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Goodman, K. S., Calfee, R. C., & Goodman, Y. M. (Eds.). (2014). *Whose Knowledge Counts in Government Literacy Policies? Why Expertise Matters*. New York: Routledge.

Whose Knowledge Counts

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How "literacy" is defined and how it is achieved in the classroom are the two questions that frame the current discourse on education policy in the United States. As a result of policy, literacy instruction in public education has largely shifted from reading and understanding stories to focusing on discrete letter-sound decoding. With the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) in 2002 as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the federal government instituted aggressive standardized assessments and school-level accountability for students' achievement according to federal guidelines. The "evidence-based" research behind these guidelines, as well as their consequences on students and teachers, are the focus of the arguments presented in this volume. *Whose Knowledge Counts* sets out to bring together an international panel of literacy experts who offer an informed and convincing research-based argument against the failed policies and trends that currently shape educational systems around the world.

The fifteen chapters of this volume are divided into two parts, along with a Foreword and an Introduction that effectively prepare the reader to comprehend the volume. The Foreword succinctly sets the stage for the rest of the book, framing the arguments in the context of the political use of literacy as a means of both aligning schools with the needs of multinational corporations and also of painting public education as a failed institution. One criticism of the Foreword is that the ideological bias is strong and establishes a decidedly one-sided political tone that reverberates throughout each chapter, which, while it supports the book's mission of effectively countering current trends, leaves the reader wondering whether there is evidence they may not be including that supports the opposing argument.

The Introduction thoroughly covers the history of federal involvement in public education and the increasing importance of evidence-based knowledge in educational research. Psychologist Reid Lyon developed the research program for the National Reading Panel (NRP) and convinced the panel that phonological awareness (PA) and phonics were essential for reading acquisition. The federal government initiated Reading First as part of NCLB, and schools adopted the program as a condition of federal funding. Lyon's simplistic model of reading (i.e., PA plus phonics equals reading) excludes meaning-centered activities and texts from a program that is tied to standardized tests that are, in turn, tied to federal funding. The Introduction is effective in both educating the reader about decades of education policy and unifying the remaining fourteen chapters around a common history.

Part I, "The Political Realities," delves into the questions of what "literacy" means and how it is it achieved in schools. The political answers to these two questions have far-reaching consequences for students, teachers, and public education in general. In the United States, Goodman points to the "attack on the teaching of reading as a means of making universal education a

failed goal" (p. 21) with the goal of privatizing education on an international level. Reading is an effective focus, because, as Goodman points out, if schools cannot teach students to read, then what value do they have?

In his chapter Goodman discusses DIBELS, an early reading assessment that came out of Reading First (RF), a program under NCLB that scores children on their ability to correctly and quickly sound out graphemes. This test assumes that all children learn to read in the same way: they learn to translate letters to sounds before they understand context and meaning. The test also ignores the range of cultural and educational backgrounds of the children who must take it. For example, children who do not speak the test language as a first language are expected to reach the same benchmarks as other children. Teachers are compelled to spend considerable class time teaching to this specific test, and, so far, very little benefit in reading comprehension, especially after third grade and in particular for at-risk students, have been found as a result of this program. Goodman concludes that the program caters to a desire for quantitative data that can show in a simple snapshot that public education is failing.

The Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), a project of USAID to help developing countries assess their literacy needs, adapted DIBELS as its assessment. The test was translated into colonial languages, which many of the students did not speak. Additionally, the functions and importance of literacy in the villages and towns where the test was administered was not researched. Evidence does not support the implementation of DIBELS as a unilateral reading assessment, nor does it support the usefulness of a solely phonics-based approach to reading instruction that must accompany this high-stakes test.

France and England are also experiencing a political shift in literacy policy. England's 2010 White Paper stated that reading is a bottom-up process beginning with graphemes and phonemes and, once those are mastered, proceeds to understanding. Balanced approaches to reading instruction that integrated discrete skills and understanding were discouraged. The Dombey chapter on government policy and teaching and research points to England's use of misquoted and even fabricated literacy research to support their causes.

In France, the government changed the official definition of "illiteracy" from an inability to read at a basic level to an inability to function in writing at a level specific to the needs of everyday life. "Illiteracy" in this sense can change depending on one's socioeconomic status and one's day to day experiences, resulting in findings that show a national increase in "illiteracy." The technical question of literacy became a political vehicle to damage the reputation of public education. Also in France, a code-based instructional approach was supported by the government who then asked city governments to buy specific titles that aligned to that approach. This highlights a theme throughout the book, which is the inevitable profit that publishing companies, in particular, experience as a result of the "evidence-based" reading programs endorsed by policy.

