Definitions:

- Basic Skills/Facts: Lower level learning taught in isolation by typically rote memorization
- Higher order thinking skills and critical thinking: that requiring analysis and synthesis of ideas, comparable to Bloom’s taxonomy in those regards.

Assumptions:

- Conceptions of educational achievement consisting of two parts (basic skills/ facts and higher order skills) are central to our thinking about all areas of education.
- Tasks are more complex in the future for students than they were for people in the past.
- Politicians drive educational foci including educational measurement which can be used to support varied goals, such as general skills or more curriculum-specific skills.
- Higher order skills compete with mastery of basic skills and facts.
- Higher order thinking is based in philosophy and is not easy to break into measurable parts, hence the smaller representation in testing and measurement.
- Children need to be taught to use self-guiding skills, monitoring and self-correcting strategies
- The public is hurt by failure to participate in our democratically funded educational system.

Summary: Neither view of educational achievement comes close to approximating the complexity needed to correctly integrate both into a cohesive whole although cognitive science comes close. Our language also contributes to this divide, making distinctions and connections between the two camps difficult. To impact education, our views of education need broadened with an agreed upon common, integrated public view of educational achievement. New conceptions of teaching and learning attend to context and processes of learning and connection to what is learned. What students need to know and be able to do needs considered in context with the continuum of their lives.

Conclusions: Long term education goals need considered to create an integrative view with common language attending to the processes of learning and connecting the curriculum with our schools.

Personal Reflections: Cole’s summary offers criticism without adding any new specific insights, and although she mentions needing to address quality of learning overall she remains locked into a socially efficient framework. Bloom’s taxonomy is referenced, but Cole fails to take it to the logical conclusion that a learning continuum already connects the learning levels mentioned. Changing assessments to match fluctuating political goals rather than evaluating ways to stabilize education outside of political climates is not ideal. If educational achievement is connected to educational measurement which then drives teacher reactions, it follows that in changing the system there should be a direct feedback loop going back to that direction which is lacking here and not just a call to find new terminology.

Questions:

- Are basic skills/facts and higher order thinking skills actually hierarchical?
- If we say higher order thinking skills are more important than basic facts, than what are they really getting in terms of useful tools in our world?
- Why do politics have such influence on education?
- What is the role of the learner in this view of education?
- Is new terminology what is needed, or is it communication about existing terminology that is needed?