

What is the Role of NCRLL in Public Debate and Policy Concerning Education?

by Judith Green and Peter Smagorinsky

From September 11-13, 1998, in the shadow of Ronald Reagan National Airport in Crystal City, VA, we represented NCRLL at the first meeting of the National Congress on Public Education (http://www.ncpe.org/html/main_menu.html). Reagan's presence was apparent beyond the specter of the airport bearing his name, for the NCPE was founded in large part because of current efforts to enact policies often associated with his administration, and believed by many educators to be detrimental to the vitality and future of public schools. Although the U.S. Congress was preoccupied with the Starr report which was released during our meeting, it was also busy considering such issues as school vouchers, the legislation of acceptable research paradigms and methodologies, and other initiatives viewed by most National Congress attendees as detrimental not only to prosperous and effective public schools but to the intellectual freedom of teachers and researchers at all levels of schooling.

NCRLL was one of a number of groups participating in this important event. NCPE was initiated by a league of organizations including the International Reading Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, the Whole Language Umbrella, and the Center for the Expansion of Language and Thinking. These groups sought others who were interested in supporting public education and in addressing the potential threats that have arisen. Constance Weaver, John Barshinger and Ellen Brinkley served as organizers and conveners of this first Congress, and Wendy Kasten oversaw local arrangements. Sponsors and contributors include the George Gund Foundation, the National Council for the Social Studies, the National Reading Conference, NCRLL, and Phi Delta Kappa. Representatives from each of these and other organizations attended the conference, along with congressional lobbyists, members of

various parent rights and advocacy groups, and other stakeholders in the debate over who controls public education and how that control is exercised.

NCRLL members played a myriad of roles from key speakers, to panel discussants, to organizers, to participants. We were well represented, officially and unofficially, suggesting that we are uniquely positioned since our members span a number of groups. Our focus on research is also a key, since we are not officially tied to any particular organization but exist in the spaces across organizations. Our expertise can make a difference. To help you see with whom we might interact, we have provided a list of other participants and a set of questions that members will need to consider as we decide how and if we will continue contributing to this effort.

Speakers represented organizations such as: Council on Educa-

tional Policy, Efficacy Institute, Interfaith Alliance, Editorial Projects in Education, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, Michigan for Public Education, Freedom Forum of the First Amendment Center, Freedom to Learn Network (Pennsylvania), American Association of University Women, Council on Basic Education, Elsberg Associates (Washington press corps), League of Women Voters, Gray Panthers, Education Week (founding editor), Parent Advocacy Network (NJ), National Coalition of Advocates for Students, National Alliance of Business, Business Coalition for Education Reform, American Civil Liberties Union, Joint Committee on Standards for Education and Evaluation, Center for Research on Educational Accountability and Teacher Evaluation, Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, Education Writers' Association, Public Education Network, National Association of Partners in Education, National Writing Project, Foxfire Fund, Parents for Public Schools, Inc., and National School Boards Association among others. Speakers also included teachers and university educators.

The speakers brought information on national, regional and local issues facing public education. Dialogues at the Congress also explored ways of becoming advocates, and speakers talked about their experiences, both successful and less successful, in taking an advocacy role. Through these dialogues and presentations, we gained a picture of what faces those of us concerned with supporting public education. For example, we found that parent groups

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president's message

Nominations for Membership and Nominations for Fellows

As an NCRL member, you can nominate colleagues for membership. The criteria are provided below. As part of our commitment to diversity, we are seeking to increase the numbers of people of color who are members of NCRL. As you consider possible nominees, keep this commitment in mind. Please send your nominations to Diane DeFord as soon as possible, but no later than November 10, 1998.

Criteria for Membership includes the following:

- 1) Currently interacting with research in the language arts.
- 2) One or more of the following:
 - (a) publishing original research in English language arts;
 - (b) editing or compiling research conducted by others;
 - (c) doing writing related to the identification of research needs, theory, synthesis of research, or critique of research in the English language arts;
 - (d) directing research efforts conducted by others (e.g., theses, dissertations).

Nomination procedures:

Submission of a curriculum vitae, plus one letter of nomination from any NCRL member.

