The Decima Research English Curriculum

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In this final decade of the millennium Canadian educators at all levels are being asked to justify their programs and instruction in terms of the requirements of business and industry. Curriculum development does not escape such scrutiny. In this paper I describe the struggle that occurred over conflicting ideologies when a new English language arts K to 12 curriculum was being developed. I describe what occurred when a personal growth model of English language arts was directly challenged with an academic rationalist model justified on the basis of appeal to public opinion and the needs and requirements of technologically-sensitive commercial and industrial sectors. The struggle that took place in one Canadian province over what many educators consider to be the central subject area curriculum suggests that this ideological clash is likely to characterize the most serious challenge for professional educators in the decade of the 1990s.

Dans cette dernière décade de ce millénaire, les exigences du monde des affaires et de l'industrie font en sorte que les éducateurs canadiens, à tous les niveaux, doivent justifier leurs programmes d'enseignement. Le développement du curriculum n'échappe pas à cette justification. Dans cet article, nous décrirons le combat qui eut lieu à propos des idéologies conflictuelles qui ont accompagné la mise en place d'un nouveau curriculum en "English Language Arts" de la maternelle à la 12e année. Nous décrirons ce qui s'est produit lorsqu'un modèle de croissance personnelle de l'"English Language Arts" entra en conflit avec un modèle rationnel et académique réclamé par l'opinion publique et par les besoins et les caractéristiques hautement technologiques des secteurs commerciaux et industriels. Le combat qui eut lieu dans une province canadienne à propos de ce que plusieurs éducateurs considèrent comme un sujet central du curriculum suggère que ce conflit idéologique pourrait devenir, pendant les années 1990, un des défis les plus importants pour les éducateurs professionnels.

Governments of the 1980s have given us budget deficits and policy by public opinion poll. Never before have our political leaders appeared to have been more sensitive to public perception of their performance. Provincial governments and the federal government spend millions of contract dollars with organizations such as Environics Research Group, Decima Research, Angus Reid Associates, and Gallup Canada to find out how constituents react to

policies and economic initiatives. Findings from such polls are taken seriously and policies are scrapped, changed, put to fallow for more seasonal times, or launched through widespread advertising campaigns designed to change public attitude to a "favorable" one. The Goods and Services Tax is a good example; so is education.

In essence, the appearance of governance by public opinion is a political marketing ploy. It is an attempt to merge collective public opinion with predetermined caucus and cabinet policy, necessitating at times reeducation of the public. Expensive advertising campaigns conducted by "communications" agencies for government are a phenomenon of the 1980s. The public is not the only constituent group polled, consulted, and wooed for policy determination. Commercial and industrial constituents are powerful and economically vocal and their influence is often exercised in ways other than through polls. Provincially, the private economic sector is a major contributor to provincial coffers. Because education often comes second only to health as the major drain on provincial resources, the private sector needs to be assured that education is serving their needs and opinion polls help identify these demands.

One need only pick up a *Maclean*'s magazine, the *Globe and Mail*, or a local newspaper to read about "average" Canadians' sex lives, reading habits, holiday preferences, attitudes toward immigrants and immigration policies, and opinions about educational standards as well as about graduating students' literacy abilities. The latter has been of particular interest during the 1980s. Canada's largest newspaper chain engaged The Creative Research Group to undertake a national survey of literacy (and illiteracy) among Canadians (Southam Literacy Survey, 1987). The results — not surprising, given the questions and items used — were dismal and were cause for great concern. Provincial governments took up the cause — results of the Southam study were also broken down by province — and initiated literacy campaigns to redress "unacceptable levels of illiteracy." Ipso facto, the schools were failing to produce literate graduates. Schools, teachers, and the English language arts curriculum were under attack by politicians and the public, the latter via its most vocal mouthpiece, the omnipresent public opinion poll.

