

## *Book Reviews Online / Recensions en ligne*

James F Baumann and Edward J. Kame'enui. (Eds.). (2004). *Vocabulary Instruction: Research to Practice*. New York: The Guilford Press. 244 pages. ISBN: 1-57230-982-2 (paperback)

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The issue of vocabulary development is of current interest in light of universal, focused efforts to increase the literacy levels of all students. Language programs commonly include phonics, phonemic awareness, and word identification, especially in the early grades and for students deemed to be at risk of reading difficulties. The editors of this book, Baumann and Kame'enui, provide a compelling argument for the addition of specific vocabulary instruction in language programs because of the relationship between vocabulary levels and reading comprehension. Instead of merely dissecting and deciphering words to decode them, the contributors to this book implore educators and parents to engage students in both direct instruction of vocabulary and activities that encourage word play.

Word Play is *Fundamental!* Using this premise that vocabulary learning is both important and intrinsically rewarding, Baumann and Kame'enui have collected an array of chapters from diverse, well-known authors. They organize their book into sections according to three of Graves' (2000) components of a comprehensive vocabulary program: teaching individual words (Part I), teaching strategies for learning words independently (Part II), and fostering word consciousness (Part III).

The chapters in the first section consider the teaching of specific vocabulary with explicit strategies. Margaret McKeown and Isabel Beck provide a rationale and direction for vocabulary instruction. Andrew Biemiller, based on his highly respected Canadian research, outlines a program for using children's literature for word acquisition. Michael Coyne, Deborah Simmons, and Edward Kame'enui describe a storybook

intervention program targeting vocabulary development based on research principles. Steven Stahl and Katherine Dougherty Stahl suggest a variety of ideas including teaching “Goldilock Words” which are “just right” in complexity and meaning. All the forementioned strategies give responsibilities to the adult to determine the vocabulary to be taught to the child.

Section two proposes that the learning of vocabulary also involves generalizations by the learner and the making of connections within contexts. Most futuristic of the chapters is Robert Marzano’s “The Developing Vision of Vocabulary Instruction.” Marzano outlines a four-step program that merges the student’s self-directed responsibility for selecting new vocabulary from reading texts and the teacher’s task of providing direct instruction on terms that are critical to student understanding. Marzano suggests that students elaborate their understanding of new words by using mental images, symbols, pictures, or presentations thus forming a vision of the vocabulary learned.

The third section focuses on the playful nature of word study. Because most adults enjoy a “play on words,” similarly children derive much satisfaction from rhymes, finger plays, songs, and tongue twisters. The authors of this section provide a strong case for the inclusion of wordplay in language programs. Dale Johnson, Bonnie Von Hoff Johnson, and Kathleen Schlichting outline eight categories of wordplay: onomastics, expressions, figures of speech, word associations, word formations, word manipulations, word games, and ambiguities. They thoroughly describe subcategories of each, with activities for classroom use. Judith Nagy and William Scot, who advocate the development of “word consciousness,” describe a project that teachers have used successfully to increase students’ word awareness through discussions of interesting words and expressions. Lastly, Camille Blachowicz and Peter Fisher offer a smorgasbord of motivating games and activities for enhancing word knowledge such as Hink Pink, 20 Questions, Categories, making word collections, and using vocabulary websites!

*Vocabulary Instruction: Research to Practice*, holding true to its word, includes the latest, if not last word, on vocabulary research and practical strategies for use by those persons interacting with children from preschool to high-school age. There are a number of issues, though, that

should be raised about the content and direction of this collection of articles. First, the editors gloss over the issue of vocabulary assessment; some authors admit that educators have few tools to efficiently determine students' vocabulary levels. How then are educators to teach necessary vocabulary or target words if deficiencies are not known? Also, how do schools measure the effectiveness of interventions if pre- and post-assessments are not widely used?

Another concern about many chapters is the common focus only on the lower half of the class. The authors emphasize raising the vocabulary levels of the at-risk students and "decreasing the vocabulary differences among students in the primary grades." As much as educators do not want the gap to widen between the "vocabulary rich and poor" students, it is necessary to provide a variety of open-ended activities in each classroom in order that the students with rich vocabulary can continue to progress and grow in their vocabulary knowledge base. If interventions such as storybook readings with targeted words for the bottom half of the class are used with the whole class, then teachers are doing a disservice to those students who could benefit from enrichment and enhancement of their already rich vocabulary.

