk to the top third, the bottom two-thirds say, "I don't understand what you're talking about." If I talk to the very bottom group, the top two-thirds are bored. Most of them know the material already. If I talk to the middle group, the top group is bored, the bottom group doesn't understand, and half the ones I'm talking to are thinking of something else anyway. We have a system where, at any given time, we're only talking to a very small fraction of the group. Is it surprising that not very much sticks?

That's one thing. Another thing is, suppose at home I got my kids together and had them sit down -- they are ages seven, eight, nine and ten -- and I said to them, "I'm going to stand here and talk to you for five hours today, and I want you to take notes and remember what I've said. I'm going to do this five days a week, 180 days a year." A little truck would come to pick me up -- the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. [Laughter]

On the other hand, if I have those kids sit in school and tell them to keep quiet and listen to me, and one kid moves around in his seat, someone might say that the kid is disturbed and off he goes to special education; something is wrong with him. But most adults can't sit still for five hours a day and listen to somebody talk and retain very much. You show me a kid in the second grade who can do that and I'll show you a college student who can't. The rear-end has become the major physical organ

that's necessary for higher education. [Laughter] It shouldn't be that way.

It's also true that different people learn in different ways. What percentage of people can retain something if they read it? What percentage can retain something if they hear it spoken? What percentage can retain it if they watch a slide program and hear it spoken at the same time? What percentage can retain something if they watch it in a movie? What percentage can retain something if they are involved in a simulation or intense discussion? And what percentage will learn something if they actually have to build or make something?

Obviously, the smallest number will understand it by merely reading or listening to it. The other forms are much more engaging, and yet 99 percent of what the school does is in the two least effective ways of engaging people. Different people learn in different ways, but not according to the schools. The school essentially says, "You will learn by listening to me talk or, otherwise, it's too damned bad." What happens if you're not feeling well and you go to a doctor? The doctor may give you some medicine to take. You might go back three days later and say, "Doc, not only didn't you cure me, but I broke out all over." What does the doctor say? If the doctor were an educator he'd say, "You have a hell of a lot of nerve not responding to my medicine. Here, double the dose."

[Laughter]

But the doctor doesn't say that. He says, "I'm sorry." He doesn't blame you. He doesn't say you're dumb for not responding to his medicine or that you're slow or that you're thick. He says, "I'm sorry. I gave you something that works for most people but it doesn't work for you. Here, try this. If that doesn't work, come back and we'll try something else." The notion is that human beings are different. Even when people have

exactly the same disease, the same cure isn't going to cure everybody.

There are alternatives.

Where is this built into the structure of a classroom or school? You either learn by listening to me lecture, or that's it. What do I do after teaching a lesson? I call on different kids to answer questions. Some kids love school and know all the answers. Their hands are up all the time. They would even come to school on Christmas. [Laughter] Other kids know it some of the time. But there are some who gaze, with their heads always down. They are sitting there engaged in an unconstitutional act. They're praying that I won't call on them. [Laughter] But I have to call on them because I need pupil participation. I have to prod them, and so forth.

What am I really doing when I call on Johnny in the morning and he doesn't have the answer, I call on him in the afternoon and he doesn't have the answer to another question, I call on him the next morning? I'm really publicly humiliating him in front of all his peers. That's what I'm doing. What does humiliation do to people? Why don't we learn how to drive by having our husbands or wives teach us? Because we don't like the people that we care about watching us as we're making mistakes. We'd rather pay someone else, who is not necessarily a better driver than a husband or wife.

Could we have a school in which students aren't exposed to everyone else as they're learning? Could we have a school in which students could learn in a more protective atmosphere, with smaller groups rather than the entire group?

Here's something else we do in school. A youngster enters high school in September and on the first day says to the teacher, "When is my final

mark?" The teacher says, "Next June." The kid says, "I'm not doing my homework tonight. I'm no damn compulsive." [Laughter] Who in his right mind would do work today, at the beginning of September, if the due date is next June? Most people aren't built that way.

Is this an important trait to have? Is it important for human beings to realize that what they do every day somehow accumulates, whether it's eating too much, spending too much money or reading or learning? Is it important to know that all sorts of things have a cumulative effect? Is this an important trait to develop? It sure is. Is it something that is widespread among the people of our society? No, it's not.

What happens to most of these kids? They say, "Well, I don't have to do my work today; I'll do it tomorrow." Before you know it, it's October, and the kid is hopelessly behind. One choice is to stay in school for the rest of the year and be humiliated because he can't catch up, and another is to drop out. If he drops out, when can he drop back in again? Next September, and after he's had a year of freedom. Now you're telling him to go into a class with students who are a year younger, after being told his entire life that being with kids a year younger is in itself humiliating.

Does school have to be organized in this way? No, it doesn't. My youngest son was not a very good high school student. He did graduate, but decided not to go to college. He started working in a French restaurant as a dishwasher, and later made salads and soups. Then he came to me one day and said, "Dad, I know what I want to do." I said, "What's that?" He said, "I'd like to go into the CIA." Then he said, "It's not what you think, Dad. It's the Culinary Institute of America." [Laughter] "If I want to be in this business, I might as well be a cook." So off he went.

I called him the first week because I knew he was going to be in a

state of shock. He thought this was a vocational school where you make souffles and omelets, and I knew that for the first year you were in classes like profit and loss, hotel management and nutritional content of food -- a heavy academic program -- and I knew he'd hate it. I called and said, "Michael, can I have dinner with you tonight?" He said, "No, I'm too busy." And I said, "What do you mean 'too busy'? You've only been there for a week." He said, "You don't understand, Dad. The semesters here are only three weeks long."