The early 1980s also saw deflation of the economic balloon that had sustained growth through the previous decade. Provincial governments began to spend less on education and to expect greater productivity of educators to make up the difference. School boards, universities, and regional colleges were expected to tighten their belts and do more with less. In Saskatchewan, for example, educational expenditures relative to total provincial and municipal expenditures were lower in 1985-86 than in 1975-76.[1]

In this paper I will present an example of how one major provincial curriculum development project in English language arts at the kindergarten to grade 12 levels was influenced by the process and results of opinion polling

which purported to advocate what Eisner (1985) describes as educational consumerism and the personal educational philosophy of a deputy minister of education who championed academic rationalism as the rationale for curriculum. During the three years it took to derive an acceptable policy for the English language arts curriculum a major philosophical schism developed, characterized by academic rationalism and personal relevance orientations to the curriculum.

Consumer and Academic Curriculum Rationales

Eisner (1985) uses the term *educational consumerism* to describe the public's demand to participate in educational policy formation as well as its demand that teachers and school administrators be held accountable (p. 30). The term suggests that education is viewed as a consumer product and should be governed by guarantees; in short, that there be product liability. In the example I present it is unclear whether educational consumerism arose from the demands of the public — the public has always participated in educational policy formation through its elected school boards — or from the polling practices of the provincial government. If the "right" questions are asked of the public, especially those that require a *yes* or *no* response, the "right" responses will be elicited. However, the educational policy decisions arrived at from interpretation of opinion polls are the result of a political process and may be quite different from educational policy decisions that school boards might make. Public opinion polling is one process; making political decisions about educational policy is a quite different process. Yet those policy decisions, we are led to believe, are what the public demand of education.

Academic rationalism argues that the major function of education is to foster the intellectual growth of students in those subject areas most worthy of study, English language arts being one of those. English language arts is a particular discipline having its own content, concepts, and patterns of inquiry and represents a special mode of thought. English language arts is a fundamental form of human understanding and as such should be made available to all students. Central to academic rationalism is that there is a core of literature and reading made up of the most able and profound thinkers of the past and present, and that all students study this body of writers and thinkers (Eisner, 1985, 66-67).

As a curriculum orientation, academic rationalism gained considerable support during the 1980s. In 1983 Mortimer Adler introduced his *Paideia Proposal*, a manifesto on education which prescribed a core of essential subject areas (English being one) for the secondary school and which allowed no room for electives. In 1987 two influential books were published which further supported a prescribed curriculum based on enduring works of historical, cultural and social adaptive significance. These were Hirsch, Jr.'s *Cultural Literacy* (1987) and Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987). The

authors of all three books strongly influenced school and university curriculum development in North America by asserting that permissive curricula of the 1960s and 1970s had produced a generation of students who were academically ill-equipped to function in a democratic, global, and technological society.

Adler, Bloom, and Hirsch were critical of the personal relevance orientation to curriculum that they (erroneously) attributed to education's failure to produce literate, responsible, and informed citizens. The personal relevance orientation (Eisner, 1985, p. 69) is one that emphasizes the primacy of personal meaning and the school's responsibility to develop programs that make such meaning possible. For experience to be truly educational students must have some investment in it, with the availability of real choices. Personal relevance as a curriculum focus for the English language arts was proposed by English educators in the mid 1960s (Dixon, 1975) but never really became the basis for widespread curriculum development in English language arts in Canada until the 1980s.

A Case Study

In times of economic restraint there tends to be shrinking of vision and ideological myopia in curriculum development. Such times do not bode well for curriculum innovation. Eisner (1985) notes that in times of dwindling funds for education real educational priorities arise and that such priorities center on centralized control of curriculum, measurement, and evaluation. In the situation about to be described the English language arts curriculum emerged as a narrow vision through the rhetoric of a skills orientation, along with attainment stages of skills development and grade level evaluation to ensure that attainment stages were met before students progressed to the next level or grade. The curriculum also was viewed in terms of content and resources that could be delineated by level and described by objectives to be met by teachers and their students.