In addition, the (im)practical nature of this book needs to be addressed. The provision of the research studies to support the teacher-friendly strategies is very noble and necessary. But I need to ask the following question: Who is this book written for? Unfortunately it is difficult to discern the audience for this book. Ideally classroom teachers would use this book to develop practical activities and materials to include vocabulary instruction in their language programs. In reality, teachers depend on curriculum consultants in school districts or publishing companies to present them with classroom-ready resources that are based on sound research principles. This book is an excellent source of the research findings related to vocabulary development and an assortment of ideas that could be translated into a practical "Guide on Vocabulary Instruction for Educators." Teachers and parents would benefit from such a guide or manual with specific examples, templates, and sample lesson plans.

*Vocabulary Instruction: Research to Practice* is comprehensive, well-organized, and relevant to this pertinent area of literacy development. It

would be a very appropriate text for a preservice or in-service teacher-education language course or as a basis for professional or curriculum development. The 'medium is the message' in this book and the writers inspire readers to reflect on the wonders of words and to reinforce children's inherent love of language.

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Anne R. Reeves. *Adolescents Talk about Reading: Exploring Resistance to and Engagement with Text*. (2004). Newark, NJ: International Reading Association, 290 pages. ISBN 0-87207-536-2.

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*Adolescents Talk about Reading: Exploring Resistance to and Engagement with Text* presents the research of former high-school English teacher, Anne Reeves, whose insightful perspective provides readers with an exploration of the "forces behind reading resistance and engagement" (p. 4) in adolescents' lives. The term *resistant reader*, proposed by Bintz (1993) as a more appropriate descriptor of those categorized as *reluctant* or *passive readers*, refers to readers who are generally able to read, yet choose not to do so. Others characterize resistant readers as *alliterate* (McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995) or *marginalized* (Schofield & Rogers, 2004). This is an important subject for Canadian educators, given statistics showing that as many as 25 per cent of secondary school students lack the literacy skills to be academically successful (Government of Canada, 2004). Literacy practices upheld by the educational system (e.g., print-based academic literacies) often privilege dominant forms of literacy and have the effect of marginalizing some

students (Street, 1995): this marginalization may actually encourage some students to become resistant to reading and literacy-based subjects. Through *Adolescents Talk about Reading*, Reeves competently achieves her goals of helping teachers see beneath the surface of students' resistance to reading while simultaneously illustrating students' engagement with the texts they love (p. v).

Inspired by the question of whether "the skill and practice of reading, so valued by contemporary culture, is achingly dull and burdensome to a young person coming of age in that culture" (p. 6), Reeves foregrounds her study by acknowledging the debates between child-centred progressivism and traditional-culture conservatives: debates that raise the questions, what counts as reading, and what types of texts should be read in school. Reeves chronicles the evolution of thought that led to her central question: Her initial stance with resistant readers was to say that if they simply tried a little harder to push past the decoding difficulties they were experiencing, they would come to "love the stories and information that reading would bring them" (p. 3). However, her increasing concern about the distaste for literature that the curriculum seemed to be generating in many young people (p. 11) led to her research question: What goes on in students' minds as they are required to sit through the required literacy-laden classes in secondary school classrooms?

Approaching her research from a blended sociocognitive and sociocultural perspective, Reeves provides case studies of five diverse adolescent readers, devoting a chapter to each, who read some genres with "pleasure and satisfaction" but found school-assigned reading to be "boring and pointless" (p. 11). Reeves gives the following summary of her cross-case analysis:

Sting, Duke, Rosa, Valisha, and Joel: These five adolescents tell educators a great deal about themselves and their literacy. The role that reading plays in each of their lives is determined by their reading purposes as well as their fluency. It is also determined by access to 'interesting' reading material and opportunities for reading — opportunities that may be eclipsed by other activities vying for the students' time and attention. Habit plays a role as well, in that teenagers who once turned to reading as a way to spend free time may no longer think of reading as an option at those times. It simply does not occur to them. Reading is

further influenced by social needs; as Sting and Duke made clear, peers who do not read and who do not value reading have a discouraging effect on their friends' reading, even when those friends, like Sting and Duke, are fluent readers who once enjoyed reading a great deal. (p .232)

