



## Program biography - Dr. Catherine E. Snow

Dr. Catherine E. Snow has dedicated her career to strengthening children's education causes through literacy and learning.

The professor at Harvard Graduate School of Education has focused on early language skills as a pathway toward lifelong learning. When asked what type of candidate would make a strong "educational president," Snow answered, "One who understands that support for families, as well as for excellent educational settings for preschool-age children, is part of doing a good job. The big difference between children who arrive at school almost certain to succeed and children who arrive highly likely to fail is the quality of experience they've had at home and in preschool settings since birth."

A Toledo native, Snow earned a bachelor of arts degree from Oberlin College in Oberlin, Ohio, and master's and doctorate degrees from McGill University in Montreal. Her interest in early learning was displayed in her doctoral thesis, entitled, "Language acquisition and mothers' speech to children."

Snow's research has encompassed the fields of linguistics, second languages, communication styles, parent-child language interactions and language skills in at-risk children, to name a few.

Snow advocates for continuous education funding, commenting, “Teaching kids to read in first grade is at least as hard as designing rocket ships or taking out appendices; the pre-service support and education, in addition to the outgoing professional development, that teachers should have has to match in scope and intensity that provided to engineers, doctors and other professionals.”

Snow has chaired two national panels, including the National Academy of Sciences Committee that prepared a thought-provoking report: “Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children,” and the Rand Reading Study Group that authored “Reading for Understanding: Toward an R & D Program in Reading Comprehension.” She is currently involved in efforts to improve middle school literacy outcomes in partnership with Boston-area researchers.

A consulting editor and editorial board member of several professional publications, Snow has authored and contributed to some of the most respected books about education, such as “Preparing Our Teachers: Opportunities for Better Reading Instruction,” “Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children” and “Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children’s Reading Success.”

Snow received the Morningstar Teaching Award in 2004, a Carnegie Corporation of New York, Institute for Statewide Literacy Initiatives award in 2002 and a Spencer Senior Scholar Award in 1999.

## Commencement Address

President Jacobs, Dean Brady, Deans and university leaders, members of the faculty, parents, friends, and, most importantly, to the graduates:

It is of course a great pleasure to be here to share your commencement with you. I say that in full recognition of the fact that I have no memory of who gave any of the commencement addresses at my own graduations, or my son’s, nor for that matter of what any of them might have said. This fact is both alarming and soothing—whatever passes my lips today will be unlikely to trouble your souls for long. I am sure, though, that many of you are asking yourselves, ‘Who is this woman, and why are we listening to her? Why don’t we get to hear J.K.Rowling, who spoke at Harvard a few years ago, or President Obama, who spoke at Michigan this year, or Jon Stewart, who spoke at his alma mater William and Mary a few years

ago, or even Yoko Ono, who is speaking at my alma mater Oberlin College this year, to considerable graduate grumbling as I understand it. I did grow up in Toledo, nurtured on the robust myth that my paternal great grandfather was the first white child born in Lucas County. I did not consider that claim more factual than most of what my father told me – he had a gift for fantasy. But it is undeniable that his mother, and perhaps her parents as well, were born here, that she, Susan Dean Snow, was a longtime teacher and principal in the Toledo Public Schools, as was my mother, Catherine Howard Snow.

I myself am not an alumna of this university, though my parents both were, as is my brother. In fact, I have a sneaking suspicion that my brother John Snow is the reason I am here. He is the classic successful sibling, the one that our parents bragged about. He got a PhD in economics,



brother. But with him I can very reliably disagree. I identify strongly with Maureen Dowd, the left-leaning NYT columnist, who lets her right wing brother write her column once a year – if they weren't in the family, why would we bother to talk to them?

I suppose most people are proud when a family member joins the president's cabinet. I admit to you here, publicly, that I was deeply shamed that a member of my family would agree to work with George Bush and Dick Cheney. I spent the four years John was in the cabinet trying to convince him to get out, to make a big fuss about the war in Iraq, the treatment of political prisoners, the violation of civil rights, the undermining of the economy. Before the 2004 election, I told him 'John, if you resigned publicly and frankly, and if you went back to your roots in Ohio and explained to the voters there what a disaster Bush is, you could determine this entire election.' Instead, he came to Ohio and stumped for Bush, and I still blame him for John Roberts and Samuel Alito.

But, as I said, I also value the chance to argue these matters with someone I have known so long, with someone who has to stay in the argument because we are, after all, brother and sister, aunt and uncle to each other's children, great aunt and great uncle to each other's grandchildren, with someone whose good qualities I also must acknowledge. He is friendly, jovial, hospitable, a loving uncle, an effective executive, and, I am sure the University of Toledo is hoping, very generous. I don't argue with John to convince him I am right – I argue with him to understand his point of view, to evaluate the validity of his arguments, to identify the points on which he is right and I am wrong, to sharpen my own case by deeply understanding his. I think that the kind of fierce debates we have are crucial to my functioning as a citizen, and also to his.

So if I dared to offer you advice as you start on the next stage of your lives, it would be to ensure you have a debate partner who will challenge you seriously in your views. If you, unlike me and Maureen Dowd, do not have a politically oppositional brother, then find another family member, or a friend, or expand your access to disagreeable views in other ways. If you are inclined to watch MSNBC, turn on Fox News once in a while. If you are a Fox News fan, then just check out what Rachel Maddow or Keith Olbermann has to say. Follow the policy of the New York Times, which has established the pre-eminent op-ed page in the country by hiring right-wing and left-wing columnists to comment on the same issues from their different perspectives, thus offering the reader the challenge of resolving opposing arguments every single day.

I urge you as well to consider the value of debate in the lives and the education of your children. Schools are all too often designed as places where adults ask all the questions and know all the answers. I would argue that schools only start to educate children when they present them with questions to which there are no answers – true dilemmas that can be endlessly discussed but never fully resolved. I(y)20(o)-10(u a)4( [(t)-6(r)-1 )]TJ 32(n t)-2(heu)2(e)6(ir)5( d)gnen4(r)-7o6m wchooltag

from school cafeterias? We use these dilemmas to teach vocabulary and reading comprehension