Three weeks! Well, that concentrates the mind. [Laughter] No teacher can tell a joke that lasts more than 10 seconds. [Laughter] A student who is late 20 minutes for class is suspended for the rest of the semester because he's missed too much. But if you drop out, you can drop back in every three weeks. And if you flunk a course, you don't have the tragic problem that you have in American schools of destroying a student by putting him back a whole year with kids who are a year younger or passing him automatically when he doesn't know what he's doing. To leave him back for three weeks isn't the same as losing an entire year. You don't move to an entirely different age group. There isn't the same shame attached to it. But I'm not advocating that we change to three-week semesters.

Let me add one more thing. A British management guru, a fellow by the name of Charles Handy, said if you view the school as a workplace and the students are workers, what kind of work are they doing? They are not coal miners, bricklayers or auto workers. They're mostly like office workers. And in the office you read reports, write reports, give oral reports, listen to oral reports, exchange numbers and exchange words. Handy says school is like an office.

Would you organize an office in the following way? When you hire me,



would you say, "Al, sit down here. There is your manager and she is going to give you work to do in a few minutes. There are 30 other people sitting in this room who are doing exactly what you will be doing. Never talk to them. They each do their work individually and you'll do your work individually. By the way, in 45 minutes a bell will ring and you'll stop doing your work and go to room 409. There you'll have a different boss and will be given a totally different kind of work to do. Again, you'll have 30 other people sitting around you who will be doing the same work you do. Don't talk to them, either. [Laughter] Every 45 minutes, we're going to move you to a different boss with different work and a different bunch of people that you shouldn't talk to."

Would you organize your office that way? People would say, "That's crazy." It takes time to get used to work. You can't do different kinds of work every 45 minutes. Furthermore, it takes time to get used to a boss. People have one boss and join a union. Here you have a different boss every 45 minutes who has different expectations, different rules and different ways of relating with people. You would never do it that way. Besides, in the world of work you're expected to turn to the people next to you and say, "Hey, is this right?" As a matter of fact, if you did something really stupid, the first thing your boss would say is, "Didn't you check with anybody?" If you said no, it would be considered the height of idiocy.

In school, to turn around and check with somebody is called cheating. In work, it's called intelligence and common sense. This organization of the school, of moving every period, doing different work, makes perfect sense if the child is viewed as an inanimate object who is being moved along an assembly line where the first teacher screws mathematics into him,

and 45 minutes later the English teacher hammers English into him, and then the French teacher, and so on. You see, if you view the student not as a worker who has to participate but as an inanimate object into whom education is being poured or into whom education is being done, then this system makes sense. Otherwise, it makes no sense whatsoever.

The question is, is it not surprising that only 20 percent of the students who are graduating from high school can write a decent letter? What we are really saying is that the students who learn are the ones who are able to sit still and be quiet for five hours a day. That is not many students. They are also the students who are able to listen to lecturing 85 percent of the time and retain it, and they're able to create pictures or images of the words being said so that they mean something. They're not only listening but are good receivers of these types of messages. They don't need any other way to learn. They happen to be the lucky ones. They weren't humiliated and didn't decide "to hell with it" because it wasn't their game, or stop trying. They happened to know the material or were relatively thick-skinned and had some support at home. They were able to move into a different category and were not left out most of the time. In other words, you had a bunch of accidents occurring here.

Here is another important thing. All kids beginning the first grade are told, "You are six years old. Now you are all going to do the following work." They all start comparing themselves with each other. They're all six, they're all in the first grade and they're basically the same, or so they're told. "The reason you can tell you are all the same is that I'm giving you all the same work to do. I expect you to do it in the same amount of time," and so forth.

Well, are all those kids the same? Of course not. How do you take

kids into the first grade? If you were born on the following day or before that, come on in. Otherwise, wait another year. There is a cut-off date. So you take in one whole year's worth of kids at a time.

What does this mean? It means the oldest child is a year older than the youngest. Does a year make a difference at the age of six? Yes, a tremendous difference. It's a major part of the intellectual and physical development of a child. It's not like the difference between being 50 and 51. It's a whole lot more like the difference between being 30 and 50.

Guess what we find later? A disproportionate number of kids who drop out later happen to be the youngest kids in the class in the early grades. It's like putting a heavyweight and a lightweight boxer in a ring together and saying, "Go ahead and try it. You're both boxers." You know damn well who is going to win.

The youngest kids feel dumber. By the way, a huge I.Q. advantage on the part of the younger kid will not overcome that year. There are some very interesting studies on that. It used to be better. Where I went to school, we had a new grade every half-year. It was 1-A and 1-B. There were at least narrower spreads so you wouldn't have a full year difference of age in one class. What I'm talking about is a system that would take students in twice, three or four times a year, or one that would bring students in not on the basis of age but on the basis of abilities in certain fields — those students that recognize numbers, colors or a certain number of words. There are all sorts of ways of putting children in groups.

Essentially, we have a structure that basically turns a lot of kids off. It tells them that if you can't sit still, you're stupid; or if you can't learn by listening, it's too bad — we don't give you an audiotape

or a computer, or sit you down with another kid who can help you. We don't give you all these alternative ways to learn. You're going to learn it my way. We don't say, "Hey, don't stand up in front of the whole group and try to answer a question or else you'll be humiliated. Go over there with three of your peers and see if you can learn it. Then come up and demonstrate what you've learned so that you can be proud of your accomplishments." Instead we say, "Be humiliated in front of everybody."