*Adolescents Talk about Reading* illuminates the complicated relationship between student interest in text and perceptions of difficulty as it relates to resistance to reading. All participants insisted that they can and do read. "They said they even like to read, under the right circumstances. What they require, however, is something that is interesting" (p. 240). Reeves notes that the resistant readers in this study do not distinguish between understanding and feeling interested in a text; these two qualities seem to go together, as do their opposites—boredom and confusion (p. 143). Implications from these observations are twofold: first, probing more deeply when students say they find the material to be boring may yield important insights into students' resistance toward particular texts; and second, acknowledging the texts resistant readers find engaging and actively seeking ways to connect required reading with students' interests and everyday lives is vital when working with resistant readers. Teachers would do well to remember that students come to secondary school having developed a number of well-defined interests, because, as Reeves states, "Tension arises when teachers, wishing to broaden students' horizons, require them to read or study something the students have already decided is boring" (p. 241).

On a similar note, *Adolescents Talk about Reading* reminds secondary English teachers that their own personal backgrounds may contribute to their students' resistance to reading: "English teachers, usually in possession of strong linguistic interests and experiences, are particularly adept at navigating a wide range of texts without consciously realizing how many skills and techniques they are using" (p. 229). This facility with and love for print-based texts often position teachers to be less than understanding when students don't share the same perceptions and abilities.

Although not advocating a dismissal of the literary canon in secondary school classrooms, Reeves urges educators to consider the dangers some students face when their resistance to school-based reading leads them to reject reading altogether. Although some students

may persevere with texts they do not enjoy, and others may find pleasure reading in texts unsanctioned by the school curriculum, the real danger is faced by the students who simply stop reading, losing out on both the reading skills and knowledge acquisition that active engagement with text provides. For these students, an objective for teachers needs to be keeping the inner reader alive through adolescence, "even when that goal requires compromises in our commitment to teaching school texts. The contribution we can make to [their] future lies not in the particular texts we admire and promote but in protecting the reader within" (p. 69).

At a time when the public eye on education is strongly focused on early literacy, the literacy needs of Canada's adolescents should not be overlooked. *Adolescents Talk about Reading* is instructive of that which marginalizes adolescent readers, making full participation in the education mainstream a difficult goal, and provides much to ponder as educators take up the challenge of providing effective literacy instruction to young Canadians throughout their educational careers.

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Cathy Collins Block and John N. Mangieri. (2003). *Exemplary Literacy Teachers: Promoting Success for All Children in Grades K-5*. New York & London, U.K.: Guilford Press. 160 pages. ISBN 1-57230-891-5 (paperback)

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Are you tired of complaining about the challenges that confront literacy instruction? Are you ready to find a way out of the current literacy malaise? And are you ready to take a journey to become a better literacy teacher and conscientiously implement actions that are recommended to you?

These questions form the basis of the literacy challenge that Cathy Collins Block and John N. Mangieri pose in *Exemplary Literacy Teachers: Promoting Success for All Children in Grades K-5*. Based on the authors' two-year study of instructional qualities that distinguished highly effective literacy teachers from less effective literacy teachers employed in the same schools and socioeconomic neighbourhoods, the book aims to increase the skill levels and the overall performance of teachers as they provide literacy instruction to students. Attempting to significantly increase the number of professionals who can legitimately be classified as exemplary teachers of reading, the authors appeal to school principals, central administrators, and most significantly to teachers to change their current practices.

The book is divided into eleven chapters and three appendices. In the first chapter entitled "Do You Want to Become an Exemplary Literacy Teacher?," the authors explore the reasons why it is important for literacy teachers to be exemplary and why so few professionals exhibit the skills required to be designated as exemplary teachers of literacy. Offering some insight into specific problems teachers face while trying to provide exemplary literacy instruction (e.g., students with slow learning rates, gifted students, students with hearing and vision deficiencies, cultural diversity, teacher unfamiliarity with specific skills of literacy instruction) the authors offer a challenge to the reader: read the remaining pages but also conscientiously implement the actions that the

authors recommend.

In choosing to take up this challenge, the reader, in subsequent chapters, is led through a series of activities that provide information to enhance the reader's skills as a literacy teacher. For example, in chapter two, the authors provide exercises to determine how the reader views his or her current role as a literacy teacher. In chapter three, perhaps the nucleus of the book, the reader is asked to complete the National Exemplary Literacy Teacher Assessment (NELTA).

