

## Chapter 18

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# Literacy Education 2.0

## Looking through the Rear Vision Mirror as We Move Ahead

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I begin this chapter with a backward look at the developments that we have endured, the present issues and developments that we are confronting, and some comments on perceived needs. In the second half of the chapter, I shift to the road ahead and explore the possibilities around a new narrative tied to reprofessionalization of teaching, rethinking the nature of educational research, and its relationship to practice and visioning literacies anew.

We are now approaching 2010, the start of a new decade, and developments are afoot which seem to be dislodging, supplanting, or shifting the prescribed standards and testing-based school improvement models that have begun to be viewed as corrupted. With the discrediting of some of the major policy directions of the past 20 years, we are seeing the beginnings of a shift in orientation away from the federal controls and standardization to calls for collaborative engagement, the growth of learning communities and contemporary views of literacy. We see the road ahead as involving a re-envisioning of literacies and literacy education, shifting how we engage in educational research and development, reasserting teacher professionalism and recommitting to an ethical approach to our activities. My hopes are consistent with other authors in this volume. Shannon et al., for example, suggest a return to some values of the "social projects of possibility that expanded social forms in order to extend human capacities and to accommodate those capacities with more flexible social forms" prior to the reversals of the past 25 years. Allington argues for "opportunities for wide experimentation in policy development and implementation for creating more equitable and improved reading outcomes." To achieve such he questions whether "... federal policymaking should be largely eliminated and that such activities be returned to the states and school districts." Harste urges us to build upon social constructivist and critical traditions as well as notions of inquiry that honor the professional judgment of educators responsive to learners and the learners' communities.

## Looking Through the Rear Vision Mirror at Literacy and School Reform Models

Today, if you visited schools in the U.S., U.K. and Australia, you would find yourself still embedded in a model of school improvement, especially literacy improvement, which emphasizes achievement gains on a subset of traditional reading skills as measured by selected tests. You would encounter a form of federalism involving national testing, common curricula, and a pursuit of ways to align what all students learn. Global competition, accountability, coordination, and mobility are often cited as the basis for these pursuits.

This *one size fits all* approach together with high-stakes testing represent a search for common denominators where consistency, common criteria, and proficiency levels became the mantra. The problem arises that one size may not fit all and standardization of measurement has contributed to the ends dictating the means. *The ends* becomes teachers teaching toward tests, which are unlikely to adequately represent reading and writing or the different ways literacy develops or literacy education should proceed. The measure of success is defined by a test score and not a fuller set of considerations. And, the measure of a school's commitment is its alignment with prescribed practices rather than practices connected with and building upon the resources and needs of those communities.

The historic nature of these shifts cannot be overstated. We have seen support for a limited definition of reading, a lessening of teachers' academic discretion, an imposition of prescriptive practices and a narrowing of what counts as research. The rich diversity of cutting-edge curricula and practices developed has been displaced by uniform standards and attempts to align assessment criteria. If you were interested in teachers and students engaged in site-based teaching and inquiry you may have been dismayed or gone underground or left the profession. If you were pursuing rich forms of literacies, you might do so in the margins. If, as a teacher, you were engaged in research and development or enlisting your own observations and decision-making, your voice was apt to be silenced as you were expected to assume the role of technician rather than reflective practitioner. And, if you were a beginning teacher, you might find yourself appreciative of the prescription, but unaware of what might or should be your goals. As a beginning teacher you might find yourself struggling to survive a system in which you were isolated, alone, and overwhelmed. If you were a curriculum developer you may or may not find yourself directed away from a rich view of literacy to approaches that teach to what is testable, and directed to develop curricula or teaching activities tied to a narrow band of skills rather than an expanded view of literacy. If you were a researcher or involved in professional development, you would find yourself being asked to identify best practice from traditional research rather than your ongoing site-based professional research and development efforts with

teachers. Essentially, the U.S. and other countries which have resorted to testing and standards as a panacea have seen a massive teaching to the test and prescribed curriculum that flies in the face of diverse curriculum, teacher professionalism, consideration for language variability, teacher research, classroom-based assessment, etc. Too often the tests become the program. And, what counts as literacy falls much along the lines of what Campbell's law suggests:

The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor.

(Campbell, 1975, p. 35)

The educator may lament what has occurred; the cynic might assign malevolent intent. Sharon Nichols and David Berliner (2007) have noted that across the major newspapers in the States and White House documents that there was a dramatic shift beginning in 1995 toward tying discussions of education improvement to achievement and a corresponding displacement or disappearance of discussions of equity or educational opportunity. Since 1995, newspapers and White House documents make very few mentions of equity matters while comments about achievement have ascended. A number of other countries seem to have followed suit. For example, a recent examination of discussions of education across the Canadian provinces by Chan, Fisher, and Rubenson (2007) found an emphasis upon neoliberal discussions of education emphasizing educational achievement devoid of discussions of social development. In Australia, accountability and standardization seem to have become the mantra of the federal and state governments over the last 10 years. Indeed, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) seems to have assumed an approach to educational development tied to similar sentiments. As Australia's Hon. Dr. David Kemp MP, Minister for Education, Training and Youth Affairs, suggested to the Curriculum Corporation 6<sup>th</sup> National Conference (6–7 May, 1999) in an extended discussion of these issues:

We can't be sure that our education system is serving all young Australians as they deserve unless we have ways of measuring and reporting the outcomes of schooling nationally. The community has a reasonable expectation that the massive public and private investment in school education should lead to appropriate improvements in skill levels and general educational attainment of our young people. To determine the extent of improvement in broad terms, data has to be collected about how students are accessing schooling, the ways they are participating in it, how they are achieving, and where they are going after they leave school. Good

accountability relies on good reporting—at all levels, the school level, the systemic authority or State level, and nationally. If we are to have a school system for the next millennium, which meets the expectations and has the confidence of the Australian community, then we must have mechanisms in place that allow us to measure the key outcomes of all Australian schools and report these outcomes to the Australian community. We need to make clear our expectations for all schools—government and non-government schools alike.