We do not consider one of the things that is obvious, and that is that a lot of work in the world and in school is boring. It is not inherently interesting. What do you do when you have boring work? What are they learning at Ford Motor Company, General Motors and a lot of other places? If you have boring work, create teams of employees and have the teams work with each other and compete with each other, because even though the work you do continues to be boring, the game you play by competing with others develops a kind of interest.

It's like a lot of athletic games. There's nothing inherently interesting about catching a ball, throwing a ball or running. But turn it into a game called baseball and start following averages, leagues, personalities and all sorts of other things and half the world becomes fascinated by it.

In Japanese schools, there are very large classes. Kids work in teams and help each other. They compete with the other teams and use peer pressure and peer influence in order to help build the school as an institution. In the United States, if you have two students who like each other, you separate them. If they send notes to each other -- God forbid they should learn to write letters that way [Laughter] -- you ask the principal to move this student to another class. See, we don't use what's

there.

So is it possible to develop a different kind of school? It seems to me what we need to do is ask ourselves if it's possible to have a school in which all or many of the problems I have just talked about are avoided. That is really the issue of the day. The issue of the day is that we have a school in which we can identify a number of structural factors that actually get lots of kids to say, "I give up," "I'm dumb," "I can't learn."

Is it possible to build a school in a different way so these problems aren't there? I'd like to give you a picture of one school that I actually saw. It exists. It's not an absolute ideal, but it's a school that performs miraculously. It gives us an indication of how a few relatively small changes can make a tremendous difference.

The school I'm talking about is in Cologne, West Germany. Don't think of it as a nice little German school with a bunch of blonde kids who salute the teacher every day and go home and obediently do all the homework and that there are no problems. This is a school with a lot of Turkish, Moroccan, Greek and Portuguese kids and a lot of Gastarbeiter kids. In other words, these are the Chicanos, essentially. There aren't many German kids. It is a multi-lingual and multi-cultural school.

You know that in Germany all the youngsters take their examination in the fourth grade. The ones who get the top marks go off to Gymnasium, which is your academic school that leads to the university. The ones who don't do quite as well go to a school called Realschule, which is sort of a middle school that later leads possibly to technical and vocational types of education. And the bottom school is called a Hauptschule and is a combination later on of an apprenticeship program with schooling.

This school in Cologne is a comprehensive secondary school, which means

they don't recognize these distinctions. They take all the kids, no matter whether they scored at the top or bottom. However, if you pass the test you go to Gymnasium, unless you are some sort of a crazy socialist and want to mix with the kids from the lower classes. All schools around the world tend to be class oriented, and they certainly are in Germany. Basically, this is a school with the bottom two categories. These are the kids who were told, "You are not smart enough to go to college or to the university."

What is different about this school? The first thing that is different is that, as a teacher, I come in and hear, "Al, go down to that room. The kids aren't coming for three or four days. You're part of a team. There are seven teachers in a team, and you're the seventh teacher." I meet the team. The first thing we find is that the students haven't been divided into classes by the administration, by a computer, by the principal or by the department chairman. The seven of us are given a list of 120, 130 or 140 students -- whatever the number -- and these are your students. It's your collective decision as professionals to divide the kids into groups. If you want to have some large groups and some small ones, because some kids are easier and some more difficult, do it that way. It's your business. Furthermore, during the course of the year you can have a meeting and reshuffle it. These are your kids and you are the faculty for them.

Secondly, you would hear: "We are never going to hire a substitute if one of you is sick or absent. We have already taken the money we would have used to hire a substitute and have given you the seventh teacher. We don't believe a teacher that comes in for one day and who doesn't know the students is going to do any good. We've given you an extra teacher

instead. Sometimes you're going to be short and sometimes you're going to have an extra teacher, but you're always going to have people who know the students. Organize yourselves in such a way that if someone is absent, it doesn't create an organizational disaster for you.

"The third thing we want you to know is that these students will be here in three days. They're in the fifth grade. They will graduate when they reach age 19. The seven of you, as a team, will be with the same students until they graduate. It's not going to take you eight weeks to learn their names. You aren't going to pack up in June because you're sending them on to some other teacher. You won't be able to say that you inherited a bunch of kids that were ruined by last year's teacher. This is not a factory system or an assembly line where you have to put one part on and pass the student on to someone else.

"You are going to get to know the students very well. You'll get to know their mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers, and furthermore, anything you do that is wonderful for these kids, you'll live to reap the profits and benefits because they'll be wonderful students who get better and better as they go on. On the other hand, anything that you do that ends up being a terrible mistake, you're going to live with that mistake and you are going to have to be the one who rectifies it.

"Furthermore, since you are working as a team, guess who's going to put the pressure on anybody in that team who is not doing a good job? You are, because you're living with each other. The others will say, 'Al, if you make a mistake or if you are not doing your part of the job, you're throwing the burden onto everybody else.' If you're doing things with students that are destructive of the learning atmosphere, you're destroying it for the whole team. They'll say, 'Al, either shape up or ship out.'"

You don't need all sorts of principals, assistant principals, chairmen, inspectors and everything else. You can devote all of your money in this school to teachers. Whereas, in American schools only 40 percent of the money goes to teachers' salaries while the rest of it is for people who have to watch teachers very carefully.

What else? In the classroom, no lecturing. The students are sitting at tables in teams. They compete with other tables and help each other. What's the bottom line? The bottom line here are the ones who cannot go to the university. A huge number of these kids pass the examination, the Aabitert, but in Germany you don't just pick an easy university to go to. It's a national and very difficult examination. A very large number of these kids who were told they couldn't make it, do indeed make it. So it is possible to organize differently. In other words, these kids make their mistakes in a small group. They're not humiliated.