This assessment, designed by the authors, is based upon characteristics of teachers who are deemed to be exemplary because of their students' attainment of significantly higher test scores in literacy than students of other teachers in their same schools and socioeconomic environments. It provides feedback about the respondent's instructional practices and about selecting materials, creating learning environments, and designing lessons. Respondents can calculate the degree to which they have already developed the abilities that the authors found were exhibited by expert teachers and judged to be the most effective. In chapter four, respondents are able to examine how their responses fall under six major competency categories or domains (dominant role, motivation, reteaching, relating to students, classroom qualities, and lesson characteristics) that the authors found to be indicative of exemplary literacy teachers.

Chapters five through ten present each domain in order. The authors suggest that the reader minimally do a careful reading of one, two, or three sections of each chapter, focusing on his or her current teaching skills. In this way, the authors contend, the reader will gain significant information about how he or she teaches literacy and why some of his or her actions may be suited to a grade other than the one they are currently teaching. The authors also state that the reader may desire to improve on any of the actions that are reported as exemplary by adapting them to meet the conditions needed for maximum literacy learning by students they presently teach.

In the final chapter of the book entitled "The Choice," the reader is challenged to make decisions based on how they compared to the exemplary counterparts whose profiles were presented in previous chapters. The authors suggest that the reader could do three things: elect

to remain in their present assignment and initiate a plan for change; determine that their skills are best used at another grade level and move to teach at that grade; or do neither. In the authors' judgment, this third choice is an unacceptable option. But to many readers, the decision to change may be quite difficult.

In the U.S.A., a nation consumed by government insistence on measurable, targeted outcomes and where improving reading instruction is a national critical issue, it is not surprising that research attention is focusing on teacher effectiveness. To be sure, one way that teachers can improve literacy instruction for children is to share descriptions of exemplary teaching. As Richgels (2003) states, "this is a simple idea, based on classroom teachers' well-deserved reputation for common sense, practicality, and willingness to learn from one another" (p. 796). But as straightforward as it may seem, it is an idea that is threatened by the current narrow conception in some circles of what counts as "research-based" when defining best practice, and when exemplary teaching is defined and measured by students' high scores on high stakes, narrowly conceived, reading achievement tests.

Block and Mangieri's book will appeal to those teachers who feel inappropriately placed in their grade level teaching assignment, or those who teach in school districts and states that are employing merit pay systems. Others may consider the authors' seeming insensitivity to teachers' unique and individual classroom contexts that may include children of poverty, children with emotional and social difficulties, or children of families in crises. These contexts are not mentioned and indeed may be considered by the authors as "alibis" or excuses resulting in barriers to exemplary literacy teaching. Although this book is written in a readable, non-textbook style, some teachers will undoubtedly find statements such as "Teachers are generally bright" (p. 7) and "relatively few professionals exhibit the skills required of them to be properly designated as exemplary teachers of literacy" (p. 1) highly inflammatory and paternalistic. To be labeled an "exemplary" literacy teacher based on students' high achievement scores on standardized reading tests remains a highly contentious issue and this may be a more probable cause for teachers leaving education than a "mismatch" between teacher skills and grade level as the authors assert. The reader is also reminded that

becoming literate means much more than achieving high standardized test scores (Allington & Johnston, 2002).

Effective teacher change occurs through collaboration, support, and developing a sense of ownership, over time and through dialogue. Block and Mangieri's book may provide a starting point for teacher change. For those looking for a personal challenge or professional development in becoming an exemplary literacy teacher in specific ways, this book may provide a practical guide to assist them. Others will find the tone of the book condescending and quite off-putting.

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Alex Molnar. (2005). *School Commercialism: From Democratic Ideal to Market Commodity*. New York: Routledge. 177 pages. ISBN 0-415-95132-1 (paperback); 0-415-95131-3 (hardcover).

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Schooling, as understood and explained by John Dewey in the first quarter of the last century, is a public good and a fundamental right (Dewey, 1916). Henry Giroux (1988), in the last quarter of the century, noted that one of the most important legacies of public education in the U.S. has been to provide students with the critical capacities, knowledge, and values to become active citizens to realize a democratic society. In this respect, school can be seen as an important indicator of the well-being of a democratic society by virtue of civic values that must be passed down to its youth for them to think critically, to participate actively in policies that will affect their lives, and to transform the social, political, economic, religious, racial, and gender inequalities that have hindered significant portions of the population from achieving their personal and professional goals.