In the U.S., the rhetoric was accompanied by mandates and funding incentives to ensure buy-in and implementation. Since school budgets are stretched to cope with ongoing expenses and are dependent upon funding from external sources, school boards mostly aligned with these mandates. Again, concerns over achievement gaps and a common curriculum for all supplanted an emphasis upon curriculum enlisting and building cultural resources and relevance. On first glance, these developments may seem worthwhile as they mandate that schools be accountable to all students and by requiring schools to report the achievement of various subgroups. On closer examination, these reform efforts may give the appearance of supporting minority interests, but achieve the opposite—at least in the long term.

Using South Africa as a case study, James Hoffman, Misty Sailors, Leketi Makalela, and Bertus Mattheo (in this volume) discuss how educational developments on a global scale appear to be adopting expedient approaches to educational improvement devoid of a full and long-term consideration for the home language development needs of diverse groups of students and cultures. In Australia, we see parallel developments in the ways the government's educational agenda positions indigenous educational initiatives. Politicians override calls for equity with an emphasis upon test performance and the achievement gap as politicians. One must question if the approach isn't subversive. For example, in the state of New South Wales a recent aboriginal education document developed by indigenous educators includes powerful guidelines addressing areas of need and issues of support built upon culture resources and respect with scant mention of achievement. The letter included in the foreword by the Minister of Education does not address matters of community development and cultural resources as important; instead, the Minister of Education identifies increased achievement as the key. (See New South Wales Government, 2002.) I believe the NSW aboriginal documents may be symptomatic of the tension between what many educators understand and what politicians (with the support of some educators) presume—the view against and for achieving sustainable equity as well as educational reform/improvement by standardized monitoring of standards attainment by testing.

In this volume, Patrick Shannon, Jacqueline Edmondson, Leticia Ortega, Susan Pitcher, and Christopher Robbins argue the policies of the past 15 years

are racist in nature and intent. In a similar vein, Kris Gutierrez (2004) offers a cautionary tale based upon her experiences with her own son after she moved to L.A. As she stated:

When my son, Scott, entered the second grade, he was a confident and fluent reader and writer. Several months after his entry to the school, I received an urgent call from his teacher requesting an immediate meeting with me. I sat nervously in his classroom trying to imagine what had prompted his urgency. I was concerned, as the school and its participants had had some difficulty adjusting to its first Latino (he is Chicano/African-American) to ever enroll in the school.

Our meeting began. Leaning forward, her voice in a whisper as if not to embarrass me, the teacher shared her concern that Scott might not make it through the second grade: he didn't know phonics. I was puzzled and relieved. After all, he excelled in reading, and his literacy skills were sophisticated for his age, a fact verified by their own standardized tests. It turned out that what he didn't know how to do (or more likely didn't want to do) were the sets of repetitive phonics exercises that he had been assigned for the past several weeks . . . I asked how she would assess my son's ability to read and, without hesitation, she replied, "oh he's probably the best reader in the class."

(pp. 101–102)

Kris Gutierrez suggests a number of concerns:

What is implicated in this very brief narrative is a set of complex issues that defines schooling for so many students today. It is an account of the consequences of narrow views of literacy and how a teacher's understanding of literacy is complicated and constrained by mandated school curriculum that was conceptualized and implemented of the knowledge and practices of its students. It is an account of the ways that we understand the competence across racial, ethnic and class lines. It is an account of the consequences of the ways we measure what counts as literacy, especially, if we only see it in snapshots in discrete moments in time disconnected from the laminated, multimodal reality of literacy activity. And it is an account of how parents can mediate school policy and practices.

The challenges my son faced are all too common, but they are particularly so from non-dominant groups, especially English learners. However, unlike poor and immigrant parents unfamiliar with the institutions of our country, I could mediate vigilantly and persistently the effects of discrimination and of policies gone awry. I knew that I was the school's worst nightmare: I was more than a meddling, middle-class mother, I was a meddling, middle-class, and Latina mother! This is no insignificant

point, however, it is a point misunderstood (or not taken up) by policy makers.

(p. 102)

Alfie Kohn (1998) in an article entitled “Only My Kid” discussed how accountability and tougher requirements tend to perpetuate the historic privilege of those who have learned to navigate the system well while excluding those who have not. Kohn (1998) contrasted the position of Dewey espoused in *School and Society* with the egocentric attitudes toward testing, grading, etc., of parents. As Kohn argues based upon Dewey’s suggestion:

What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy.

