

The Politics of Knowledge

Why Education Research Does (or Does Not) Influence Education Policy

Frederick M. Hess

The American Enterprise Institute

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The collected papers from this conference are available online
at www.aei.org/event1455.

THE POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE: WHY
RESEARCH DOES (OR DOES NOT)
INFLUENCE EDUCATION POLICY

AEI, 2007

Reid Lyon

The history of the profession has never been a particularly attractive subject in professional education, and one reason for this is that it is so deplorable of a story. For century after century...the profession got along by sheer guesswork and the crudest sort of empiricism. It is hard to conceive of a less scientific enterprise among human endeavors. Virtually anything that could be thought of for treatment was tried out at one time or another...It was...the most frivolous and irresponsible kind of human experimentation, based on nothing but trial and error, and resulting in precisely that sequence (Thomas, 1983)

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

- Pose significant questions that can be investigated empirically
- Link research to theory
- Use methods that permit direct and valid investigation of the question(s)
- Provide a coherent chain of reasoning
- Replicate and generalize across studies
- Disclose research data and methods to encourage professional scrutiny and critique

WHY IS IT SO TOUGH TO USE TRUSTWORTHY
SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE TO INFORM AND
GUIDE EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND
PRACTICE?

A FEW REASONS

- An Anti-Scientific Culture in education
- The Quality (or lack thereof) of Education Research
- The Effects of Limited Quality and Relevance on the Demand for Educational Research
- Complexity is Tough To Sell
- Politics Trump Science

Life Experience
Content Knowledge
Activation of
Prior Knowledge
Knowledge about Texts

Oral Language Skills
Knowledge of Language
Structures
Vocabulary
Cultural Influences

Language

Knowledge

**Reading
Comprehension**

Fluency

Motivation & Engagement
Active Reading Strategies
Monitoring Strategies
Fix-Up Strategies

Metacognition

Prosody
Automaticity / Rate
Accuracy
Decoding
Phonemic Awareness

Florida Reading Initiative

PREPARE AND SUPPORT RESEARCHERS

....debates persist about the merits of conducting quantitative research versus qualitative research. In reality the scientific merit of quantitative and qualitative research designs and methods are equal to the extent that they are applied appropriately to the questions under study... The question should be, WHICH COMBINATIONS OF RESEARCH DESIGNS AND METHODS ARE MOST APPROPRIATE FOR WHICH SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTIONS?

PREPARE AND SUPPORT TEACHERS

....teachers are frequently presented with a “one size fits all” philosophy that emphasizes *either* a “whole language” or “phonics” orientation to instruction. No doubt, this parochial type of preparation places many children at continued risk for reading failure since it is well established that no reading program should be without all the major components of reading instruction...and the real question is “which children need what, how, for how long, and with what type of teacher, and in what type of setting”?

Lyon, House Congressional Testimony, 1997, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004

Lyon, Senate Congressional Testimony, 1998

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