However, in the last two decades, public schooling has come under growing attack from proponents of market ideology and corporate culture (Consumer Union Education Services, 1995; DeGraaf, Wann, & Naylor, 2002; Linn, 2004; McNeil, 1992; Schor, 2004). Alex Molnar's latest book, *School Commercialism: From Democratic Ideal to Market Commodity*, questions the real cost of turning to various private sources of funding for education because of budgetary constraints facing many schools in America. His short, well-researched, thoroughly readable, shocking, yet rather gloomy book details how marketing and marketing logic since 1990 increasingly shape school practice and policy. In the six chapters of the book, Molnar provides an overview of the commercial transformation of culture and dangers of school commercialism. The second chapter documents trends primarily in the form of marketing programs in and around school. Chapter 3, "Eat, Drink, and Be Diabetic: Using Schools to Promote Illness," reviews the marketing practices associated with the sales of unhealthy food in school. Chapter 4 considers the legacies of John Dewey and two architects of the modern public relations industry: Edward Bernays and Ivy Ledbetter Lee. Chapter 5 examines the rise in school privatization and the emergence of so-called virtual schools and the involvement of personalities such as Christopher Whittle, Tom Ridge, William Bennett, Michael Milken, and others entitled, "Whittle or Virtually Nothing: The Emergence of Edison Schools and Knowledge Universe." The last chapter discusses the future prospects of public education in an age of globalization and the expansion of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) entitled "Futures Trading: Buying and Selling Education in the Global Marketplace." The book would appeal to educators, students, parents, school administrators and policy makers, and perhaps even corporate partners.

Molnar is a professor of Education Policy and director of the Education Policy Studies Laboratory (EPSL) at Arizona State University. One of EPSL's units, the Commercialism in Education Research Unit (CERU), has monitored media references to commercialism in American schools since 1990. To this end, CERU uses eight categories of commercial activities in schools through searches on media databases. The categories include sponsorship of programs and activities, exclusive

agreements, incentive programs, appropriation of space, sponsored educational materials, electronic marketing, fund raising, and privatization. Although Molnar confesses that hard data on the extent of corporate money-making activities in school is difficult to pin down, the Council for Corporate and School Partnerships in 2002 estimated U.S. schools received \$2.4 billion a year from “business relationships” with corporations (p. 19). However, the author admits he does not know how to interpret these numbers because there is no generally agreed upon set of definitions, an ability to assess the actual value of the funded school activities, or an understanding of how the corporations benefited. Yet, the book provides extensive examples for each category with references to how these areas have recently grown, for example, references to Exclusive Agreements from 1990 to June 2004 have risen 858 per cent, Appropriation of Space has risen 394 per cent, Sponsored Educational Materials have risen 1,038 per cent, and Privatization has risen 2,213 per cent (pp. 21-25).

Additionally, Molnar highlights evidence of a growing backlash against corporation-school partnerships whereby critics are threatening lawsuits, claiming that certain sponsorship programs interfere with school operations, instruction, or students’ health. He cites McNeal’s (1992) *Kids as Customers: A Handbook of Marketing to Children* as a powerful reminder to those who believe that a little advertising in school will not impact students, given the thousands of ads targeted at them outside of the school, or that children are sophisticated and critically aware such that ads will not influence them. Yet companies can virtually guarantee adult customers tomorrow if they invest in them as children (p. 6). In fact, Molnar suggests that despite increased opposition, commercialism in schools has become so pervasive that it is virtually invisible. More alarmingly, he claims “at a time when commercialism in schools is dramatically increasing educators have been largely silent or, worse, cheerleaders for the trend” such that the education community has failed “to critically describe and attempt to understand and assess the impact of commercial activities on the character and quality of schools and their programs making them unworthy of a profession that would lay claim to the legacy of John Dewey” (p. 89).