Just as the new English language arts K-12 curriculum was getting under way in Saskatchewan, there began a move toward centralization in curriculum development. First, separate departments of K-12 education and advanced education were merged to form a new K - postsecondary unit. The structure of this new department was dominated by advanced education administrators and policy makers. It became clear that there would be less influence by professional educators in educational policy making, including curriculum. It was also made quite clear that the English Language Arts K-12 Curriculum Advisory Committee was just that, advisory, and that the department of education was not committed to recommendations of the advisory committee. Williams summed up the Saskatchewan educational climate nicely when he noted that "Canada has moved from a tradition of professional dominance of most educational policies to one now of overt elected politician dominance represented by swings to the

right in fiscal policies, curricular policies and on many personnel matters" (1986, p. 45).

When the advisory committee first met it had a lot of work to do. Members had to familiarize themselves with the foundation paper which set out the philosophical, academic, and research orientation proposed by an independent writer. After several revisions to the summary paper plans were made to take the proposal to teachers across the province in a field study in the spring of 1987. Summary proposal booklets and response booklets were mailed to all schools in the province and regional one-day meetings were held with teachers and administrators (at least five from each school division) to lead them through each section of the policy. They discussed and filled out their responses during the day-long sessions. In all 950 responses were received, the data were analyzed, and a report with recommendations was given to the advisory committee and the minister of education in the fall of 1987.

The advisory committee studied the results of the field study in the fall of 1987 and recommended changes be made to the curriculum policy. Having done so it was confident that a strongly-endorsed English language arts curriculum policy would now be ready for development and implementation. The advisory committee was optimistic and united in its advocacy for the proposed curriculum.

It was at this very time, however, that the advisory committee first came face-to-face with political demand for a publicly-determined English language arts curriculum. In October of 1987 the deputy minister of education met with the advisory committee to raise concerns about the proposed policy that had gone out for the field study. These concerns, which were distributed in a written statement, provide the outline for the Decima Research English curriculum. There were 12 major issues at stake in the drive for a publicly-presentable English language arts curriculum. The department's orientation toward an academic rationalism curriculum is clearly described in these twelve issues.

The committee was informed that "the public strongly want to see the basic academic skills maintained and strengthened" (p. 2)[2]. Here was the committee's first realization that public opinion poll results were being used to determine policy for curriculum development. But the committee was never given either the pollster's questions nor the results of the poll. By chance one committee member had been telephoned by the pollsters and had written down the questions asked of her. The question about maintaining and strengthening the basic academic skills required a simple *yes* or *no* answer (or *no opinion*), as did all the other questions. The questions were of such generalized vagueness that they invited simplistic responses which could, in turn, be used to support any interpretation given them by pollsters.

The committee was told that yearly attainment levels examinable by tests of discrete language skills were required. "It is clear that the public believes there

is a basic level of attainment in the fundamental academic disciplines that all children must reach to lead successful, fulfilling lives" (Unsigned document, p. 2). Further,

> curriculum in the fundamental academic disciplines must define a core body of knowledge to be acquired by the student. And provision must be made to develop this knowledge in an organized, sequential manner. Parents expect, and have a right, to see their children learn in a structured environment marked out by measurable accomplishments along the way. (p. 2)

Here it became difficult to separate the public poll findings from the personal educational philosophy of the deputy minister. The committee suspected that it was being asked to implement the deputy minister's preferred philosophy through a selectively biased interpretation of the opinion poll findings. Other statements in the unsigned document presented by the deputy minister led the committee to believe this.

> Whatever texts are used, it remains important for the curriculum to spell out specific skill attainment schedules. These schedules must be sequential, such that definable responsibilities can be assigned to teachers in an orderly fashion. (p. 3)

The committee was especially upset with the implication that the curriculum was to be prescriptive and the teachers held accountable for their linear progression through the curriculum. There seemed to be no allowance for teachers to interpret curriculum in terms of the needs of students.

When it came to the teaching of grammar it became quite clear that the deputy minister was using opinion poll results to foster his own direction for the English language arts curriculum. The committee was to lock horns with the deputy minister several times over the place and role of grammar in the curriculum.