The final two chapters of Part I discuss the implications and consequences of the new demands that federally funded educational research should be experimental and quantitative. Sue Ellis points out in her chapter that the question of what the "facts" are is often at the base of many disagreements in education policy. Demands for "evidence-based" decisions involve a narrow definition of "evidence." The idea that "evidence" should come from rigorous research, which is limited to controlled experiments, reveals a lack of understanding

of the nature of the complex interactions and interrelationships that are inherent in the practical implementation of any instructional program. Controlled experimental investigations of literacy learning cannot account for the wide range of situations that children encounter in and out of schools that affect their capacity to achieve according to what is witnessed in a controlled study.

Ellis and Valtin both discuss the ethical uses of research and how political authorities tend to prefer the advice of who offer "simplistic solutions to societal problems" (p. 94). Valtin points out that research shows correlations between measures of reading and PA, but nowhere does it show causation. In fact, PA seems to be a byproduct of reading, not the other way around. PA, though, is a simple skill to measure, and if policy makers want to measure the worth of public education, a simple measure is easy to point to and quantify.

In Part II of *Whose Knowledge Counts* the chapters focus on the literacy knowledge base, which has been largely ignored by policy makers and commercial curriculum developers. Following from the theme in Part I of the contrast between discrete versus global reading instruction, Kathy Short's chapter is about the role of story and literature and their importance in retaining new knowledge, making connections to real life, forming and understanding global perspectives, and reinforcing the values of a society. She says that what teachers are asked to do today is to ask text-dependent questions that emphasize evidence, rather than connections, thereby decontextualizing literacy instruction.

She also discusses the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and their focus on superficial reading that is completely text-dependent. Her concluding claim, and one that is particularly powerful in the context of the book's themes, is that we are aiming too low by focusing only on literacy. Even if students meet the established benchmarks of literacy, they are increasingly left out of opportunities to interact with information in a way that empowers them to create and to question. Judith Langer writes about the shift away from literature to college and career readiness as a focus in English. She discusses two ways of thinking: evidence-gathering and open-ended searching. She argues that the CCSS focus too much on non-fiction and text complexity and not enough on literature and content connections. David Bloome and Melissa Wilson echo those ideas in their chapter and liken the discussion on the definitions of "literacy" to those about the definitions of "language." Simplifying and decontext-ualizing literacy instruction is essentially the same as decontextualizing language instruction. Children use language to communicate, and they require interaction, input, opportunities for output, and constant feedback. PA-based approaches to literacy and CCSS programs are in the business of simplifying complex learning processes to fit a political schema; they are not realistic reflections of what actually happens nor of what learners actually need.

Katheryn H. Au and Taffy E Raphael in their chapter shift the book's focus from instruction to programmatic innovations. They describe a "Staircase Curriculum" approach to building instruction at the local school level, aligned with standards, but with the potential to surpass the established expectations. In the curriculum building process, teachers become collaborators who work together across grades to systematically build their students' skills and knowledge. The authors argue that packaged programs are inappropriate for any particular school because they are designed to fit many settings. They pay more attention to lower-level skills but give less to reading comprehension and analysis. Teachers are

encouraged to evaluate external benchmarks critically and to consider themselves competent professionals able to make decisions that will help their students. This chapter serves as an excellent example of what can be done at the local school level to regain control over school curricula, but it simplifies the process as one that solely involves the collaboration of teachers; it does not touch on the essential aspect of the leadership and buy-in that must exist to see a project of this magnitude to fruition.

The reoccurring themes in the book overlapped often, and were almost redundant at times; however, the research and specific instances of data misuse that each author brought to his or her chapter provided depth to the topic of education policy and its actual intended or unintended consequences on education.

The theme of dichotomies is present in each chapter: phonics versus whole-language, government versus private control, student-centered versus standardized programs, and decontextualization versus contextualization. All of the recent political arguments about the efficacy of public education boil down to simple questions that, on the surface, are technical questions. They become political when legislators decide to determine the success of public education by how it performs according to one simple question. To muddy these waters, the benchmarks that students are expected to meet, according to these experts, are not based on reliable research and often go counter to the educational knowledge base. The book provides a strong case for educators and education professionals to take a stand against mandated programs that have the potential to harm not only our students, but also teachers and the institution of public education.

Yetta M. Goodman, one of the volume's editors, writes the concluding comments and effectively brings together the common threads of the book's chapters, and she ends with a call to action to push back against the onslaught of packaged curricula and standardized tests that devalue both teachers and students. The final comments provide a strong ending to a cohesive and thorough examination of the causes and consequences of the increasing marginalization of knowledge and best practices in education. Overall the book succeeds in its mission to join a range of perspectives from literacy experts to offer a thorough counter to the proliferation of baseless claims about how children learn that have so overwhelmingly shaped American policy and public education.