Admittedly, Molnar is missing sufficient hard data on the issue. And, although researching the components or aspects of commercialism in school via media references is a start, it is not thoroughly insightful and perhaps something akin to using a flashlight to explore a cave. What would be more helpful is a spot light or hard data reported by schools and corporations as a means to monitor and/or measure the situation and the outcome in schools. In light of the wave of growing commercialism in society, it is difficult not to envision at times Molnar as someone trying to hold back the oncoming tide. In this respect, what would be instructive to the reader are strategies to cope with the onslaught of commercialism in schools and guidelines for successful and mutually beneficial education-corporation partnerships as envisioned and drawn up by the Canadian Teachers' Federation (2004). As well, he seems to fall short of commenting on a growing number of schools who, in exchange for technology resources, allow business to collect personal information from students through online profiling and expose students to the targeted marketing enabled by banner ads. In this way schools are participating in exchanges without adequate assessment of their educational value, impact on students, or ethical implications (Willard, 2000).

Molnar unfortunately devotes just a few pages at the end of his book to the spectre of globalization, the 1994 General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS) and education as a "knowledge industry" with its various profit opportunities. Valued at an estimated \$2 trillion annually or 5 per cent of global GDP, under Article I, Section 3(b) of GATS, this "knowledge industry" could be interpreted as a business rather than a social service and as such a commodity to be controlled by a company in a foreign country focusing primarily on the bottom line (pp. 130-132). Molnar warns that turning children over to the market will ensure they are treated as an expense to be reduced or a resource to be harvested. He fears for a market mentality with winners and losers and closes gloomily cautioning that, "while all societies produce losers, this may be the first time a society has explicitly sought to do so" (p. 134).

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Daniel Callaghan. (2006). *Conservative Party Education Policies 1976-1997: The Influence of Politics and Personality*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press. 230 pages including notes -185 not. ISBN 1-84519-120-X (hardcover)

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"Internecine wars" and leaked memos (p. 92), whisper campaigns and lying civil servants (p.114), blatant conflicts of interest—about Nursery School Vouchers no less! (p.167), patronage appointments, and an East Anglian Mafia (p.163) – no this is not a book about the Canadian Sponsorship Scandal or a recent episode of The Sopranos. A chronology of people, policies and events, *Conservative Party Education Policies 1976-*

1997..., traces the decisions that turned the British educational system upside down. "Why," you ask, "should I be interested in education policies in Britain from 1976-1997? That was another time and in another country." Beyond being a potboiler of an account of the politics and personalities behind the decision making, Callaghan's book also serves as a cautionary tale. For those readers in or aspiring for power, read the sub-title: "How to wreck a system and lose an election in twenty-one easy years." For those who are affected by the decisions made from above and/or who are working to sustain democracy, that subtitle would read "A guerilla's primer of what strategies not to counsel, and what toadying and backstabbing to watch for in policy work." Covering the Conservative party reign first with Margaret Thatcher and then with John Major at the helm, the book provides us with a look at those individuals and their policy preferences, political styles, and personal characteristics and experiences that impacted on educational policy in Britain and beyond.

As important to this history, Callaghan examines the personalities and impact of their Secretaries of State for Education, beginning with Mark Carlisle, then Keith Joseph, Kenneth Baker, John MacGregor, Kenneth Clarke, John Patten, and finally Gillian Baker and their *politicos* – deputies and advisors. Modifying Lawton's model of three competing groups (Lawton, 1984, p.16), Callaghan also identifies the *regulars*, "generally professionals working within the education system, primarily DES officials" (p. 4), and *irregulars*, "... a fluid combination of pressure groups, think tanks and advisers once completely outside the traditional loop of policy making" (p.3). Personalities from the three groups meander through and cross paths as they advocate, manipulate, subvert and, it seems, do almost anything but consult, cooperate, and consider the impact on students of radical policies that torpedoed Britain's previously stable education system. Do the terms Grant Maintained Schools, a National Curriculum, standardized testing, and voucher systems resonate? For those in Ontario, "common sense" (p.123) might cause flashbacks. The aphorism that "history repeats itself" lives through the seepage of these same notions to school systems around the world including our Canadian ones where sometimes "Education policy... [is] more driven by political egos than a concern for the educational needs of

children" (p. 179). Because we can also learn from history, this book is worthwhile. In fact for those beginning political or policy studies and/or work, I would almost say a must read.

Although initially, readers who are not familiar with the British educational system might become, as I was, bogged down in sorting through the names and acronyms; for example, "the CTCs provided an inauspicious start to the construction of what would become the 1988 Education Act" (p. 80), it is worthwhile to persevere. Callaghan is a teacher and at the same time as he works to provide a balanced and clinical view and seems not to insert himself into the analysis, there is a between the lines integrity and caring about teachers, students, and learning that I sensed drove him, and certainly the book forward. In addition, he considerably provides a *Dramatis Personae*—his sense of humour comes out from the beginning—and list of *Abbreviations* to help us non-Brits keep up.

