

Why Literacy Researchers Have Little Influence On Policy and What to Do About It: A Commentary

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For literacy researchers it is the proverbial best of times and worst of times. It is the best of times because researchers have available a wide variety of methodological options for studying literacy and they have collectively embraced theoretical and disciplinary diversity in their work. Further, there is an unprecedented interest in research findings among policy makers, journalists, practitioners, and the general public. There is considerable federal and private funding available for literacy research, and the job market for literacy researchers remains relatively strong despite a weak economy and the deep budget cuts in higher education.

But, these are also the worst of times. Policy makers' interest in research is often limited to narrow conceptions of literacy and of what counts as legitimate or useful research. Consequently, the methodologies and topics pursued by many researchers are devalued or ignored, locking many researchers out of opportunities for federal funding. Researchers find their work being misinterpreted or appropriated in ways that ignore the nuances and limitations of their research. The scientific method is being oversold as the gold standard for prescribing instructional practice, often as a remedy to imagined or to politically expedient woes (Berliner & Biddle, 1996). Research findings are manipulated and used selectively to advance political agendas (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2003). Between researchers and policy makers there is dissension in what has been described as a collision of alien worlds (Editors' introduction to Mathews, 2000) or as two games each with a different ecology of rules and goals (Firestone, 1989).

Many researchers, including arguably a majority of NRC members, gravitate toward the worst-of-times scenario when they see how literacy research is used to justify educational policy in the U.S. with which they disagree. However, I argue in this commentary that much of the attention devoted to the relation between research and policy within the field in general, and within NRC in particular, has had more to do with passion, emotion, and ideological positioning than with carefully considered analysis leading to strategic action likely to affect policy making or policy makers. Particularly ironic is that literacy researchers' moves toward the policy arena have often not been guided explicitly by our own literature devoted to the relation between research and practice. Further, I argue that not only is the field in a decidedly weak position to influence policy, but its weak position is fundamentally of its own making.

Lest I be misunderstood, I am not arguing against passion in our work as literacy researchers or in our desire to ensure that it be applied honestly and productively toward improving literacy. Nor am I denying what are clearly in some instances disturbingly calculated attempts to distort and to suppress research findings toward political ends. However, I believe

that when confronting this problem the field and NRC need to guard more diligently against an accusation that we are generating more heat than light, that we are protecting our own parochial interests, and that an appropriate and effective response can only be framed as guerilla warfare against an evil empire. Instead, I would argue that we need to understand more clearly what we are about as literacy researchers in relation to instructional practice and policy, how what we do or do not do might make a difference in the policy arena, and assess systematically what doors are open or closed to us in influencing practice and policy. We need to remove ad hominem attacks from our repertoire of responses, and before we demonize and point fingers at those who operate in different domains with different agendas, we need to not only understand the rules of another game but to confront our own complicity in the current state of affairs.

Specifically, I argue three points: (a) there is a literature about the relation between research and policy, and that literature should guide our understanding and actions more than it has in the past; (b) the weak position of literacy researchers in influencing policy is partially explained by educational researchers' historical failure to connect their research directly to instructional practice; and (c) attempts to increase our influence on policy should proceed systematically grounded in a realization of the previous two points. In light of the latter points, I suggest a stance and a framework for taking action.

ACKNOWLEDGING AND USING THE RELEVANT LITERATURE

There is a substantial literature in the field aimed at elucidating the relation between research and policy. However, in my experience as an active NRC member for many years, the substance of that literature rarely enters into discussions, implicitly or explicitly, in guiding how literacy researchers might be more successful in shaping policy or confronting ill-conceived or inappropriate policy. Although, it is beyond the scope of this paper to review that literature thoroughly, I will illustrate my point with a set of publications that are particularly noteworthy here because they all appeared in the *Journal of Literacy Research*, NRC's research journal. Between 1996 and 2001, the editors devoted 7 of the regular critical issues feature to issues of policy and research. That period corresponds roughly to several high-profile legislative initiatives in the US, which have been a focal point of discontent and concern among many literacy researchers and stimulated the increasingly rocky relationship between researchers and policy makers.