Criteria for Fellows:

- 1) Member of NCRL in good standing for a minimum of three years;
- 2) Outstanding contribution to research in English.

Nomination Procedures:

Submission of two letters of nomination, each written by current Fellows. Please send nominations for Fellows to Diane DeFord as soon as possible, but no later than November 10, 1998.

Address for Nomination letters and candidate information:

Diane DeFord
200 Ramseyer Hall
29 W. Woodruff Avenue
The Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio. 43210

e-mail address: deford.1@osu.edu

NCRL Volume 25, Number 2

The *National Conference on Research in Language and Literacy*, formally The *National Conference on Research in English*, was founded in 1932 as a professional organization committed to furthering research in the teaching of English and to improving instructional practice through the dissemination of research findings. The newsletter is published twice yearly.

Publications Chair: Evelyn B. Freeman
Editor and Designer: Susan J. Matthews

Congratulations to Our New Fellows

James Baumann
Russel Durst
Violet Harris
Donald Leu
Judith Lindfors
Penny Oldfather
Deborah Rowe
Peter Smagorinsky
Sheila Valencia
Constance Weaver

* * *

Seeking Ideas . . .

We would like you to share your thoughts and ideas for the types of articles and features to be included in the newsletter. Send your ideas to publications chair, Evie Freeman at the following e-mail address:

freeman.5@osu.edu



just a reminder . . .

Please send your annual dues to: Sheila Valencia, NCRL Treasurer, University of Washington, 122 Miller Hall, P. O. Box 353600, Seattle, WA 98195.

Make checks payable to the National Conference on Research in Language and Literacy. Be sure to include address, phone numbers, and email address.



EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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President's Message continued

were now able to take up their rights and join the table, but did not know what to advocate for when they got there. They wanted help from research on what were directions to bring to the table. For example, parent groups were interested in research that supported the use of literature to counter the basal movement and the reduction of library books. Still others talked to us about political directions in the area of vouchers and how groups were researching and watching the implementation of vouchers in Milwaukee, and the potential of vouchers in Washington, D.C. Still others informed us of legal issues, of ways of communicating with the press, and of common ground across groups and positions. These dialogues led to a draft of a set of principles for the National Congress for Public Education, and to plans for a new meeting on how to maintain the National Congress and its role in supporting public education.

Following the conference, we discussed NCRL's role in the advocacy of public education. We decided that the question is best discussed among NCRL's membership. To help facilitate that discussion, we came up with a series of questions that we feel

are critical in determining our organizational participation in NCPE and its activities:

Determining NCRL's role

1. Of the various issues of concern to NCPE—such as school vouchers, establishing a more effective and credible voice with legislators, establishing networks among educators and parents who support public education, and the like—which are germane to NCRL's research mission?
2. What should NCRL's role be in the activities of NCPE, including funding, representation, conference planning, and networking with constituent groups?
3. What is the most effective means of getting NCRL member input into considering these questions?

Reaching a broader public with NCRL's perspective

4. On what terms is the debate currently being conducted in the public and political arenas? How can we enter this debate on those terms while being faithful to our research mission?
5. Through what vehicles should NCRL's advocacy reach the public? Possibilities include writing position papers for public sharing and political influence, lobbying politicians,

participating in public meetings such as school board meetings, writing letters to editors and other public forums, developing political action groups within professional organizations, etc.

Developing an appropriate research agenda

6. What research agenda is suggested by the current terms and state of the debate about public education?
7. How can we contribute to the research base that informs these questions?
8. What reports currently exist that we can draw on to introduce into the public debate?
9. What evidence is being omitted and/or excluded from the debate on public education as currently being conducted? For instance, the debate about the teaching of reading has ignored much research on secondary school literacy. How can we effectively introduce relevant research from other realms into the debate about primary school reading?
10. How can research into these questions be supported by NCRL and other funding agencies?
11. Beyond the customary practice of writing and publishing research reports in scholarly journals, what vehicles exist for distributing relevant research to politicians, parents, news media, and other participants in the public debate about educational policy?