> Despite the trend away from teaching grammar and spelling as separate subjects, the public response (to *Directions*[3]) clearly identified a strong expectation that students continue to learn both. A means must be found within modern instructional techniques to ensure that both grammar and spelling remain focal points in language arts. (p. 3)

There seemed to be little doubt that opinion poll results were being interpreted by the deputy minister (and others) to dictate not only curriculum content but also instructional methodologies. In fact, it became clear that the deputy minister often did not distinguish between the two; specific content and skills, such as grammar and spelling, demanded direct transmission instruction to ensure that the content was passed on and the requisite skills demonstrated (by teachers and students) and learned.

At issue too was what was identified as the "mechanization of language" and the threat it posed in sustaining the tradition of our cultural literacy. Curiously, the opinion polls were not dredged up to support this call for the presentation of

language as tradition and cultural heritage; in fact, it is the great works of literature argument. A particular deputy ministerial bias was driving this curriculum demand by arguing that English was becoming mechanized by the media, computer technology (spellcheck and style analysis programs), and video communications such as news reporting and journalism and as a result that English was deteriorating. The demand to sustain the tradition of our cultural literacy shows the influence of Hirsch (1987) who argues that reading and the making of meaning require students to learn and have at their cognitive disposal a distinct body of knowledge. Further, Hirsch argues that this defined cultural literacy is a prerequisite for becoming educated and successfully participating in (western anglophone) society and its culture. Such a defined body of cultural literacy, by inference, would qualify as the content of an English language arts curriculum and it would readily correlate with a canon of the great works of literature as historically defined.

The committee had used the term *oracy* as a parallel to *literacy* because it wanted to emphasize the importance of oral language (speaking and listening) and redress the imbalance between oracy and literacy in the previous curriculum. However, the committee was told that "the Department (of Education) is concerned that an undue emphasis on oracy and on oral structures and the oral experience of language, may determine standards for formal, written English" (p. 4). This was another instance where a particular deputy ministerial bias was being brought to bear on the curriculum developers although there were no opinion poll results to support the demand. The committee was unable to make clear that there are levels of usage that describe features of both oral and written language and that formal written language does not constitute the standard against which all language use is judged.

The English language arts curriculum was definitely seen as the core of an educational program to produce the well-educated person. "Parents, and society generally," the committee was informed, "are clearly saying" that the features that distinguish the well-educated person are "the ability to speak and write in grammatical, well-formed sentences; to understand and care about the proper use of punctuation and spelling; to be numerate, literate and articulate" (p. 5). The demand for a unilateral, formal written Standard Canadian English standard against which all language use must be evaluated was reiterated in the statements given the committee. Despite their reference to research in sociolinguistics and pragmatic/functional language use the committee was frustrated in its attempts to argue that the curriculum must develop students' fluency in all levels of oral and written language, and that even the most articulate speakers do not speak in grammatical, well-formed sentences except in the most formal situations.

It was inevitable that evaluation would be officially seen as requiring a formal adult standard written usage as the criterion. However, this criterion was linked

with the demand to define yearly levels or standards of attainment which students would be expected to reach before passing on to the next grade.

> The department (of education) believes that the best advice that can be offered . . . is that it is important for curriculum to define standards of attainment. In the case of the Language Arts curriculum, certainly a basic standard of adult literacy should be developed. (p. 6)

Perhaps the most controversial issue that arose in response to the committee's initial blueprint for the English language arts curriculum was over the terms *correct* and *acceptable/appropriate* with respect to language usage. The resolution of this issue would have profound implications for how the curriculum was to be realized not only in terms of content and methodology but also of evaluation. The official departmental position was as follows:

> While modern theories of language stress the existence and "acceptability" of different registers of usage, a Policy Statement for Language Arts must speak out unequivocally for "correct" usage. Now, more than ever, is the time for a strong re-statement of the importance of correct usage, of a love for our language in its most powerful forms, and for a firm stand on maintaining our linguistic heritage. (p. 8)

This statement made it clear that there was no place in the curriculum for voices other than formal Standard English, synonymous with "correct" usage. Powerful forms of language exist only in the formal standard dialect, and our linguistic heritage is captured for posterity in this dialect. The traffic of everyday language, the language in which we conduct most of our affairs, was deemed not worthy of recognition in the curriculum.