In fact, in 1996 (Volume 28), 3 critical issues addressed the relation between research and policy. Two of those critical issues features initiated a dialogue between researchers and policy makers. Four literacy researchers representing different orientations to research were invited to write about what they would most like to communicate to educational policy makers (Alvermann, 1996; Green & Dixon, 1996; Pearson, 1996; Quint, 1996), and 3 policy makers were invited to respond in a subsequent issue: Emerson Elliot (1996) who served for 38 years in a variety of federal agencies in Washington related to education including directing the National Center for Education Statistics; Gary Hart (1996), a state senator in California who focused on education issues; and Marshal Smith (with Cianci & Levin, 1996), then an acting undersecretary of education. During the next 5 volumes of JLR, there were 4 additional critical

issues devoted to issues of research and policy including pieces by Jay Mathews (2000), an education reporter for the Washington Post; Dick Allington (1999), Peter Mosenthal (1999), and Cathy Roller and Rich Long (2001).

Again, it is beyond the scope of this paper to summarize extensively the conclusions that can be drawn from this set of publications, but a few are representative of how relevant such publications are to conceptualizing the relation between research and policy and to guiding the field's moves into the policy domain: (a) Policy makers and journalists typically hold researchers in low regard, in part because they find that researchers typically do not communicate their ideas in a useful, straightforward manner (e.g., Elliot, 1996; Hart, 1996; Mathews, 2000); (b) The use of research in the political realm is always expediency and is not guided by logical and reasoned arguments (Allington, 1999); (c) Qualitative researchers will be more successful in interjecting their work into policy decisions if they can be flexible and pragmatic and join in front-end discussions of real problems rather than critiquing the limitations of policy decisions after the fact (Roller & Long, 2001); (d) A fundamental tension with which literacy researchers must contend is how they generate a unum of consensus from a pluribus of perspectives and sometimes conflicting conclusions (Mosenthal, 1999).

I would argue that anyone within the NRC community who wishes to take a leadership role in proposing how the research community should be involved with or respond to policy issues should, at minimum, be familiar with that literature. In addition, discussions about and plans for taking action should proceed from a firm grounding in that literature. Yet, in my experience, that has not been the case. I believe that one would be hard pressed to find evidence that the field in general and NRC in particular have initiated actions in the policy domain that are consciously and conscientiously guided by this literature.

THE HISTORICAL FAILURE TO CONNECT RESEARCH WITH PRACTICE

I would argue that literacy researchers are in an inherently weak position to participate in the policy arena not simply because they participate in a different game with a different set of rules, but more fundamentally because their game does not require explicit attention to the relation between research and practice. Further, that weak position is profound, pervasive, and multifaceted, which should give pause for reflection. As a field and as an organization, we have avoided addressing that issue directly, in part because, until recently, practitioners and policy makers had never really tried to pin us down to state clearly and unequivocally what research says about practice. For most of our history, most literacy researchers have had a pleasantly amorphous and ad hoc relationship with practitioners and policy makers, which has allowed us to conduct our research on our own terms and in our own ways.

For most of our history as a field and as an organization we have been able to choose when and how we connected our research to practice, and policy makers, if interested in it at all, did so on a much more local level and issue-by-issue basis. But today policy makers are demanding answers on a scale that the field is not fully prepared to address, and they wonder why? The response has typically been that the research community does not yet have all the answers, that the issues are too complex for simple answers, and it is wrong-headed to ask for

definitive answers to such narrowly framed questions. However, given that literacy research as a systematic endeavor is more than 100 years old, it seems appropriate to ask ourselves as field if we will ever be ready to answer the questions that policy makers are seeking. And if not, on what basis can we as an organization argue to participate in or even comment upon the development of policy? It will be difficult to participate effectively in policy discussions if we are not prepared to provide clear answers to simple, pressing questions and issues, especially if we insist on an open-ended timetable for providing answers to pressing questions. Or, should literacy researchers accept and acknowledge collectively that their work can only be conducted in a hall of mirrors with little that speaks concretely to the real world of practice and policy?

If as a field we don't know clearly ourselves how our research is positioned in relation to educational practice, how can we expect to convince others that they have it wrong or that they are using our research inappropriately? The persistent soul searching about this issue testifies to its relevance and importance. For decades, educational researchers have continuously lamented the divide between research and practice and offered various ideas about bridging it. But, again, until recently, this has not been a pressing issue and often only rhetorical lip service has been given to this limitation.