As should be evident, our attendance at the NCPE conference left us with more questions than answers. We share these questions with NCRL members in the hopes of finding better ways to make our work matter as various stakeholders use their organizational clout to influence educational policy. We hope that you will engage with us in this discussion. Please let the members of the board hear from you about these issues. Since we do not have a list serve for NCRL at present, please address your responses to Judith Green (green@education.ucsb.edu), current president of NCRL. She will then forward them to the board and report the findings in the next newsletter.

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WELCOME TO NEW NCRL MEMBERS

Eury Bauer, The University of Georgia
Sheridan Blau, University of California, Santa Barbara
Cindy Brock, Texas Woman's University
Ann Egan-Robertson, University of Wisconsin-Madison
Amelia E. El-Hindi, Transylvania University
Gisela Ernst-Slavit, Washington State University
Mark Faust, The University of Georgia
Ana Floriana-O'Sullivan, Illinois Wesleyan University
Alan Flurkey, Chandler, AZ
Carolyn Frank, University of California, Santa Barbara
Maria E. Franquiz, University of Colorado
Kris Gutierrez, University of California, Los Angeles
James Louis Heap, Ohio University
Louise B. Jennings, University of South Carolina
Jill Lewis, Jersey City State College
Elizabeth B. Moje, The University of Michigan
LeAnn Putney, University of Nevada
David Reinking, The University of Georgia
Lesley A. Rex, University of Michigan
Karen Smith, National Council of Teachers of English
Shelley Wepner, William Paterson College

David Barton: Featured Speaker at Fall Breakfast

The annual NCRLR Breakfast at the National Council of Teachers of English Convention in Nashville will be held Saturday, November 21, 1998 from 7:00-8:30 a.m. in Cleveland B Room at the Opryland Hotel. David Barton, Lancaster University, will be the featured speaker. David teaches linguistics and is interested in all aspects of literacy in and beyond education, from children's earliest encounters with the written word through adults' literacy lives. He is the author of *Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of Written Language* (Blackwell, 1994) and *Local Literacies: Reading and Writing in One Community*, co authored with Mary Hamilton (Routledge, 1998).

David describes his talk, "Studies of Everyday Literacy Practices and the Achievements, Disputes, and Unresolved Issues of Literacy Studies," as follows. In this paper I will examine the achievements of the field of literacy studies, focusing on the contribution of detailed studies of people's everyday literacy practices. Examples will be taken from a recently completed study of the role of reading and writing in Lancaster, England (published as *Local Literacies*, Routledge, 1998). I will describe some of the conclusions of this study on the range and diversity of people's everyday practices. I will draw attention to current problems and unresolved issues in the field of literacy studies and point to some contributions such work can make to the study of language in education.

RESEARCH SERIES LAUNCHED

by JoBeth Allen

At NCTE during its Fall 1997 NCRLR meeting, the Board proposed a new direction for the organization in fulfilling its mission, which is "a) to stimulate and encourage research in the teaching of English language arts at all educational levels; b) to synthesize, interpret, and publish significant research and compilations of research results in English language arts teaching; c) to support research and special projects authorized by the Executive committee..." That new direction is a Literacy Research Series. The Board appointed JoBeth Allen, Donna Alvermann, and David Reinking as series editors for the first three years. The series of 50-100 page small, paperback books will be similar to the Sage research series but focused explicitly on language and literacy research. The books will be written for literacy researchers who want to learn about an unfamiliar research tradition or methodology; therefore, the audience is not novice researchers necessarily but those new to the particular approach. Each paperback will include the following sections:

- a. Theoretical and epistemological assumptions;
- b. Issues within the tradition (including different interpretations, applications, and methods);
- c. Questions that might be addressed using such a research approach;
- d. Design possibilities;
- e. Exemplars (an annotated bibliography of 8-10 very different language and/or literacy studies within this tradition; and
- f. A reference list for further, in depth reading.