Notice that the teacher isn't lecturing. The students are helping each other learn. There are videotapes, audiotapes, computers and different ways for them to learn. The kids are essentially learning that they don't have to learn it individually. They're learning that the important thing is for your team to win, and it wins when everyone makes a contribution. If you have an important contribution to make with the team, you're going to be able to make an important contribution later on.

Is that a model that should be used everywhere? Of course not. Does it give us a way of thinking about how our schools might be restructured? Yes. Where should we go with this? We need to do at least the following three things if we want to move from the current system that we have to one that at least develops some different models.

First, we need a set of incentives that encourage professionals at the



school level to experiment with the creation of a new type of institution. What we need is to say, "We have an image of what is wrong with schools as they now exist and we have a vision of the kinds of specifications that must be established for a new school. We want a school that will take into account the fact that kids learn at different rates, that kids must be engaged in order to learn, that not all kids can learn by listening and that there needs to be a variety of different ways to learn."

We have an idea of how to do this. We will issue a charter to them and say, "Okay, you are now free for the next seven years to run your own school, free from regulations of the board of education and of the union contract. You're now like Henry Hudson. You had a plan; you were going to look for something. Maybe what you found isn't what you were looking for, but you had a plan. Now you're going off on these uncharted waters. When you're out there, you're on your own."

We need to get a set of specifications that will enable us to identify explorers who have a reasonable chance of finding what they are looking for. Are they certain to find what they're looking for? Of course not.

The plans that they come up with will all be quite different. Just as if you went to different architects and said, "I like to listen to music, cook," etc., five different architects will draw five different plans for your home, but they will all be responsive to the needs that you suggested in the first place.

What we need, since we don't have a model that will work everywhere -- and we probably never will -- is to generate discussion at the school level among teachers and principals to do this. But in order to make it work, we need something else. At the present time, there is a very hostile attitude towards experimentation in the schools. Why? Because most people who are

engaged in something different are very arrogant. They say, "Hey, I'm involved in a wonderful experiment and I'm sure we're going to find all the answers. The rest of you people are stupid, lazy and unconcerned, and boy, are we going to show you how terrible you are because our experiment is so wonderful." If you tell a bunch of people that they're a bunch of fools and inferior, morally and otherwise, what do you expect them to do? The fact is that most of the time, most experiments do not succeed; they fail.

What we need is a much more scientific and objective attitude on the part of the experimenters. We are looking, but it's going to be very hard and will take a very long time. If the experimenters take a modest attitude rather than an arrogant one, they are more likely to get more support from the others.

There are two other things that are needed in order to make this work, and I'll touch on them quickly. One of the main reasons that experiments like this in the past haven't worked is because it's too difficult to create a new institution. It's hard enough to give a good and interesting set of lectures. It's much harder to say, "Next period, I'm not going to lecture but I'm going to need to find two chapters of books, a wonderful set of pictures, two wonderful videotapes, some terrific audiotapes, some simulation models and some questions to throw out to the group." Instead of giving one lecture, I now have to go through hundreds of different objects, materials and everything else in order to find what I'm going to present to the children.

This is too difficult. You need a system where teachers all across the United States are trying to do these things but are able to share them with each other. In the 1960s, it wasn't possible for them to share these things with each other. You had to find them yourself or share them with

the teacher in the next room or on the next floor. But with the availability of microcomputers today, it is perfectly possible for teachers in one school to develop something, to put it into the system, to have 500 other teachers try it and to verify that the first teachers were right. This is indeed an excellent approach. Then it could be put into a national data base so that within a few years most teachers would have available to them access to all sorts of things they didn't themselves discover, things that were discovered by others but validated by a large number of people.

This is the use of technology, to create a base of valid and different approaches to present to students that are absolutely essential, because teachers don't have the time, energy or ability to reinvent in 10 or 15 different ways an entire curriculum. To give lectures and lessons, yes; to review all the different approaches and materials, no.

Finally, one other thing is needed. As long as we have the current standardized examinations in reading, mathematics and other fields, it will be very difficult to get a change in the structure of schools because current examinations don't measure very much in the way of thinking, expression or creativity. They measure very short-term gains that don't add up to anything. You can end up being very good at taking these tests but not be any damn good at doing anything.

We need different systems of assessment because the only thing the current system encourages is for you to keep students sitting still and practicing answering multiple-choice questions. The best way to get the students to improve is to get them to practice on something they will never need again for the rest of their lives.

We need better systems of assessment that measure a 17-year-old's grasp

of important tasks that will later be needed in the world, some of which I mentioned in terms of national assessment. But what I didn't mention are some things that have some intellectual rigor to them. We shouldn't stop with writing a simple letter. We should see how many students are able to read decent literature, scientific literature, or are able to do some critical thinking.

If we don't do this, we will have some threats facing us -- not only those of tuition tax credits but also the forthcoming takeover of the Chelsea school system in Massachusetts by a private university. The state of New Jersey has a system where it can declare a school system bankrupt and take it over.

What is going to force teachers, principals and school boards to engage in this sort of change? You know what propels General Motors to build a new car: they are losing a share of the market and they are not going to have a union, they aren't going to have a company, and therefore they go out there and develop a new product, because they have to be competitive.

My response to this is that the schools have to be competitive, too. We are very, very close to a point where the American public is going to say, "To hell with public education. It stinks. It's no good. We spend \$200 billion a year on it and look what we're getting out of it -- only 5 to 10 percent of the kids are learning."

The response that the public turns to is some form of privatization and the market system, which won't necessarily be a way of improving schools but will be destructive of public education in this country, given what public education means in terms of bringing the people in our society together. That would be a very great loss, indeed -- not just an educational loss but an important social loss -- as it's part of what holds

our country and our people together.