The tone of the book is appropriately earnest but sprinklings of the aforementioned humour abound – one section's title "Testing Times" (p. 149) is a double entendre, another "Mac the knifed" about the pressure on John Macgregor to resign, is a parody. That and a passion for his subject warm what could otherwise be a dry litany. So by the end, with the many he said, she said, and gossipy tone which came through from memoirs and interviews quoted, I was approaching it with the relish I might a *People* magazine for educators. For example we learn from Duncan Graham of, "Mrs. Thatcher's single minded determination: 'Apparently in the morning after a great world crisis she was found sitting alone at breakfast altering the wording of the detailed proposals for English, while munching at her toast and Marmalade.' You might find that magnificent, frightening or both" (p. 89). The book even has cartoons!

Callaghan's copious research and attention to accuracy and details, although also at first daunting, serve to counterpoint the exact opposite characteristics of those about whom he is writing. Using interviews, recollections, numerous articles from various sources such as the *Times Educational Supplement* and the *Oxford Review of Education*, and books including memoirs and government reports, Callaghan develops dense character studies and a thorough and balanced analysis of the times. The

new perspective that he brings to policy analysis makes sense and is commendable because he illustrates that, just as many of us have suspected, sometimes, "...the course of policies should not be studied through 'abstract generalities but through the concrete experiences of individuals' [McPherson and Raab, 1988, p.xiii.], the personal and political contingencies they faced" (p. 176).

There are many lessons embedded in *Conservative Party Education Policies 1976-1997: The Influence of Politics and Personality*. One, augmented by scandals such as Enron, is that we should keep hammering out our expectations for others and ourselves about ethical leadership. Through their twenty-one years in power, we learn that Conservative's appointments, for example, Clarke and Keswick (p.125) and rewards (the life peerage awarded to Carolyn Cox) (p.33), were seldom based on merit, but on friendships and alliances. That vision is an important aspect of leadership is augmented by lack of it under Conservative rule; for example, "'One looks in vain for a statement of [Major's] political beliefs before 1990'" (p. 122).

The book also offers support for knowledgeable management of leadership succession:

While ideological ambiguities and practical difficulties were certainly factors in the difficulties experienced by successive Secretaries of State, the nature of their appointments and their political background were the more potent factors. The appointments... appeared to follow a fairly unsophisticated pattern whereby each new incumbent was appointed on the basis of the main weakness of the previous incumbent. (p. 181)

Politics, not moral purpose, drove many decisions (p. 126) leading to another lesson that those who care about democracy, and the real motivation behind policy decisions, must be vigilant. "Kenneth Clarke asked why we were messing about with a ballot...Just 'boot 'em'(Local Educational Authorities) out'" (p.125). Students of policy studies will benefit from the tracing of various policy developments and debacles and learn, for example, that "while it might be possible to largely control the initial input to the policy process, it is much more difficult to control the process itself and its subsequent output" (p. 179). Weaving through the whole book is the reminder that, "no diktat from the centre can

succeed unless there is some sense of agreement or some sense of joint venture between those involved....When [some] succeed where others fail, it is because they recognize the overriding importance of giving, and getting a personal commitment" (p. 184). That is a very important lesson indeed.

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Vimala Ramachandran (Ed.). (2004). *Gender and Social Equity in Primary Education: Hierarchies of Access*. New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, CA, & London, UK: Sage Publications. 381 pages. ISBN 0-7619-3247-X (hardback); 0-7619-3248-8 (paperback)

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In his address to the Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in 2003, Indian-born economist Amartya Sen underscored the need to close existing gaps in access to basic education:

If we continue to leave vast sections of the people of the world outside the orbit of education, we make the world not only less just, but also less secure. ...Basic education is not just an arrangement for training to develop skills (important as that is); it is also a recognition of the nature of the world, with its diversity and richness, and an appreciation of the importance of freedom and reasoning as well as friendship. The need for that understanding – that vision – has never been stronger.<sup>1</sup>

Vimala Ramachandran's edited volume, *Gender and social equity in primary education: Hierarchies of access*, is a review of Indian primary education following a decade of concerted efforts on the part of Government of India's District Primary Educational Programme and various non-governmental organizations to close the gap between education for the rich and the poor, between urban and rural areas, and between the education girls receive compared to boys. More specifically,

the book documents the results of research on a number of programs implemented in response to the Government's 1986 National Policy of Education report, which declared as its central issue the "removal of disparities and [equalization of] educational opportunity by attending to the specific needs of those who have been denied equality so far" (cited in Ramachandran, 2004, p. 21).