Scientism, Academic Rationalism, and Personal Relevance

The committee's first encounter with the deputy minister over the policy for the new English language arts curriculum set the stage for an ongoing philosophical tussle which placed the academic rationalism orientation of the deputy minister against the personal relevance curriculum orientation of the committee. These conflicting orientations came to characterize the polarities of curriculum and pedagogical philosophy which were manifest in a variety of issues and processes in the proposed curriculum.

The academic rationalism orientation adopted by the deputy minister reflected the philosophical bias that he brought to curriculum development. The generalized conclusions and statements derived from the opinion polls were used to lend authenticity and validity to the deputy minister's orientations; not all issues raised by him were supported by conclusions from opinion polls. Where the opinion polls were used to bolster the academic rationalism demands for curriculum development, the statements were so general that only the issues addressed were supported in the most broad and vague sense. Nonetheless, the committee was led to believe that there were clear, firm public expectations for

English language arts for which there was consensus and that unequivocal direction was presented not just for the committee but for the department of education. The committee was being directed to develop a curriculum which would meet public expectations for literate graduates and the role of the department of education was to interpret those expectations in terms of scope and sequence of skills and content and annual benchmarks of attainment.

The philosophical polarities were evident in the model of curriculum that the department of education — the deputy minister addressed his oral and written remarks in terms of "the department" — had implicitly adopted. The committee was aware that the English language arts curriculum could be construed in three ways, with combinations thereof: a specific body of knowledge (content) arrayed in terms of degree of difficulty and quality, and including the "great works" of literature; a scope and sequence of skills that students were to obtain over the school year for each of grades K to 12; and a process orientation based on how, when, and at what stages students were to develop cognitive and linguistic structures, with content fitting in where appropriate. The committee's orientation was the process model, also described as a personal growth model (Dixon, 1975). The department's orientation was a combination of the body of defined knowledge and the skills scope and sequence models.

The demands for cultural literacy as the content for the English language arts curriculum constitutes an academic rationalist orientation because content is prescribed which is defined by a small group of academics who have determined that this content is relevant for all learners. A canon of cultural literacy would be unicultural but in a multicultural society such as Canada's the concept of cultural literacy would need to be defined in a plural sense.

The issue of usage further exacerbated the polarization identified by the committee. The committee was asked to ignore linguistic research on language registers, levels of usage, and attitudes toward language and was admonished to avoid lending support to the view that one dialect of English is neither more correct nor better than another dialect. Those who hold an academic rationalist orientation argue that there is one language and one culture, and that language is confined to a single dialect, namely formal Standard Canadian English in both oral and written modes. Those who hold a personal relevance orientation view an English language arts curriculum as enabling students to become proficient in oral and written Standard English, but not as their sole linguistic proficiency and not at the expense or loss of their home or mother dialect or language. The committee did not agree that "correct" usage was a necessary condition for maintaining one's linguistic heritage where that heritage includes peoples of varied cultures.

Academic rationalism became the official orientation for curriculum, especially the English language arts which the deputy minister had declared the most important curriculum area, when the minister of education issued his brief

entitled "The Year Ahead" (Saskatchewan Education, 1988). In this brief the public opinion polls were hauled out to lend public weight to the official expectations for curriculum. The brief began with an executive summary in which it was clearly suggested that curricula must be publicly approved statements of education.