What this might lead to is what just happened in Margaret Thatcher's Great Britain, an example of what radical education reform can be, which is, by the way, very much like the Chicago proposal. Under Margaret Thatcher, in any school where 20 percent of the parents sign and petition and say, "We are unhappy," the government conducts a referendum of all the parents in the school. If a majority of the parents say they don't like the local board of education, the entire building is taken out from under the jurisdiction of the board of education and the parents themselves elect their own board of education. They can hire and fire anybody they want. They can impose tuition fees. They can expel students.

It then becomes a private school run by those parents with public funds. They have simultaneously instituted a national curriculum and a national examination system. If those parents don't do a good job, you can kick them out and elect another bunch of parents the following year. Those are the stakes. The stakes are really the future of public education.

Well, can it be done? Let me share with you a story I have in a different context. In the last few months, I've been to Poland several times. After my first visit, I came back to the U.S. and read a short article in the Wall Street Journal in which a Polish economist was interviewed. He was asked a question like: "Is it really possible to bring the Polish economy out of the terrible situation it's in?" I give you this story because I think if you substitute the words "Polish economy" and ask the question, "Is it really possible to bring about major improvements and restructuring in our school system?" then I think the same story applies.

The economist answered: "Yes, there are basically two ways of

improving the Polish economy making substantial progress. One way is the natural way, and the other way is the miraculous way. The natural way would be for a host of angels to be sent from Heaven and lift the Polish economy into prosperity. The miraculous way would be for the Polish people to do it themselves. [Laughter and applause]

**QUESTION:** What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of decentralization? And how would you compare recent efforts in Chicago to the Oceanhill-Brownsville incident several years ago?

**MR. SHANKER:** They are pretty similar, except the ones that are being discussed here are worse. You need to ask the questions: "Why is it that schools haven't taken greater risks? Why is it that people haven't tried to do the kinds of things that I talked about?"

We have 16,000 separate school systems in the United States. You would expect that there would be great diversity. In Europe, there are many national school systems and you know that wherever you go, students are studying the same thing, using the same books. In this country, there are 16,000 different school governments, and they're all doing the same thing.

Why? The reason is that we have a school board, which is elected -- not by Democrats or Republicans, but in a separate election. To get known to be elected to the school board, you have to make a lot of statements to the public about what is wrong with the schools. This is how you get your name in the paper and how people get to know you. So, school board people basically get to be known by exposing problems that exist within schools.

Once elected, they meet every week or two with the superintendent of schools, whom they hire on a one-, two-, three- or four-year contract. That superintendent meets with those 9, 10 or 11 people in a public

meeting, and every one of them has discovered that something is wrong here or there. The superintendent is, figuratively speaking, dying because he is spending all his time in public meetings being humiliated: "You're the superintendent. Why did this happen in this school? in that one?" What would happen to you if your contract and job were at stake, and every week or two you had to deal with these nine people on the board who are digging out every damn thing that is going wrong?

I'll tell you what you would do. You'd tell the principal of each school, "Look, I don't care if you are doing a lot of interesting things, but the main thing is I don't want any mistakes. Make sure there is no bad news." We all know that when trying something new, there's a pretty good chance of making mistakes because nobody gets something right the first time. It takes time before you work out the bugs in something.

What you have is a system with a superintendent and board members who are very well meaning, but who, in order to remain on the board, have to keep their eyes on the public and who feel that in order to represent their constituency they constantly have to publicly air everything that is going wrong. The result is an insecure superintendent who, because he's afraid the board members are going to find more and more things that are wrong, sends out orders saying, "Make sure there is no bad news coming out of your school. You get no rewards for good news, and you get plenty of punishment for bad news. Furthermore, I'm going to give you all these rules and regulations so that if anything goes wrong, I can show that I had a rule against you doing that and that it happened because you didn't listen to me."

What do the principals do with the teachers then? If you're a teacher and you want to do something interesting, the first thing the principal

is worried about if you want to do something different is, is it going to result in some sort of mishap? So everything is geared toward doing things the same way that you did them yesterday. The more you do things in the way that you did them yesterday, the less mistakes you'll make. Very few kids die in school. There aren't that many accidents. Of course, nobody is learning anything, either. But you get no rewards for that.

What we have is a system that rewards boredom, conformity and stability. You have a system that discourages risk taking, and that's why it remains pretty much the same. Now, the effect of having a board in each school, similar to the central board, which in effect is able to hire and fire the principal, is to make the individual principal just as insecure as the superintendent. That principal is going to stop thinking about what is going to make these kids really learn. He has to figure out, "How do I keep the majority of this board on my side so I can keep my job?"

What is the best way of keeping the majority of the board on your side? Well, the best way is to get into a fight with somebody and unite them. It increases the political conflict and it decreases the time that people have to deal with educational issues.

One of the reasons I advocate giving these people a charter and letting them do their own thing for seven years is the board of education can then say, "Look, we gave them a license for seven years. As long as they can attract students, they can go ahead and do this."

What you need to do is create a distance between the professionals and the board. You need to give people time. You need to give them the ability to make mistakes and recover. You need to give them the ability to pursue something. You cannot have someone sitting on them all the time saying, "Aha, don't do that because it didn't work out right," or, "Aha,



this is a mistake. Don't do that."

Look, you've had 20 years of decentralization in New York City. Have the schools in New York City improved? They haven't. What you have instead of one central bureaucracy is 32 local bureaucracies in addition to the central bureaucracy. And the central bureaucracy hasn't gotten smaller, it's gotten bigger, because it now has had to control 32 local bureaucracies.