(John Dewey, *School and Society*)

In contrast, Kohn suggests that parents:

... are not concerned that all children learn; they are concerned that *their* children learn. There is no national organization called Rich Parents Against School Reform, in part because there doesn’t have to be. But with unaffiliated individuals working on different issues in different parts of the country, the pattern is generally missed and the story is rarely told. Take a step back, however, and you begin to grasp the import of what is happening from Amherst, Massachusetts, where highly educated white parents have fought to preserve a tracking system that keeps virtually every child of color out of advanced classes, to Palo Alto, California, where a similarly elite constituency demands a return to a “skill and drill” math curriculum and fiercely opposes the more conceptual learning outlined in the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) standards; from an affluent suburb of Buffalo, where parents of honors students quashed an attempt to replace letter grades with standards-based progress reports, to San Diego, where a program to provide underachieving students with support that will help them succeed in higher-level courses has run ‘head on into vigorous opposition from some of the community’s more outspoken, influential members—the predominantly white, middle-class parents of high-achieving students.’

The apartheid-like character of these reforms is vexing. Complicity with these developments or support of them, for self-interest, extends beyond parents to educational policymakers and researchers with motives that are both ideological and economic. There has been institutional and individual complicity at times and at other times a disregard for the violation of the ethics involved. In the U.S., the Inspector General made visible via evidence from

emails the unethical behavior of public representatives as they attempted to ensure that certain decisions would be made over others and moreover that these decisions carried with them certain assets (including position). It identified individuals in our field as instigators or perpetrators of actions to advantage some (including themselves) while disadvantaging others. They appeared to be operating in a manner which was covert, coercive, fraudulent—intended to misrepresent how decision-making was occurring. Certain parties were involved in a campaign motivated to mandate some programs and approaches to educational research and development to the exclusion over others—indeed, the exclusion of some programs, the exclusion of certain voices, and the maintenance of certain control of what counts as literacy, literacy progress, and literacy curriculum as well as personal financial gain. Despite admissions of conspiring secretly to gain advantage for selected programs, despite admissions of conflicts of interests, and despite financial disclosures of profiting, the implicated individuals seem interested in acting as if their behavior was warranted and the institutions deny that the program itself has been corrupted. Indeed, if we were to apply a broader lens to what has occurred, a number of institutions and individuals might be considered co-conspirators, collaborators, and beneficiaries of an initiative that was recognized as a form of apartheid in our field while others were the victims. At the same time, individuals could be identified as the whistleblowers (individuals and institutions) or as agitators. As I have analogized, the exclusionary mission reflected a form of apartheid and a desire to move an agenda forward. The agenda was not a democratic agenda; rather, almost a form of theocracy and control in the interests of some who have much to gain.

Those of us in the U.S. or Australia are not alone in terms of its past embrace of and current concerns with and criticism of the reform model. An evaluation of these initiatives has reached almost a consensus that the standards and testing regimen was unreliable and at times limiting as well as misdirected. Indeed, some countries seem set to abandon or soften the standards and testing regimen. In the U.K., for example, in a recent *Times Educational Supplement* report (“Test regime must change,” *Times Educational Supplement*, November 2, 2007), Warren Mansell discussed the criticisms by various researchers and others around the emphasis upon testing and league tables as the vehicle for leveraging educational improvements (<http://www.primaryreview.org.uk/Publications/Interimreports.html>). Mansell noted: “In a strong critique of Labour’s record, academics denounced the testing regime as ‘inadequate’: it provides unreliable information on Standards, encourages schools to neglect lower achievers, narrows the curriculum, and increases pupils’ anxiety.” Professor Robin Alexander, the project team leader, stated: “The consensus which these reports reinforce is now so commanding that it is hard to resist the view that sooner rather than later the apparatus of national testing must change radically.” Interestingly, the U.K. Prime Minister Gordon Brown was reputed to have said: “We must keep assessment under

review to ensure that it supports learning and achievement and does not dominate teaching.”

Certainly there is growing disillusionment now with the reform program as a result of the disappointing returns, and the corruption and collateral damage of the school improvement models tied to standards and testing. In the U.S., there has been considerable debate around the renewal of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), but only some of the features of the program faltered. There is now some recognition that the model of literacy extrapolated from the National Reading Panel report was limited to a narrow set of skills and areas, which perpetuated a reductionist and limited view of literacy and literacy teaching. Some query the motivations and ethics which led to certain findings of the National Reading Panel being overemphasized; and others ignored as policymakers appear to have cherry-picked the report to justify the approaches that they advocated and undermined support for others. As I have discussed, a U.S. Justice Department investigation revealed that the U.S. Department of Education staff and appointees conspired to support certain approaches over others, including approaches for which they had vested financial interests. The U.S. Department of Education personnel offered the retort that the means justified the ends, while expressing concern over some of the behavior of their staff. This is perplexing given the recent data on *the ends*.

In terms of the success of these efforts, many school boards seem to be on a trajectory which identifies them as failing at the same time as they are directed to set goals and adopt programs which may not meet their long-term needs. Indeed, the most comprehensive study to date of the practices derived from the NCLB and its offshoot Reading First are troubling to anyone who advocates these reforms. In particular, despite the insistence on the worth of the decisions, a study conducted under the auspices of the United States Department of Education of Reading First failed to support the very initiatives that they had advocated and prescribed. Reading First initiatives may have improved performance narrowly defined, but do not appear to be capable of achieving the broader goals, including its own prime goal of having more students reading “at their grade level.” Further, in areas such as reading comprehension and interest or engagement in reading, students enrolled in Reading First initiatives fell behind students in non-Reading First initiatives. The report suggested that the longer students were in Reading First the poorer the students did as compared to others. Allington’s discussion of the impact of federal legislation upon Title 1 in the current volume offers a number of similar observations or corollary evidence of the lack of effectiveness of these reform efforts. He traces how political and other influences contributed to prescribing certain suspect practices. He suggests that there is little evidence from the National Assessment of Educational Progress that the achievement gap has been reduced since 1992. Federal policymakers and media pundits appear to want to redirect the blame for the failure of the reform initiatives on teachers or teacher education and press for greater fidelity in what is taught



and tested. Meanwhile, educators struggle with the pressure to teach toward the test and schools struggle with threats of withdrawal of funding or public disgrace unless they do so. They find themselves facing akin to a Hobson's choice or a take it or leave it situation as they struggle with having to sideline or displace their students' other key needs.

