



Lynne Munson Remarks
Great Minds-presented panel, “Knowledge for All”
Friday, November 8, 2:15 p.m. to 3:45 p.m.

Paving the way for Structured Literacy™
Annual International Dyslexia Association Conference
Oregon Convention Center
November 7-10, 2019

Welcome to “Knowledge for All,” a discussion of the importance of background knowledge to learning to read and write. I’m Lynne Munson, founder and CEO of Great Minds.

I spoke at this conference for the first time last year and was so impressed with the quality of the conversation that we’ve decided to come back to learn more. I’m joined by many colleagues who I hope will raise their hands.

If you’re unfamiliar with Great Minds, we create high quality core curricula for all students in ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies. Our motto is “every child is capable of greatness” and we design curricula with all students in mind—including students who struggle with dyslexia, like my daughter, Sophia; students learning English; those with no one to take them to museums or libraries; those in every zip code, urban, suburban, and rural.

We base our curricula on the research showing what works and we empower teachers with the resources they need to add their experience to those findings and craft curricula that is effective and a joy to use.

On the topic of knowledge the research is clear: Knowledge is essential to learning to read and to write. Natalie (Wexler) will go in depth on that topic.

There are other essentials—most notably structured, systematic instruction in reading foundations. I talked last year about how our family moved two hours south from Washington, D.C., to Richmond, Virginia, so that Sophia could get the best Orton-Gillingham-based reading instruction we could find—at the Riverside School, where panelist Robin Hegner teaches.

There is no replacement for the effective teaching of decoding—of mastering the sound-spelling patterns in the right order and through the best methods.

The question is only how that instruction, and other instruction, can be enhanced, deepened, and made to stick. Knowledge is the key to doing that. I assert that knowledge building should be present in nearly every aspect of reading and writing instruction. And that the worst crime that can be committed against a struggling reader is to take her out of class when knowledge-rich instruction in English, social studies, science and the rest are taking place, and putting her in a knowledge-free remedial instructional setting. That is not “extra help.” The pure joy of learning about substantive topics and of participating in a discussion with your peers is a gratifying and confidence-building experience all readers deserve.

Knowledge and skills must walk hand-in-hand if skills are going to have a chance to stick, and if students are to see that there’s a point to it all, especially students with dyslexia who have to put in so many more hours building those decoding skills than do others.

Let me introduce our first panelist.

Natalie’s book, *The Knowledge Gap*, takes readers inside schools and classrooms, showing how knowledge-focused instruction is our best hope of achieving educational and social equity.

Natalie is also the co-author with Judy Hochman of *The Writing Revolution*, which shows how to teach writing and content at the same time.

A senior contributor at Forbes.com, Natalie has written on education for The New York Times and The Washington Post and is the author of a widely read article on The Atlantic.com about why reading scores haven’t improved in twenty years. Anyone who saw the recent NAEP scores knows that that decline continues.

I know no one better at explaining the most important understandings from reading research than Natalie Wexler.

Next is Robin Hegner. I know Robin because she serves as an Orton-Gillingham Fellow-in-Training at the school my daughter attended—the Riverside School in Richmond. Robin supports the teachers there by providing Academy-approved training.

Robin is a Certified Level member of the Academy of Orton-Gillingham Practitioners and Educators and is certified as a structured literacy dyslexia specialist by the IDA’s Center for Effective Reading Instruction. She is also a passionate advocate for children with dyslexia who, as you will hear, has spent years working to systematically integrate knowledge into language foundations instruction.

Robin Hegner is an extraordinary practitioner.

Conclusion, post panel discussion

At Great Minds we practice what we preach. Let's notice the knowledge our presenters included in today's panel. Yes, we discussed the research that supports the teaching of ELA skills with knowledge, and we heard about a wonderful example of how this is done in practice at the Riverside School.

But we also had the opportunity to use our Velcro to add to our existing knowledge of how the Inuit people survive life in the Arctic, where to find caribou herds and beluga whales, how working memory operates in the brain, and why Andrew Jackson was a popular president. Next came details about the Iditarod dog race, including checkpoint locations in Alaska, geographical features including deltas and peninsulas, the bedding most sled dogs prefer, the story of Balto, and finally that there was a historic storm in Galveston, Texas, in 1900. A feast of knowledge, indeed.