For example, in 1982, Robert Ebel stated in his American Educational Research Association (AERA) presidential address that "We do not need more research that explains how education works, we need more research that will help us determine how to make it work better" (p. 10). David Labaree (1998) has convincingly argued that education research is a lesser form of knowledge—that it is, rural rather than urban. In other words, education researchers are all over the landscape in a peripatetic wandering among interesting and promising topics instead of building skyscrapers of knowledge about well-defined problems and issues. In Peter Mosenthal's (1999) terms alluded to previously here, the field has been more content with the *pluribus* and much less interested in generating the *unum*. These fundamental limitations and a proposal for addressing them has been echoed more recently by Burkhardt and Schoenfeld (2004) who acknowledged that education research has been of marginal utility in guiding practice or policy.

Also more recently, Ellen Laggeman (2000), a historian of education, in her book *An Elusive Science: The Troubled History of Educational Research* wrote, "[to gain respect as a field] educationists tried to emulate their brethren in the "hard" sciences . . . and failed to realize that their goals might have been better served by instead pondering what distinctive characteristics might comprise rigor and relevance in this particular domain of scholarship" (Laggeman, p. xii). Thus, criticisms of a scientific research that is defined too narrowly ring hollow when the majority of the research base in education sits comfortably within that methodological frame.

The field's position in criticizing ill-conceived policy is weakened in other ways too. We have set up false, or at least unnecessary, dichotomies that are barriers to finding useful and workable responses to educational issues and these dichotomies often fragment efforts to confront wayward policy making. For example, historically the field has dichotomized issues such as basic and applied research, qualitative and quantitative methods, top-down versus bottom-up views of reading, and, most fundamentally, the relation between understanding

education and changing it for the better. Further, it is noteworthy that much of the theoretical and research base over time is not about synthesizing practical solutions, but instead about documenting ever-increasing complexity and nuance.

Too many researchers have often been more interested in doing research within a preferred paradigm, sometimes a paradigm of the moment, than in considering how that paradigm contributes to developing good instruction and sound educational policy. They have not selected paradigms or carried out research within them with a clear vision of how their research might effect positive improvements in practice. When they do, they often reveal what many of us know implicitly: the community of researchers is not monolithic in its views about what the most pressing problems of practice are, nor what might be done to address those problems. As a field we are ideologically divided, which does not mesh well with informing practice as a major goal of research. Not only do literacy researchers conduct research within different paradigms and from different methodological assumptions, they do so from decidedly different views of what literacy is and what the goals of literacy instruction should be. Ideologically and methodologically literacy researchers, on the whole, are little more than a loose confederation of tiny, isolated townships within a vast countryside.

In short, the field does not speak with one voice on almost anything. A diversity of perspective represents strength in an academic environment, but it is no more than another dimension of weakness in the dual arenas of practice and policy. Even consensus documents are rarely consensual in a genuine sense. They are too often, I would argue, either carefully negotiated compromises, narrowly conceived positions that ignore dissenting voices, vacuous generalities, simplistic and self-serving calls for more research, or equivocal statements highlighting our disunity. Too often, essentially separate research communities have been unsuccessful in generating research that is useful beyond the boundaries of other like-minded researchers. An admittedly more cynical view is that too much of literacy scholarship goes little beyond advancing pet theories, ideologies, or, more crassly, simply introduces clever terms and arguments aimed more at advancing careers than effective practice. In short, as a research community, we have not historically been particularly focused on, even genuinely interested in, improving practice or informing policy.

There are clearly exceptions to this admittedly cynical view. There are many researchers who frame their research clearly in terms of understanding, and thus improving, practice. They first clearly define what is valued instructionally and what they hope to accomplish, and they then proceed to seek out relevant theories and methodologies. For example, Eisenhart and Borko (1993) in their book *Designing Classroom Research* essentially take this stance. They argued, and demonstrated, how researchers from different theoretical and methodological backgrounds can collaborate to address instructional practice in ways that might translate more readily into recommendations for practice and policy. Another example is formative or design experiments, which comprise a methodology that has emerged among researchers seeking to find ways that theory and research can contribute directly to transforming teaching and learning (e.g., Brown, 1992; Cobb, Confrey, diSessa, Lehrer, & Schauble, 2003; Moll & Diaz, 1987; Reinking & Bradley, in press.)