## The Road Ahead

Over the next 10 years we are facing a major turnover in the teaching force and a massive global teacher shortage. By 2015, it is estimated that the majority of teachers will be new. I would hope that their preparation and induction supports them as *rich* collaborators and inquirers rather than the current positioning of teachers that mandate-driven prescriptions dictate. I would hope that we could align teacher development and preparation to a new ethical form of teamwork across schools, which respects and builds upon inquiry-driven possibilities. I would hope that we would develop programs that would support literacy development in a fashion which respects and builds upon the cultural resources of communities similar to what colleagues such as Victoria Purcell-Gates (2006, 2008) advocate. As she has charged, models of literacy teaching and learning need to acknowledge and build upon the significant ways in which families and cultural communities impact young children's language and literacy development. As Purcell-Gates states:

Teachers must be aware of what the children come to school knowing, and not knowing, and then must be allowed to tailor beginning reading instruction that will make a difference for all children in the context of real reading and writing activities. Teaching models that strip down reading and writing to technical skills outside of meaningful practice may show what looks like good results on skills tests, but these gains are quickly lost after grade two. Children learn to read and write better when teachers respond to them based upon knowledge of them as individuals and as members of cultural communities.

(2008, p. 5)

I would hope that we support educators with the digital, linguistic skills and cultural awarenesses to build upon indigenous resources, including language and the multicultural nature of our increasing cosmopolitan settings.

As the narrative shifts and we begin a new chapter, I would hope our ambitions move beyond an ideal that defines educational advances as improved test performance. There is much we should have learned and not done, much we have to learn and pursue differently in our schools and more broadly in our society in the interests of equity and opportunity. A call for or hope of a new narrative may not capture the full gravity of my concerns. Currently schools

seem to have been placed in a situation where they can do the best to meet the mandates of governments in ways that compromise their professionalism and redirect them from what they know and observe and would deem as priorities. Unfortunately, schools seem to be forced to deal with mandates that have the potential to move us further back than forward as compliance to *best* and prescribed practices, setting improvements in test scores as the target and there is an insistence on fidelity between standards, legislation, and practice.

As I have argued, the standards- and testing-based reform efforts tend to perpetuate interesting paradoxes: while they claim to be bridging a gap in reading achievement, they limit what counts as literacy; while they blame teachers for school failures, they give only lip-service to teacher professionalism and teachers' engagement in site-based program development. First, let me discuss the growing gap between what students may be taught and what they might need to learn for today's digitally enhanced world.

Selfe and Hawisher (2004) have argued:

If literacy educators continue to define literacy in terms of alphabetic practices only, in ways that ignore, exclude, or devalue new-media texts, they not only abdicate a professional responsibility to describe the ways in which humans are now communicating and making meaning, but they also run the risk of their curriculum no longer holding relevance for students who are communicating in increasingly expansive networked environments.

(p. 233)

Over the past 15 years, literacy has remained quite narrowly defined and restricted to what literacy has been, rather than what literacy is or has become today. Some suggest that the lack of responsiveness of schools goes beyond intractable views of what counts as literacy. Some suggest that the institution of schooling may not support the transition of these new literacies to school settings in ways consistent with their potential and participatory, including the possible shifts in power dynamics that might occur (Sheehy, 2007). The contrast between school curriculum and the informal engagement via the internet, digital gaming, social software, and media production has become stark. What may be accessible outside of school appears to have surpassed what most students in schools may be given the opportunity to access within schools. And, what may cross over to school may involve a mutation, which may not have the same saliency or worth. As Street (2006) argued, outside of schools there is often an interest in global issues, networking, webs, multimodality, flexibility and so on, whereas inside schools there is often a tendency to stress stability and unity. Indeed, in some situations, these new literacies are framed as discrete skills such as programming, internet access, or presentation skills rather than as learning tools with complex palates of possibilities for

students to access in a myriad of ways. It is as if learning with technology is being perceived as *learning the technology* rather than using a range of multimodal literacy tools (supported by these technologies) in the pursuit of learning. Similarly, Squire (2006) has argued that the approach to learning within most schools falls short of what digital-based games are already achieving—most notably, situated learning with an array of imageful resources plus an accessible network of others developing expertise and understanding through performance.