On the surface at least, the news appears to be good. The 2001 Indian census reports increased school attendance, a significant increase in overall literacy rates, and a decline in gender and social inequity, evidenced especially by the increasing demand for primary education in rural areas. However, although the nationwide data are promising, Ramachandran cautions that there is still "a long way to go before gender and social gaps are bridged" (p. 70). Most troubling, perhaps, is the fact that despite political reform and concerted social action, the traditional caste system still prevails in much of the country, determining in large part which children have access to which schools. A growing problem is the proliferation of dysfunctional government schools, especially in the more under-developed areas (p. 77), due, in part at least, to the increasing numbers of wealthier parents (including government employees and teachers) who are opting to enroll their children in private schools – a shift which, in turn, takes the pressure off government schools to perform well. As a result, with the opening of more private schools, and enrolment in government schools declining, students in government schools are almost guaranteed to receive a sub-standard education. This phenomenon has also sparked considerable controversy and debate in the public sphere. Some theorists and social activists (including Sen) argue that the only just response to this situation is to prohibit private schooling, thereby forcing socially and economically privileged parents to work for the improvement of public schools; but these parents, who have a much stronger political voice than their less wealthy counterparts, are fighting such a move all the way.<sup>1</sup> Paradoxically, then, what the studies in Ramachandran's book reveal is

that, despite intensive efforts by both governmental and community-based organizations to level the playing field, access to basic education is accompanied, in her words, "by a reaffirmation of a child's caste, community and gender in defining which school she or he attends" (p. 75).

In addition to editing the volume, Ramachandran has authored or co-authored five of its thirteen chapters, and her work provides much of the substantive theoretical background and analysis for the various studies. She brings to the project extensive experience in Indian politics, education, and women's issues; therefore she is well-positioned to help readers who are unfamiliar with Indian educational policy and politics to gain an understanding of some of the systemic forces that continue to undermine efforts to achieve genuine educational equity. However, since many of the chapters provide detailed reports of statistical data from individual local studies, the book as a whole will likely be of limited interest to most Canadian readers, save those interested in international and comparative educational research. Ramachandran's "hierarchies of access" analysis, on the other hand (especially Chapters 3 and 4), is suited to a much wider audience, and might in fact provide a useful framework – or, more accurately perhaps, a cautionary tale – for addressing the persistent educational inequity within our own borders. Take, for instance, recent Canadian statistics which reveal that Aboriginal youth are only half as likely as non-Aboriginal youth to graduate from high school, and that only 8 per cent of all Aboriginal people have a university education compared to 20 per cent in the general population.<sup>2</sup>

The challenge before educators, then – both here in Canada and in India – is to find how to awaken the collective will to provide all children with a high quality education regardless of race, class, or gender; for, as Aruna Rathnam makes clear in her concluding comments to the book, "Teacher training and individual teachers' commitment...cannot substitute for consistent social and political support" (in Ramachandran, 2004, p. 362). In general, I commend Ramachandran's book for its

unflinching analysis of the benefits and limitations of recent educational reforms in India, and as a wake-up call for those who hold quality public education as an essential aspect of democratic society, but who have not yet mobilized sufficient social and political support to make that ideal a reality.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Sen, A. (2003, October). *Closing the gap: Access, inclusion and achievement*. Paper presented at the 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers, Edinburgh. Retrieved January 2, 2006, from [http://www.the-south-asian.com/Nov%202003/closing\\_the\\_education\\_gap.htm](http://www.the-south-asian.com/Nov%202003/closing_the_education_gap.htm)

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, A lion's looks, a rabbit's liver. (2002, November 3). *The Times of India*. Retrieved January 2, 2006 from [http://www.swaminomics.org/articles/20021103\\_lion\\_rabit.htm](http://www.swaminomics.org/articles/20021103_lion_rabit.htm)

<sup>3</sup> See the 2001 Census results from Statistics Canada at <http://www.statcan.ca>

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