> Introduction of the Core Curriculum coincides with a period of heightened expectations for our schools among parents and the general public. In this brief, the Minister of Education suggests how the new curriculum can satisfy these expectations while building on sound educational practice. (unnumbered)

The brief went on to describe how a publicly acceptable curriculum would be achieved. It must "have a strong foundation in academic content" (p. 1); there must be "proficiency levels . . . set out in a manner that provides guidance for both teachers and students" (p. 6). Furthermore, particularly in terms of literacy, "there may be a need to raise proficiency levels beyond the present standard" (p. 6). Another curriculum expectation was a common body of knowledge which all students should possess. Curriculum developers were warned that a process approach to learning had been adopted at the expense of content learning, so that the potential existed "for children to progress through successive grades without ever fully mastering the knowledge and skills they should be learning at each stage" (p. 7). With respect to evaluation, "parents want to know how their children are faring in some meaningful and objective sense" (p. 7). Finally, it was noted that educators are coming under more public pressure to be accountable, with obvious implications for the structure and content of the curriculum and for student and curriculum evaluation.

Following the publication of the brief, which officially sanctified the academic rationalist approach of Saskatchewan Education for curriculum development, a lengthy process of negotiation took place between the committee and the deputy minister during which time revised policy papers went forward and came back with demands for further modification. The enduring controversial issues were the emphasis and scope of oracy processes, prescriptive language standards, Standard English as the arbiter of correct usage, authoritative critical analysis of text against which responses are evaluated, a teacher-proof prescriptive curriculum, the need for prescriptive grammar, and process at the expense of content.

This perception of process at the expense of content was a central part of the demand for a Decima Research English curriculum. The perception exists, the committee was ostensibly informed through the opinion pollsters, that the process English curriculum has produced a generation of students who are basically illiterate, or at least subliterate, who are ignorant of the fine literature at the core of English, who are naive users of the rich vocabulary that makes up the English language, and who are unschooled in grammatical structures with which they can analyze language and become better writers. It was inferred that

20 years of process English has failed, and it is time to return to a knowledge-based English curriculum, one that deals with grammar, traditional literature, spelling, and punctuation.

There is nothing new in the claim that schools have failed to produce literate graduates. A recent phenomenon, however, is that opinion polls are being used to create a sense of wide-spread public outrage, hence the pervasiveness of the problem and the need for immediate and drastic action. This has led the department of education, through its spokesperson, the deputy minister, to demand a restorative curriculum guaranteeing higher standards and accountability.

Curiously, it had never occurred to policy makers who analyze and draw implications from the opinion polls that only now is the personal growth focus and process orientation championed at the Dartmouth conference on English education in 1966 (Dixon, 1975; Squire, 1966) being incorporated in English curricula. In fact, English educators have never given the process approach a chance to succeed or fail. The current cries for back-to-the-basics (knowledge-based) English curricula are really pleas for no change. Parents of children in school, the main subjects of education opinion polls, believe that the education they received suited them well (they consider themselves successful) and thus will suit their children equally well.

Another curiosity is revealed in the deputy minister's written appeal in 1989 to the academic community in the battle against process educators and curriculum developers.[4] The minister speaks of the belief that the age of information and the explosion of knowledge marking the final quarter of the century occurs only in the sciences and technology fields and "has no significant impact on the amount of information needed to grasp English" (p. 10).

The underlying ideology is that English hasn't changed and language hasn't changed. How we use the language, learn the language, or teach the language is not an aspect of science and technology. There is lack of understanding of what constitutes literature in English and how literature has undergone considerable change particularly in multicultural Canada. Further, it is suggested that language as a content area is fixed and no external influences can be tolerated. In short, the complex interrelationships of language, thought, society, and culture are ignored.

The very shifts that have occurred in how literacy is understood by linguists and educators are ignored in the Decima Research English curriculum. The strides in thinking in reader-response theory, the act of reading, the process of writing, and functional approaches to grammar are ignored as well. No parent responding today to an education opinion poll could speak with the benefit of this "new literacy."