There is growing recognition of the need for spaces and the license to rethink literacy and redo learning so that it befits our changing digital literacies and the entrepreneurial, participatory, interactive, and multimodal experience akin to *Web 2.0* (e.g. in this volume: Harste as well as Lapp, Flood, Heath, and Langer). For example, just as the United Nations established functional reading and writing goals for the world over 50 years ago, the UN recognizes digital literacy as equivalent to those goals for today. Particularly notable are the Geneva principles on building the information society that were the focus of the world summit on the informational society in 2003 (United Nations, 2003). The summit began with:

Principle 1: We, the representatives of the peoples of the world, assembled in Geneva from 10–12 December 2003 for the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, declare our common desire and commitment to build a people-centered, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life, premised on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and respecting fully and upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The principles argued for participation “where human dignity is respected” and where we access these informational technologies to further development:

... to reduce many traditional obstacles, especially those of time and distance, for the first time in history makes it possible to use the potential of these technologies for the benefit of millions of people in all corners of the world . . . as tools and not as an end in themselves. Under favorable conditions, these technologies can be a powerful instrument, increasing productivity, generating economic growth, job creation and employability and improving the quality of life of all. They can also promote dialogue among people, nations and civilizations.

They emphasize the use of a range of technologies as fundamental to local and global problem-solving and development as a tool for search, inquiry,

exchange, and the expression of idea. They suggest that educators need to not just develop an environment for allowing students to participate in using a range of digital literacies but also develop learners who become:

- capable information technology users
- information-seekers, analyzers, and evaluators
- problem-solvers and decision-makers
- creative and effective users of productivity tools
- communicators, collaborators, publishers, and producers
- informed, responsible, and contributing citizens

Today's digital literacy requires appropriating skills in defining and refining goals, searching and selecting various documents, websites, and other sources for relevant material. Digital users need skill in gathering relevant material and considering how they connect or might be relevant compositions from these searches. They need a sense of agency as they engage in research and design as well as ongoing conversations which are complex, multilayered, virtual and face-to-face, global and local, identity-shaping as well as informing. Rather than the traditional triad of pre, during, and post, a different array of strategies and skills receive emphasis as one considers engaging with multiple literacies associated with project-based ventures incorporating web searches and other resources, multimedia and multilayered project development, and postings on the Internet for consumption and connections.

Without suggesting a rigid sequence or discrete categories, today's digital inquirers are engaged in ongoing and recursive research, development, design, dissemination, critique, refinement, etc. As they move across or within networks and web-like engagements, they are sifting, linking, sampling, following leads and paths, at the same time as they are doing forms of layering and affiliating as they pursue for themselves and others confirmations, understandings, plans, commitments, answers, directions, or acknowledgements. Those researchers examining the cognitive strategies involved in meaning-making online bring to the fore the importance of several strategies which may be somewhat nuanced in the networked environment—the importance of refining searches, forward inferencing (akin to predicting), making linkages and other integration in a fashion that coheres and is relevant, flexible, and recursive. It suggests that the meaning-maker(s) is/are engaged in simultaneous linking together of ideas (texts, images, and sounds) as the meaning-maker(s) refine(s) or expand(s) understandings at the same time as they evaluate them and assess coherence.

We are also aware that today's digital literacy requires a significant shift in the social bases of our models of literacy. Whereas traditional reading and writing models focus upon the individual and transacting with an author, digital meaning-makers encounter different forms of transactions (and co-constructions) daily as they engage with colleagues, collaborators, and

others in various time zones. It is significant that digital meaning-makers are often engaged in a form of group meaning-making akin to a jazz ensemble. They play with different personae, move in and out of groups or operate in all manner of fashions—unified or dispersed. Even in solitude, today’s digital meaning-makers may view themselves as operating in multiples, especially as they interact with texts of others and their own selves, including sometimes their playing out a range of roles. Building upon the work of Dyson (1995) and McEneaney (2006), the notion of participatory culture has been used by Jenkins and his colleagues to describe these engagements. As Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison, and Weigel (2008) define participatory culture, they suggest that it involves:

. . . a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one’s creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices . . . one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least they care what other people think about what they have created).

Affiliations—memberships, formal and informal, in online communities centered around various forms of media, such as Friendster, Facebook, message boards, metagaming, game clans, or MySpace).

Expressions—producing new creative forms, such as digital sampling, skinning and modding, fan videomaking, fan fiction writing, zines, mash-ups).

Collaborative Problem-solving—working together in teams, formal and informal, to complete tasks and develop new knowledge (such as through Wikipedia, alternative reality gaming, spoiling).

Circulations—shaping the flow of media (such as podcasting, blogging).

As Jenkins et al. (2008) emphasize, “participatory culture shifts the focus of literacy from one of individual expression to community involvement. The new literacies almost all involve social skills developed through collaboration and networking.”

Drawing from years of engagement in improving the professional practice of teachers intent on immersing students in digitally enhanced learning, Dwyer has offered advice that resonates with these views. As Dwyer (1996) indicated in his reflections of the advances and obstacles faced by the Apple Classroom of Tomorrow (ACOT), progress seemed to occur when the approach to teaching was authentic, interactive, and collaborative, resource

rich, and inquiry driven. He observed that students were successful when they were afforded access to and support for multiple representations of ideas, shared, critiqued, and pursued innovatively by a community of students that see the possibility of re-imagining selves across digital spaces and other literacy fields or spaces.

## **The Growth of Support for “Rich” Collaborative Site-based Research and Development**

Throughout this volume a number of authors call for leadership in order to develop a narrative that supports a definition of research and relationship to practice which builds upon social constructivist and critical traditions as well as notions of evidence-based practicing that honors the professional judgment and decision-making of teachers and their preparation.