Don't these 32 local bureaucracies perform any positive functions? They sure do. A lot of poor minority people in these areas get very valuable political training. They are learning how to run for office, how to conduct meetings, how to get reelected, how to collect funds and how to do a lot of other things. And later, they run for state legislature or they do other things.

This is very important, but it has absolutely nothing to do with whether the kids are getting a better education. There is no question that there are pluses in terms of politics. But there are no big pluses in terms of education. Nothing new is really going on in those 32 districts that didn't exist in the central district before. And they're not much different from district to district, either.

So what you really need is to find ways of encouraging people to take risks. When you make people insecure, you say, "Hey, if you don't get something done right away...." You see, it's very much like American business. When you work in a Japanese firm, in many cases you know you're going to be there for the rest of your life. So you're going to work as hard as hell. You're going to think in the long term: "What are we going to do 10 years from now?" "What are we going to do in 15 years?" If you have an idea that's going to take ten years to develop, you're still going

to be there, and the company is going to be there. American management doesn't think that way. You have to have a good bottom line next year. That will mean you can move to a better corporation.

So we don't manufacture products any more. We buy companies, we sell companies and we shift assets, because that's what makes you look good. You aren't producing anything. As a matter of fact, if you have a brilliant idea, sell it to the Japanese. They'll give you \$500 million and you'll have a great bottom line this year. You are going to get a great job. Of course, you have just cost 5 million jobs for the United States of America because we are not going to make that product. You have sold the idea, but you've got the money for it.

What you create in this sort of management is a board that is elected frequently and superintendent and principals who are worried about their jobs. They have to be worried about short-term bottom line. The short-term bottom line is to increase the scores on standardized tests this year. That has nothing to do with learning.

Suppose you have something that takes three years to understand and you can't measure it very well. You end up saying, "The hell with it. They won't learn that. I want the scores to go up." You are distorting the educational process, in terms of a bunch of measurements that have nothing to do with real learning and real education, in order to keep some people in their jobs or to get them reelected. You are distorting the whole educational process. It is not a good way to go.

I recognize that this process is well motivated and that people are very, very frustrated. There may be strikes every year, a central board of education that is not responsive, and a union that is frustrated. I know that people say, "Let's do something," but just doing something isn't

enough because you can do something and make it worse. Anybody who says things cannot get any worse hasn't been around very long. [Laughter]

**QUESTION:** If you chartered these teachers, how would that fit with equity concerns? Who do you think they would serve? And would we end up with a board without control?

**MR. SHANKER:** I think you could put certain requirements on that. For instance, I would think that you couldn't pull all the top, most spectacular members of the faculty together and have them go off and run their own little school and prove something. You wouldn't improve very much. You can't, say, take all the kids that are already doing spectacularly well and put them into your charter. I think you could put certain requirements on this and say that you take a fair share of different types of faculty members, and you'd have to show that the number of talents they have among them are capable of running the entire educational program. I think you have to show that you take a fair share of handicapped kids and those who are substantially behind. I think all of that is reasonable.

We aren't doing very well on equity issues right now. It's not that we have moved backwards, but if you want to establish a model that's going to be effective you really have to show how it is going to be effective, not because of your selection process. You know, it's like private schools. They do very well because they're like hospitals that don't take any sick patients. These hospitals do very well, too. It doesn't prove very much. It doesn't help you improve medical care. So I think that's an important concern.

**QUESTION:** How do you assess William Bennett's tenure as Secretary of Education? And, implicit in that, I suppose, is can that position do

anything; and if so, who would be the ideal person in that type of position?

**MR. SHANKER:** William Bennett stated the goals of American education very well. I think there are lots of things that we fall down on. As an example, about two years ago a student in a New York City school found a wallet containing a lot of money, probably the wallet of some kid who was dealing drugs. Nevertheless, that student returned the wallet to the person who lost it.

The entire school engaged in a discussion, and the discussion in every class was: "If you found a wallet that had \$1,000 in it, would you return it?" The discussion went on all day long. The New York Times reported that while the discussion took place in all the classrooms, there wasn't a single class in which the teacher said it is right to return something you have found. No teacher expressed such a view. So the notion is that there are some generally accepted values that schools ought to stand for. There are things of cultural value, of greater worth, and there are things that are of less worth. There are also things that are garbage. I think it's important for a person in education to stand for these things.

So there are certain aspects of Bill Bennett's tenure that I think are good. Having said that, I must say I was the only guy in the education establishment who said nice things about him when he got the job, something I learned to regret about five minutes later. You see, here he is, sort of the symbolic leader of American education.

I'm a leader of teachers. I know that in order to get anything done, I need to unite people behind certain goals. Bennett didn't unite anybody. He turned around and dumped on everybody. He united everybody against him. He attacked everybody. If you have a Secretary of Labor who hates

unions, he's not going to do very much for unions. If you have a Secretary of Commerce who is against capitalism, he wouldn't do very well, either.

[Laughter] If you have a Secretary of Agriculture who says, "Let the Chinese send the food over here; we ought to get the hell out of this business," he wouldn't do very well. [Laughter]

If you have a Secretary of Education who basically has nothing but contempt for all the people in education -- higher, elementary and secondary -- he's going to fail. I mean, he's going to look good to the Heritage Foundation, as a vice-presidential candidate four years from now or as a Senate candidate, but he won't have accomplished very much for education.

In addition, the simple-minded notion of the great "Golden Age" that he introduced was false. On balance, I think there were a few positive things in terms of ideals and values, but beyond that, everything was rather negative. He really represented the hostility that the right-wing groups in this country have for educational institutions. That's unfortunate, because that's not where Bill Bennett started. He was a student of Charles Frankel at Columbia University. I was also a student of Charles Frankel. I know where Bill Bennett came from, and I know that he molded himself for this administration, which is unfortunate.