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I am not arguing that all literacy researchers necessarily should be held accountable for how their research relates to practice. There are many informative and interesting areas of literacy research that broaden our perspectives even when they are not directly related to instructional practice, and certainly the field of literacy research should be multidisciplinary. However, I am not sure that it is appropriate to refer to all literacy researchers as "education researchers." We might hold ourselves as a field and as an organization more accountable by reserving that label only for those researchers who are willing and able to articulate clearly what specific educational problems and issues their research addresses and how exactly their research is aimed at improving practice and informing policy, not to mention what specific recommendations for practice their research suggests. Those who are truly education researchers in this sense should be at the forefront of communicating with practitioners and policy makers, with other researchers relegated to more of an advisory role. Making that distinction may lead to greater consensus, a clearer message, and a renewed legitimacy among practitioners and policy makers who often see literacy researchers as a cacophony of often dissenting voices (Elliot, 1996; Hart, 1996).

To quote Cherryholmes (1993), a pragmatist, "Research findings are rhetorically successful to the extent they convince people to act on them" (p. 3). And, if it can be assumed that all research is rhetorical, literacy researchers have perhaps been too little interested in who exactly they are trying to convince of what, at least beyond the reviewers of their latest manuscript submission. Or, they have been too interested in convincing themselves and other researchers that their view is the correct or most appropriate one. Or, worse, I would argue, they simply aim their work at those who already accept their worldview. Doing so seems to be a decidedly incestuous approach to scholarship that works against conversations across disciplinary, theoretical, and methodological boundaries, not to mention effectively locking them out of meaningful dialogue with practitioners and policy makers who care little about methodological or epistemological purity. Policy makers want recommendations aimed at achieving well-defined goals, which does not seem to be an unreasonable request, nor one that literacy researcher should see as irrelevant or marginal to their work.

We cannot hold grudges against researchers who do the kind of research that meets the need for specific recommendations, even if they tend today to more often be those who operate narrowly within the classical scientific method. However, I believe it is incumbent upon those researchers not to bask smugly in their ability to sit closer to the policy making table, but to lobby actively for a broader view of research that would encompass their methodologically diverse brothers and sisters in research. In that regard, if as a field and an organization we are unhappy with narrowness in methodological perspective, it would be better to redirect our energies toward broadening the methodological base of research aimed directly at addressing instructional and policy issues and at making specific recommendations. For example, how can qualitative researchers get closer to the table in which policy decisions are made (see Roller & Long, 2001).

In summary, I would argue that whatever is not good today about the relation between literacy research and policy, whatever we as literacy researchers are not happy about, we are to some extent reaping what we have sowed. Historically, too many of us have not taken a strong,

explicit interest in framing our research in terms of practical problems and issues, and in the extreme we have relegated that role to someone else. Previously, as a field we have invested much in the scientific paradigm, which has relatively recently been challenged by other methodologies. When organizations of literacy researchers protest now that they do not like what politicians and policy makers are doing with literacy research and that research is being conceptualized too narrowly, the protests ring a bit hollow. When added to the natural divisions between the academic and practical worlds (Labaree, 1998), it is easier to understand why literacy researchers are being ignored and likely to be ineffective in our forays into the world of policy. The characteristics of a good academic and researcher are to think divergently, to explore and reflect on complexity, to be skeptical and equivocal, to make long-term commitments to exploring issues and problems, including withholding recommendations until all the evidence is in, and so forth. For better or worse, these characteristics are antithetical to the characteristics of a successful politician and to many policy makers. In short, we need to start our discussions about the relation between research and policy by understanding and accepting that researchers hold little currency in the policy arena, perhaps for good reason. Nonetheless, I believe that there are ways to maximize our influence in spite of our inherent disconnection with the world of politics and policy.

WHAT STANCE SHOULD WE TAKE AND WHAT MIGHT WE DO

I am emphatically not arguing that the field and NRC are wrong in expressing deep concerns and legitimate criticisms about how literacy research is being selectively appropriated and sometimes purposefully silenced to accomplish political ends, nor that we can or should do nothing to address manipulation of research toward the creation of ill-advised policy. However, I am arguing that the stance taken and the actions contemplated among those researchers who wish to confront politicians and policy makers should be tempered with an appropriate sense of humility based on historical trends in education research, a conscious awareness of the decidedly weak position they occupy, and a realization that they cannot make the world turn on their own terms through the force of argument alone. For example, as Allington (1999) has documented so clearly, it is not possible to trump politics with reason and evidence. And, as policy decisions become more political, dispassionate research findings and reasoned arguments will less likely hold sway.