In his 2007 NRC address, “An Historical Analysis of the Impact of Educational Research on Policy and Practice: Reading as an Illustrative Case,” Pearson mounted a criticism of the method of research synthesis used to guide the educational policy and prescribe practice as orchestrated by NCLB and other mandates. Pearson argued that the approach to policy development represented an important shift in a number of ways. First, theory development was “replaced by synthesis” and in turn the synthesis began to define models of reading, not the reverse (see Figure 18.1). Second, the syntheses seem to be used to leverage a predetermined agenda—that is, selected findings of the syntheses became the basis of legislation to mandate certain curriculum elements and teaching practices to ensure predetermined agendas would be enacted. In other words, as Pearson stated, “monitoring tools (to ensure fidelity in standards-based reform) and sanctions (to motivate schools and teachers to higher achievement and stricter adherence to reforms) are added to keep the system moving.” The end result was a narrowing both of the definition of research and in turn literacy via the selective enlistment of research findings to propel certain agendas over others. Again, a range of leverages were used to guarantee fidelity with an agenda of standards, testing, prescribed practices directed at addressing an achievement gap as measured by selected tests and a host of unethical (if not illegal) practices enlisted to ensure that: certain findings and approaches were supported and funded over others by key staff within the U.S. Department of Education selected committees to ensure certain agendas were maintained and not challenged; results were cherry-picked and decontextualized to achieve certain directions or emphasis; and personal financial gain seem to override the better judgment by and recusement of select individuals from decision-making roles.

Based upon his own research and review of other research on effective schools, David Pearson has argued that a more collaborative site-based approach to inquiry and teacher decision-making will more likely be successful than a model of research into practice which is prescriptive and scripted. He

## Theory of Action 2007

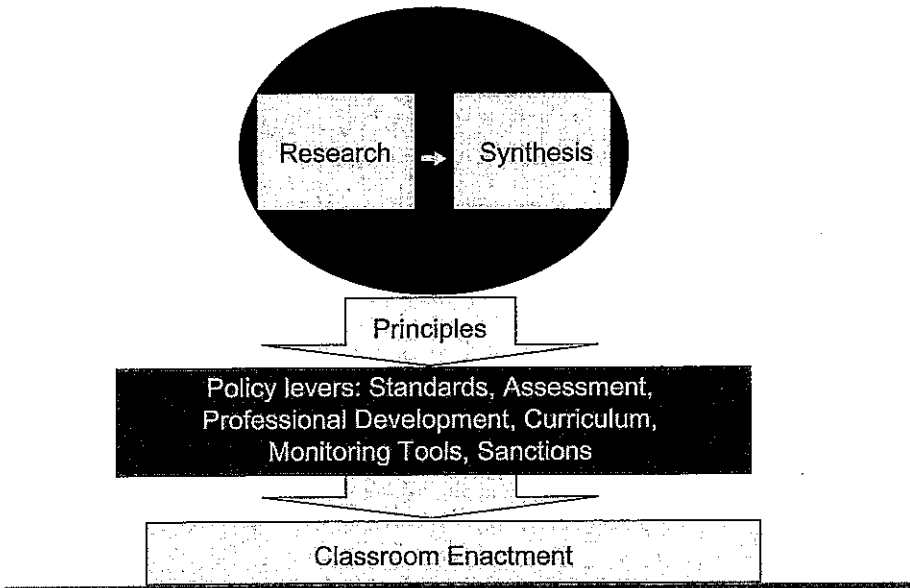


Figure 18.1 Theory of action 2007.

and his colleagues have stressed that most success occurred when teachers work together and use their observations to develop instructional plans along with customized ways to assess them to distinguish effective literacy programs (Taylor, Pressley, & Pearson, 2002). Consistent with their argument for a more dynamic interactive approach to educational research, policy and practice, Deb Butler (2008) has proposed a model for research into practice which re-establishes educational research as a joint collaborative enterprise between the research community, teachers, and other stakeholder groups. She argues for shifting to a model of knowledge generation which involves the collaborative engagement of teachers, researchers, and other stakeholders from the outset—from the inception of the issue or problem or question—to the formulation of interventions, pursuits, observational procedures, measurements, analyses, the interpretation of the results, and their use en route to shaping and reshaping policy (see Figure 18.2). She and her colleagues have argued for engaging multiple stakeholders “in parallel, coordinated, and/or collaborative inquiry” as a means to “simultaneously support teacher professional development, foster a constructive, progressive discourse in education, and enhance efforts towards educational reform” (Butler et al., 2008).