Can a Secretary of Education accomplish a lot? Sure. I think there are basically three functions of the federal government in education. First is a civil rights function. We have a big problem with large groups in our society because we had slavery and legal racism, and, therefore, there is still a national and thorough responsibility to try to undo that damage. And, by the way, some of the things we are doing are working, because minorities are moving up pretty fast. But we haven't done enough.

One of the big things that happened in the past eight years was that 30 percent more children are now living in poverty, which essentially means that a lot of them were born without adequate nutrition or medical care available. So we're getting a lot of brain-damaged kids, and the schools aren't going to be able to do a damned thing about it. Here we are, the richest country in the world, producing a lot of children who are going to be horrible to themselves, their families and to the rest of society. The head of Procter & Gamble was on the cover of Fortune magazine this month. When you have a big businessman who is worried that we are turning out hundreds of thousands of brain-damaged kids, I don't know why the Republican Secretary of Education can't talk about that.

Secondly, there is the research aspect. There's a lot that we don't know about education. We spend \$200 billion a year on public elementary and secondary education. We ought to spend a few hundred million dollars finding out what we do. We ought to know more about what we are saying so that it becomes part of the agenda.

The third part of the agenda is that the federal government needs to intervene in certain emergency situations to do things that nobody else will do. After Sputnik, the federal government did something about math, science and foreign languages. It may not have done enough and it may not have always done the right thing, but it knew damn well that 16,000 school districts were not all of a sudden going to begin worrying about Sputnik. This was a defense issue and the federal government had to do it.

If we are about to have a shortage of teachers, if we can't get enough high-quality teachers, what could the federal government say about these college loans? Could we forgive the debts of students who are top notch and agree to teach for five years? Instead of repaying loans for the rest

of your life, you can do a public service, something for your country and it's children. But can you at the same time help yourself economically? Sure.

Could the federal government say we're going to have 1,000 federal charter schools if the faculties come up with a brilliant notion of developing a new school? Will the federal government provide you with the computers, the money to attend conferences and buy books and some networking so that you can communicate with other teachers? Could the federal government, with a relatively small amount of money, provide substantial incentives for people to try to experiment creatively in schools? Sure it could.

I think the best person in the job of Secretary of Education -- given the fact that education is not a constitutional responsibility of the federal government -- would be someone who is able to do something in the first year or two of the administration, because after that the administration always gets bogged down in economics and national defense. Those are the major issues of the federal government. You need someone who is an experienced Washington hand and who could come in the day after the presidential inauguration and start working with the Congress, the president and the administration to get something done before the administration gets into other things. You need somebody who has been there before, someone very experienced.

In my opinion, we need a top-notch businessman who is concerned with education, like Brad Butler, who has been very active in the Committee on Economic Development, and who had some very good ideas concerning the problems businesses face when going through transformations. He has a very strong economic sense of what it means to a country to turn out all these

children who aren't going to be able to learn. He's very well connected and is a Republican and conservative.

I don't think you want someone in the position that the Congress thinks is just a bleeding-heart person who just wants to throw money at children and who doesn't know what to do. I believe you want somebody who is a tough guy. By the way, this guy does love kids and he's not the tough businessman you think he is. At least he plays that game, and he plays it very well. And I think it helps. He could do a lot. But we'll see who gets in there.

**QUESTION:** Recalling your title to the lecture, you mention educated guesses. It's not at all clear to me what portion would be under the category of educated guess. More generally, you don't take a cynical approach, and I think that is something worth emphasizing. Could you say more about that, about why you don't take a cynical approach?

**MR. SHANKER:** Well, I look at other fields, such as the field of medicine. There's a lot wrong with medicine and the way it's now practiced. A lot of people don't get medical care. There are all sorts of problems with it. Yet, if you look at the kind of medical care that people were able to get in 1910 and the kind of medical care they can get today, it's a miracle. Furthermore, a lot of the increase in longevity isn't due to the fact that we have better doctors, better trained doctors or even more scientific knowledge. A lot of it has to do with public health, the fact that meat is inspected, water is inspected and that there are safety regulations.

There's a lot that one can see there. You can see that you need to take a fairly long-term perspective -- long term non-historically. But if you talk in terms of 40, 50 or 60 years, and if you're able to remove



people from coming up with short-term political answers, you can accomplish a great deal. After all, fathers were sending letters to their sons at Harvard saying, "If you go into medicine, I will disown you. It is disreputable." The whole thing was a lot of opinions and different schools and different philosophies.

You can do the same with business administration; that is, there are fields that within this century were as disorganized as our own is at the present time. If you look at it from an earlier start point of view, you would have said there's not much chance of doing it. I also think there is hope in this field because a lot of what ails the schools is due to the fact that the schools essentially copied business institutions.

When the factory system came along and was successful, Taylorism immediately came into teacher training and administrator institutions. Now that people in industry realize that you can't treat workers as mere hired hands but that you have to involve their brains and souls and develop more participative forms of structures, I think there will be a lot of support from the influential world of business to bring about positive support for schools.

The interesting thing is that these business people are not interested in narrow vocationalism, either. I think they take an attitude that is a lot more like finding a cure to some disease. They get out of the business of trying to produce instant cures. Generally, we have faith that if we work at something long enough, we can remove a substantial amount of politics and allow some integrity of the human process of intelligent inquiry. In that sense, I've been very influenced by American philosophy. And I've been influenced by John Dewey, Charles Saunders Pierce and William James. They stand for, essentially, an American tradition of thought,

which is optimistic over the long run. I'm not cynical. Optimistic in the long run? Yes. I'm skeptical about the short run because when you have an institution that has remained about the same for such a long period of time, you can't be optimistic that you can move it in the short run.