I would argue that individually and collectively, as literacy researchers we need to reject the naïve notion that research findings have ever been or ever will be applied neutrally to practice or policy. Neither should we be so naïve to think that what is happening today is simply business as usual in the political arena. The extent to which research findings of national importance from diverse disciplines are being politically distorted or repressed today is a grave concern (e.g., see the Waxman Report, 2003; *Scientific American*, 2004). Education researchers in particular face a carefully orchestrated political strategy that has appropriated research in a way that at once plays well to an American public convinced that the scientific method is the means for solving every problem, that feeds on the misperception that there is a crisis of educational achievement, and that actively works to neutralize dissenting voices in the research

community, all of which is made easier by our own ineptitude in understanding and participating in the political game. Educational researchers in general and literacy researchers in particular are being beaten at their own game by those who know the research community's weaknesses and limitations and who can exploit them. However, righteous indignation is not going to stem the political tide any more than will carefully crafted scholarly arguments. A response is needed, but it needs to be a strategic response, cognizant of the research community's inherently weak position and of how formidable the forces are that oppose moderation and balance.

On the other hand, I believe there must be equal vigilance in resisting paranoia, conspiracy theories, and ad hominem attacks, even if those with whom the research community disagrees may be less constrained or kind. High profile spokespersons in the political arena are easy targets especially when their positions encourage, if not require, them to engage in a political rhetoric that suppresses nuance and qualification. But little is gained, and it is a disservice to the field, for individuals and organizations to forfeit the higher ground of reasoned discussion by engaging in the same tactics. I believe, too, that as individuals and as an organization of literacy researchers we would do well to disassociate ourselves from those within the field who engage in demagoguery. Further, it is unfair and ultimately unproductive to extend concerns, dissatisfaction, and frustration with high profile political demagogues downward through the ranks of policy makers, many of whom appreciate a broader range of perspectives and research and who could become strong allies in moderating extreme views in the political and policy arenas.

Some comfort can also be attained in knowing that even the most well-oiled political machine is not impervious to change or outside influence and is likely to become a victim of planned distortions. For example, Eisenhart and Towne (2003) have documented how researchers played a role in effecting changes in narrowly conceived governmental definitions of scientific research. Analyzing how such success was achieved might provide useful guidance for further efforts. Further, history suggests that eventually a more informed and inclusive sense of truth and justice is likely to prevail, even if current protests seem ineffective or weak. As Berliner (2004) remarked in an AERA session about governmental manipulation of educational research, "Liars are eventually found out and punished." The increasing number of states rejecting the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation and back peddling away from requiring second language learners to reach NCLB standards immediately may be signs that more reasoned and temperate views are gaining an upper hand.

As a field, as an organization, and as individual researchers we must also strive to keep our own house in order. For example, we cannot criticize those who promote narrow conceptions of literacy and the selective use of research to support policy decisions while engaging in those same practices. We cannot question the data used to support claims of a literacy crisis in the US and then use the same questionable data to justify the importance of our own work. We cannot dispute narrow conceptions of literacy development aimed mainly at preparing workers for the marketplace arguing that the jobs for upward mobility may not exist (Shammon, 1995), and then justifying our own research by arguing that it will prepare students to compete in the global marketplace. Instead of reinforcing that view, we could work to enlarge and reaffirm views of literacy as a fundamental democratic right, one that acts to preserve the diverse views and

informed dialogue essential to a democracy (see Glickman, 2004). Taking that stance is likely to resonate with many Americans and may be the Achilles heel of those promoting policies we oppose.

An even greater threat to the credibility of education and literacy researchers is the increased potential for conflicts of interest due to federal funding for instructional materials that is contingent on scientific evidence of effectiveness. In the current environment, commercial publishers of educational materials, afraid of losing sales without a foundation of research for their products, are beginning to fund researchers to investigate commercially published products. The situation may be moving toward one that is analogous to medical researchers who are funded by pharmaceutical companies (Reinking & Alvermann, in press). Criticisms of potential conflicts of interest and backroom deals in the political arena carry less weight and lack sincerity if literacy researchers choose to take a commercial and proprietary stance toward their work.

Beyond understanding that the field is in a weak position and why, and beyond keeping its own house in order, what can researchers do to oppose inappropriate or misguided policy and to encourage more enlightened policy making? As I argued previously in this commentary, those wishing to do so should first, at minimum, be well versed in the literature pertaining to research and policy in the field. Responses and actions should be consistent with the guidance that literature provides. We also need to identify and to promote stances and research methodologies that can directly inform practice and thus policy (Burkhardt & Schoenfeld, 2004).