Both Butler’s and Pearson’s proposals re-establish the teacher as an

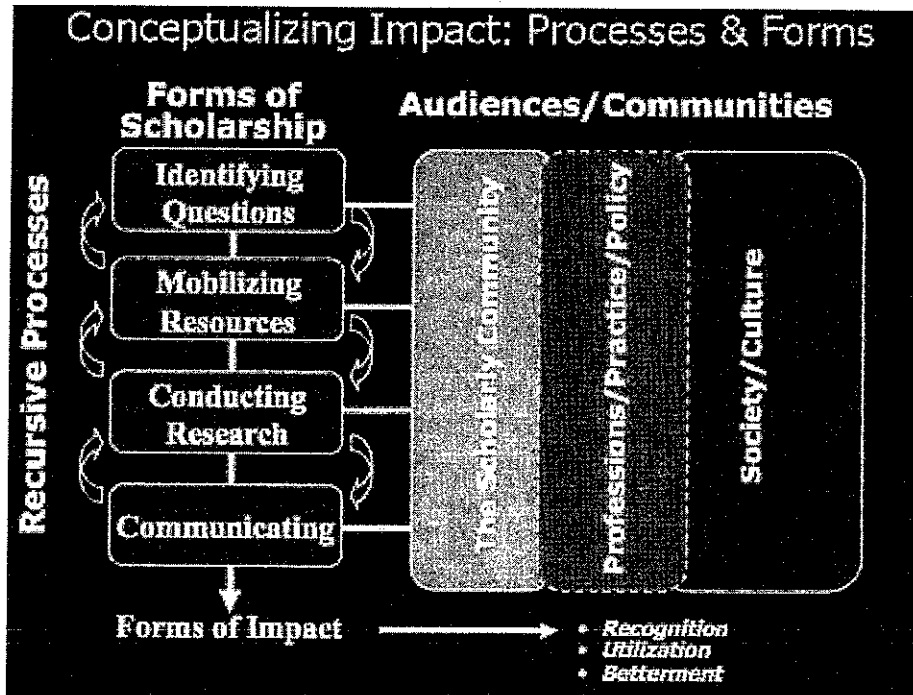


Figure 18.2 Conceptualizing impact: processes and forms.

experimenter, consistent with the notions espoused in the historic Bullock report. As Bullock proffered:

In our view, teachers should be involved not only experimenting with the outcomes of research, but also in identifying the problems, setting up hypotheses and carrying out the collection and assessment of data. We should particularly like to see more action research . . . for we believe that this form of activity holds considerable promise for the development of new practices in school.

(Bullock, 1975, p. 553)

The significance of these discussions of the nature and quality of educational research is profound. The typologies for describing educational research in terms of antecedent, purposes, values, processes and products may prescribe educational practices in ways that constrain or limit who, what, why and how inquiries are engaged. In universities it may privilege certain research traditions over others in ways that guide whether inquiry is exclusively detached from site based and collaborative inquiry. In the U.K., for example, the National Research Assessment Exercise has contributed to a type of social contract as applied and basic research distinctions are formulated and the quality indicators of such research are imposed (see Hammersley, 2008).



Whereas the U.S. universities have not experienced research assessment directly, we have witnessed the corollary narrowing of what counts as inquiry. In particular, developments such as the Reading Excellence Act have limited what can count and inform policy. In turn, these developments privilege some forms of research and researchers over others in ways that can, in turn, be corrupted by self-interest. In Canada, agencies seem to be addressing a similar question, but answering them differently. For example, Canada agencies seem to recognize the need for an approach to inquiry in the social sciences, which is embedded in communities, and tied to community engagement. Figures 18.3 and 18.4 reflect an attempt by the primary Canadian funding agency for educational research to render the nature of the dynamics of inquiry, especially the diversity of inputs that might spur research, the convergence at the point of inquiry and divergence of possibilities emerging from and with the inquiry in partnership with communities (Bennett & Bennet, 2007).

The notion of communities of inquiry is consistent with a return to Dewey's view of educational scholarship and recently touted by Bruce and Bishop in a recent article, entitled *New literacies and community inquiry* (Bruce and Bishop, 2008) As Bruce and Bishop state:

Community inquiry provides a theoretical and action framework for thinking about and working on these issues. It emphasizes the need for

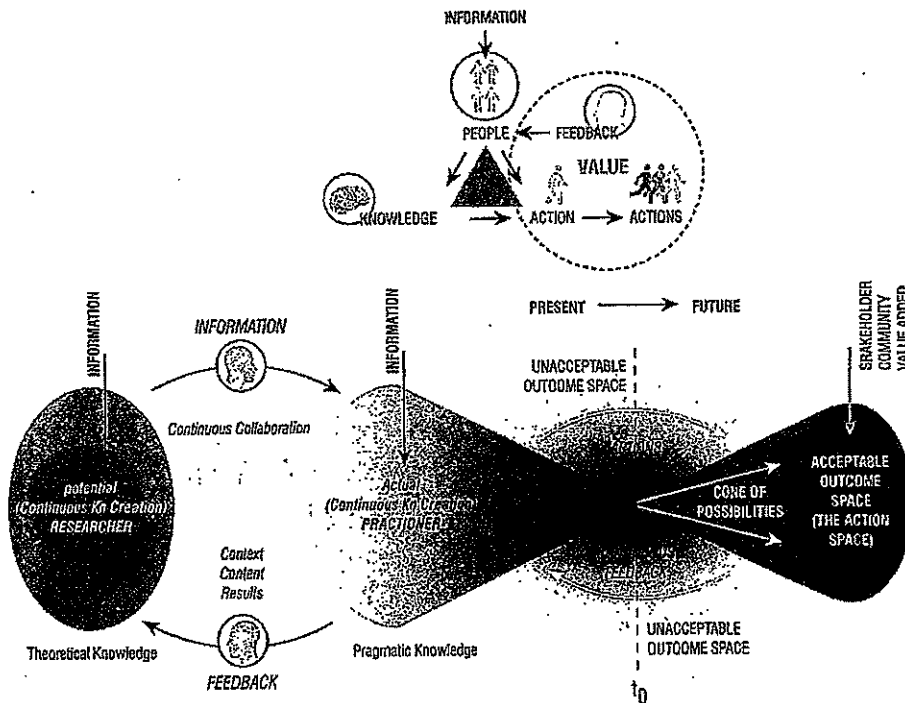


Figure 18.3 Knowledge mobilization. Assimilating and applying the right knowledge to solve problems, make decisions, and take effective actions.