**QUESTION:** What factors do you suppose made it possible for a big-city school system like Cincinnati to take major risks and forge a new kind of bargaining relationship between the school board and the teachers; and, say, a city like Chicago, which got bogged down and didn't accomplish much, frustrating the parents?

**MR. SHANKER:** There are a number of cities that have taken steps: Toledo, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, Rochester, Hammond and Dade County, Florida, and I could point to about 10 others. They all have certain things in common. They all have a very strong, secure union leader and school superintendents and very secure school boards. There are no rival organizations about to kick the union out. They've gone through many years of conflict in bargaining, and they've become mature.

Both sides were convinced that by continuing the conflict, each was going to lose; that is, they were losing public support. And both sides felt that the system was going down pretty rapidly. There were people on both sides with a long history and who got tired of the fight. They also had a lot of vision and the strong sense of security that if they did something, they could afford to lose a certain percentage of their constituency and still be in a position to lead and maintain their positions.

One thing you don't have here in Chicago is any management. That's a major issue. I was invited by a major business group to Chicago about a year and a half ago. They also invited the local superintendent, school

board and union. I was asked to bring the superintendents and school board leaders from Cincinnati, Toledo, Rochester and the other places I mentioned. They all came. The superintendent here did show up, but only one member of the school board came, after all had promised to be there. If you can't even get people into a room to listen to somebody else talk, it's not a very organized situation.

I don't blame people for getting frustrated or for grabbing and trying to do things. But the fact that you have problems with management now doesn't mean that you should, with your eyes wide open, go into a situation with the same problem you have on a citywide basis. It will now be extended to every school in the city.

**QUESTION:** To what extent can the school make up for what is missing in the home due to divorce, broken homes, etc.?

**MR. SHANKER:** We don't know, because we really haven't had whole societies where people didn't have homes but did have modern educational systems. First of all, there's no point in just saying that you can't do anything until the home gets put back together again; it may never get put back together. What you can do is try to get certain structures and strengthen them in order to compensate for what's missing at home, and one of those things is the peer relationship of children. If you can get children to believe that what they're doing in school is part of work that they're doing with their friends, as a team, it is helpful.

I can tell you that in Japan and in the school in Germany that I spoke about earlier, if one of the students is absent, another student from the team calls up and says, "We missed you today. Today, there were only four of us and we needed five. It was much harder for us to get the work done. Why were you absent? Why couldn't you be here?"

It is like a ball team. If you're sick the day of a game and the team doesn't get to play, you're going to feel miserable and guilty because you're a part of it and they need you. Does that substitute for the family? No, it doesn't. But what can you do? You can't make mother and father get back together again, but you can provide other systems.

By the way, in a system where the teacher is not busy lecturing all the time or telling the students to shut up and sit still, the teacher can sit with each of the kids for five minutes. And do you know the difference between lecturing to a class and talking to a student individually for five minutes? It's a tremendous difference. It enables the teacher to develop relationships with those students, which you can't do as long as they're all in a state of constant agitation and uprising. The way we treat kids now is the way policemen treat huge mobs. The police are afraid of the mobs, so they blow whistles, yell and shove them around. Other people in the mob push back, and then somebody throws something. Go into an urban high school and take a look at it.

So there is not much we can do about the family, but there are other support structures that we can create that will make the youngsters good citizens. If we can't create other support structures, then it's the end of our civilization and society.

**QUESTION:** There seems to be some evidence that kids can learn very effectively, in fact naturally, by not being in a dependent situation, by being allowed to learn what they choose to learn in an atmosphere where the school is a community, one that makes its own decisions. Do you have experience with democratic schools like that, and what are your thoughts?

**MR. SHANKER:** Well, I'm not talking about intense or cutthroat competition. I think competition and cooperation are really very closely

related. I don't view them as opposites. I feel that people cooperate better when they're in competitive situations. A nation cooperates more when it's in a state of war. When it faces no external enemy, it falls apart inside somewhat, cooperates less, and people pursue their own interests rather than cooperative interests because they can afford to and because there's no big focus or high stakes.

This is also true in families, in other countries -- and in education, as well. So I'm not trying to create naturally-competitive people or do anything that is cutthroat. But I really think that the greatest cooperation is achieved in situations where you have combinations of the two. You can change the cutthroat nature by varying the teams, changing the players and not creating permanent sides.

A lot of the negative effects that you might think of are not permanently there. But I think that in the absence of some sort of competition, you don't get the focus or the same incentives. In those schools where it works, you get heavy incentives from families at home that make it work.

I don't think you get the same incentives for the overwhelming majority. I think we ought to try more of it. We ought to try some schools that work without the competition and just try total cooperation, or try others with a mixture of the two and take a look over a period of time.

That's where I think nobody really has any good educated guesses. I have given you one, but I could be absolutely wrong and wouldn't bet anything on it. I'd like to try them and play them out.

The reason I say this, also, is because some things are intrinsically interesting and other things are just boring. With respect to those

things that are boring, I think you probably have to make more than a cooperative game out of it. With respect to the interesting things that really involve kids, you don't need any competition at all. If you simply get a child involved in something real, get him fascinated, then you don't need any competition. The kids will follow and pursue it and become more and more involved in it. Of course, that also happens in the intellectual life when you get to a certain point where you're fascinated, where you ask questions and where you want to spend all your time with it. But there are competitive aspects to the intellectual life, too. There are people who know someone else who's working on the same thing they are, and it's a question of who gets there first or whose solution is more elegant.

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