In addition, I would argue that it may be useful to distinguish between the process and products of policy making. The two often seem to be confounded in many of our discussions of research and policy. For example, I believe such a distinction might have led to a more productive discussion of the National Reading Panel's (NRP, 2003) work, which generated much discussion and dissent because of its prominent association with educational policy. However, few critics of the NRP seemed willing to separate concerns about the process of selecting the panel and about the criteria for research to be included in the analysis and the NRP's conclusions. Is it possible the process of forming the panel and the use of its conclusions, if deemed unfair or misguided, might nonetheless be conceded to have produced some useful data and conclusions? Making this distinction may be important, because concerns about process suggest one set of actions (e.g., strategic moves aimed at interjecting more balance into the process of selecting panels). Concerns about policies that are the products of a process suggest another set of possibilities (e.g., critiquing meta-analytic approaches or countering conclusions with rigorous data not included in the review).

However, distinguishing between the processes and products of policy making may not go far enough. A finer-grained view may need to precede focused and strategic action that has much chance for tangibly influencing policy. Careful consideration based on systematic and rigorous analysis is, after all, befitting of those who claim to be researchers. For example, when the research community has concerns about policy, the following set of questions represents a possible framework for determining systematically whether action is warranted and what action would be appropriate: (a) What exactly is wrong, distorted, misguided, unfair, too narrow, and so forth, about a policy or the process that led to it? (What is the problem?) For example: Is it a narrow view of research? Is it the misguided or misapplied use of research findings? If so,

what exactly is incorrect, and what are the negative consequences of this incorrectness? What alternative does the research literature suggest? Is it a narrow view of literacy? Is it an abuse of governmental power and influence?; (b) Who exactly has it wrong, etc.? (Who needs to be convinced, confronted, or enlightened?). For example: Is it legislators? Is it also the general public? Is it a segment of the research community? Who has the power to change the policy or process? Who is a potential ally in moving things in a different direction?; (c) Why do they have it wrong? (What explanations and motivations are operating?) For example: What is the agenda, hidden or explicit? Is it strictly a matter of political expediency? Is it a lack of awareness?; (d) What are the consequences of not addressing what is wrong, etc.? (Is it worth taking any action?) For example: What would be better if different (or broader) perspectives prevailed? Who will gain or suffer under the policy or the process used to establish it? How would literacy or literacy instruction be improved? What different actions would be taken? If there are no major consequences, why bother? Will the policy experience a quick demise by virtue of its own limitations?; (e) What relevant conditions, views, factors, and so forth sustain or threaten the policy or process of concern? (What are the pragmatic issues and concerns?) For example: What role does funding play in determining the success of the policy? What constituencies are likely to value or de-value a policy or process? How are the popular media likely to view the policy or alternatives? Is compromise an alternative? What compromise might be proposed?; (f) What actions are reasonable and based on convincing arguments? (What should we do?) For example: What actions are consistent with the literature related to research and policy? What is the probability of success for each proposed action? To what extent is there consensus to rally members of the field around a particular action? What arguments can be brought to bear in support of a particular action? Are there examples of alternative policies or procedures that have been implemented successfully?; and (g) What were the effects of actions taken? (Did it work?) For example: To what degree were processes or policies influenced or changed? What might explain effects or the lack thereof? What did we learn? What are next steps?

Because the literacy research community occupies an inherently weak position, successful efforts to influence educational policy will require the major investment of time and energy this representative framework implies. Anything less, is likely to be little more than a quixotic catharsis.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Within the field and within NRC, considerable energy and attention have been devoted to discussing concerns about the current, largely unsatisfactory, relation between literacy research and policy. There have been some well-intentioned moves to confront these concerns primarily directed outward toward confronting or offsetting the misappropriation of research in the policy arena, particularly when it is used to further political and ideological agendas. Those moves are important and justifiable, and they should continue. However, I have suggested in this commentary that as a field and as an organization we should devote equal energy and attention to looking inward. First, we need to attend to what our own literature tells us about the relation between research and policy. Being guided by that literature will help ensure that we engage in

more informed, strategic moves that are more likely to bring desired results. Second, we need to look inward to examine the historically unsatisfactory and relatively unproductive relation between educational research and practice. Doing so will help us set honest, realistic goals in the short run and will lay the groundwork for strengthening our position to constructively influence policy in the long term.

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