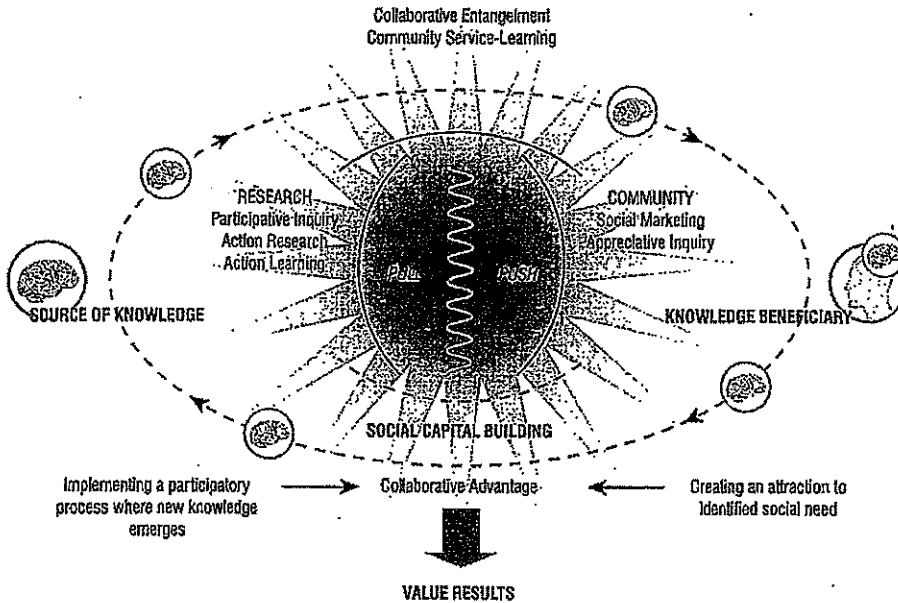


Figure 18.4 Developing collaborative advantage: as an organization, as a nation, as a connected world.

people to come together to develop shared capacity and work on common problems in an experimental and critical manner . . . respond to human needs by democratic and equitable processes . . . learn about community and its situation . . . recognize that every member of the community has knowledge which may be critical to solving a problem, but can be discovered only if that individual has a voice . . . communities become learning organizations.

(p. 711)

Within this Deweyian framework, inquiry situated within and derived from different communities' needs and goals; knowledge is negotiated, held and used in a reciprocal fashion by and with individuals and groups.

These discussions may be less visible in literacy journals, but are clearly and repeatedly addressed in current essays appearing for the broader educational research community such as through the *Educational Researcher* over the past two years and *British Journal of Educational Research*. In essays and book reviews in 2008–2009, matters of indeterminism of research findings, hybridization of research findings, site-based complexities, the social processes of knowing and the position of knower and knowledge, the merits and nature of research syntheses are among the topics discussed repeated. For example, in her recent book *Getting Lost* (Lather, 2008a) and her review essay in *Educational Researcher* (Lather, 2008), Lather troubled the return to positivism and determinism her recent review of an edited book by F. Hess (2008)

entitled, "*When research matters: how scholarship influences educational policy.*" Drawing upon Canadian researchers, Pitt and Britzman (2003), Lather argues for "embracing constitutive unknowingness, generative undecidability, and what it means to document becoming" (Lather, 2008b p. 363). In her article and other articles, we have energetic discussions as to whether or not research can be viewed as deterministic versus indeterminate or transferable versus situation-specific.

Overall, we seem to be seeing a potential shift to realization or re-realization of an account of educational research which encompasses a fuller consideration of the complexities, scope and dynamics of participation as well as alternative conceptualizations of the generative character within and across the communities pursuing inquiries. I would suggest we might see a new generation of research models for educational research, which connects the research enterprise to ongoing collective and sustainable inquiry.

## Closing Comments

The suggestion that the standards- and testing-based reform efforts may pass and shift to our rear vision mirror should not be considered farfetched. While Australia seems to be amidst a major struggle between its support for diversity and matters of equity and its initial embrace of a form of standards and some national testing practices as a means of achieving a new form of federalism in education, I am hopeful that developments both in North America and globally have seeded a shift toward teacher-based inquiry in all countries. Indeed, international comparisons on tests (especially the success of countries such as Finland) appear to warrant a shift away from standardization to a form of what Hargreaves and Shirley (2007) suggest is "post-standardization" where:

... summative quality assurance is replaced by assessment *for learning*, where data are used to inform ongoing decisions to produce better outcomes. In this second theory of change, the teaching profession is a high-caliber resource for and responsible partner in modernization, not an obstacle to be undermined.

Whereas standards-based testing as a means of achieving school improvements may give the appearance of data-based decision-making by teachers, the high-stakes testing has become more often a stick rather than a support to teachers. The road ahead requires a more dynamic and robust form of assessment and inquiry. It demands a richer collaboration among teachers, researchers, other resource personnel, learners, and community stakeholders. The notion of *rich* collaborative communities of inquiry might represent a better fit with the nature of educational decision-making than the singularly positivistic orientation and translation models that seem to be trying to imitate the physical sciences and findings that simplify the connection between

research and practice as well as objectify rather than humanize the differential support needs of all learners and reciprocal expectations of communities.

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