Politically Correct Literacy

The political policy push towards what I have chosen to call the Decima Research English curriculum can only be considered a reductionist, restrictive one. Any English curriculum policy whose rationale is built on academic rationalism and public opinion of a generation removed, and interpreted by those with political expediency rather than pedagogy as their motivation, must be conservative, narrow, and technocratic. What I fear is the evolution of curriculum for empowerment to curriculum for servitude, involving an expectation that education should serve the needs of the business, industrial, commercial world. English educators, with their humanistic, process-oriented, naturalistic ideologies are seen as enemies of their own discipline, one which requires defending in the face of liberal relativism and linguistic lassitude.

The Saskatchewan phenomenon is not an isolated one, although what may be unique is the direct involvement of a deputy minister of education in the development of an English language arts curriculum policy. But what is clear from the Saskatchewan experience is that the English Language Arts curriculum was seen as being at the very heart of literacy education; it was the most important curriculum, and therefore it had to be "right" ideologically and politically. Being right meant that the policy was to be a political public statement as well as an educational one, and what better way to ensure that than to have it address the concerns expressed by the perceived consumers of education, the public.

Politicalization of English language arts curricula, a phenomenon of the 1980s and 1990s, is prevalent beyond Canada. Reporting on recent developments in Australia on literacy education and assessment, Green notes:

> 'English' is clearly seen (in these recent policy developments) as both the major means of and the principal forum for literacy assessment. Indeed, 'English' is pretty much equated with 'literacy' generally; which is to say, the literacy project of schooling is associated almost unanimously with subject English, and literacy education, conceived rather ambiguously, is located firmly at the heart of English teaching. (Green, 1989, p.22)

In a recent issue of *Phi Delta Kappan,* in which curriculum reform was the focus, Eisner (1990) lamented that "it irks those of us who have devoted our professional lives to the study of curriculum to find that, when efforts are made to improve the schools, we are the least likely to be consulted" (p. 523). In the same issue Apple noted that the former United States Secretary of Education William Bennett believed that the people had risen up in a grassroots movement for educational reform. Bennett's response was

> to take authority away from many of the professional educators who have supposedly had it. This attitude (claims Eisner) bespeaks a profound mistrust of teachers, administrators, and curriculum scholars. They are decidedly not part of the solution; they are part of the problem. (p. 527)

I have concluded that the leading educational policy makers in Saskatchewan believed that the English language arts curriculum advisory committee was part of the perceived problem, that of unacceptably low literary levels of school graduates.

What do English educators do in the face of the Decima Research English curriculum movement? Do we become politicalized too? That would seem to be the answer, because our failure as curriculum experts has been to neglect publicizing our knowledge, including that of pedagogy. The charge has often been made that educational research has failed to have a significant impact on classroom teaching, that teachers teach as they were taught. If I am correct in asserting that only now research and ideology in English language arts education is making a significant impact on curriculum development, and through curriculum inservice to teaching, then political and public we must become.

Is the new English language arts K to 12 curriculum in Saskatchewan a Decima Research, academic rationalist English curriculum? No, it is not, thanks to a strong, united, intelligent, and knowledgable advisory committee. But, given a weaker committee, it would have succumbed to the academic rationalists, the politicians, and those who interpret the opinion polls.

Notes

1. Data for 1975-1976: Statistics Canada (1983), *Decade of educational finance - 1970-71 to 1978-80*, Table 2, pp. 40-62. Data for 1985-1986: Statistics Canada (1987), *Advance statistics of education, 1987-88*, Table 12, pp. 30-31. See also Decore & Pannu (1986), pp. 31-32.

2. These quotations are from an eight-page statement which was unsigned, undated, and without institutional identification. It was distributed to advisory committee members on October 7, 1987 when the deputy minister addressed the advisory committee.

3. *Directions* is the report of the Minister's Advisory Committee, Curriculum and Instruction Review, in which public response from meetings and questionnaires between 1982 and 1984 was incorporated.

4. The deputy minister sent a paper entitled *The Place and Role of Knowledge in School Curricula in Saskatchewan* to faculty members at the province's two universities dated April, 1989.

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