The editors surveyed NCRLR members about the language and literacy research traditions or methodologies that would be most useful to them and their colleagues or students. They identified case study, narrative, mixed qualitative/quantitative, critical theories based, discourse analysis, action research, and ethnography as their choices for the first books in the series. In addition, the series will be launched with a foundational book on the theoretical foundations of interpretive research. Series editors will contact prospective authors, work with them as needed to develop the manuscript, identify two reviewers per book, and strive for a delicate balance of innovative individual contributions with certain consistent elements across the series. We are talking with Michael Greer and Karen Smith at NCTE about publishing the series, building on our previous relationship with NCTE in publishing the NCRE monographs. The editors thank the NCRLR membership for participating in the survey, and for several very thoughtful comments that will help shape the series.

Co-Sponsored Session at NCTE

The NCTE/NCRLR co-sponsored session (E2), "Researching Literacy Across Contexts" will follow the breakfast on Saturday, November 21, 1998, from 8:30-9:45 a.m. in Cleveland B Room, Opryland Hotel. Speakers will be: Sally Thomas, Claremont Graduate School; Penny Oldfather, University of Georgia; and Nora White, University of Western Sydney/University of Alaska. This session is intended for a general audience of literacy educators at all levels.

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Don't Forget!

Invite a colleague or graduate student and send your reservations for breakfast (\$20 per person). Send your check payable to NCRLR by November 9, 1998 to:

Dr. Sheila Valencia,
NCRLR Treasurer
University of Washington
122 Miller Hall
Box 353600
Seattle, WA 98195-3600

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Clip & Mail

Call for *N C R L L* Newsletter Items

Preparation of the Spring 1999 *NCRL L Newsletter* is under way, and we would like to hear from you. Please describe below your current research project and include any queries you might have for other members. Include an address or phone number in your description for those who might want to get in touch. Also, send us news of any recent publications or honors. Be sure to include institutional affiliation and full names of co-authors.

Name:

Address:

Affiliation:

Phone Number:

Email:

Recent Publications (including names of co-authors):

Honors:

Other News:

The deadline for submission for the Spring 1999 issue is February 20, 1999. Information goes to Evelyn B. Freeman, 499 Riley Avenue, Worthington, OH 43085. We look forward to hearing from you!

First Class Mail

Evelyn B. Freeman
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NCRL Newsletter
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333 Arps Hall
1945 N. High Street
Columbus, OH 43210

M e m b e r s i n t h e n e w s

Douglas K. Hartman, University of Pittsburgh, has edited the book, *Stories Teachers Tell: Reflecting on Professional Practices* (National Textbook Company, 1998).

Dorothy S. Strickland, Rutgers University, received the 1998 Indiana University Citation for Outstanding Contributions to Literacy Award. Her recent publications include: *Teaching Phonics Today* (International Reading Association, 1998); "What's Basic in Reading? Finding Common Ground," *Educational Leadership*, March, 1998; "Reading and the Media" in *Imaging Education: The Media and Schools in America* edited by G. Maeroff (Teachers College Press, 1998).

James L. Collins, University of Buffalo, has developed with Kathleen M. Collins, *Writing Strategies for Struggling Writers*, an international videoconference available as a professional development package (National Council of Teachers of English, 1998). He also is the author of *Strategies for Struggling Writers* (Guilford, 1998).

Recent publications by Karen S. Day, University of the Cariboo, Canada, include: "The Challenge of Style in Reading Picture Books," *Children's Literature in Education*, (1996); "From the Eighteenth-century Illustrated Book to Contemporary Children's Picture Books: Teaching the 'Third Text'" in *Integrating Visual and Verbal Literacies*, edited by W.F. Garrett-Petts and Donald Lawrence (1996, Inkshed); and "Sarah Reads: From Reader to Classroom Practice," *Journal of Children's Literature* (1997). Karen would like to hear from NCRL members who are working on the integration of visual and verbal literacy (kday@cariboo.bc.ca).

Carolyn Hedley, University of South Florida, has a new book: *Curriculum Leadership* (Hampton Press, 1998). Co-authors are Regis Bernhardt and Gerald Cattaro.

Lucile McCarthy, University of Maryland-Baltimore County, co-authored with Stephen M. Fishman, *John Dewey and the Challenge of Classroom Practice* (Teachers College Press/National Council of Teachers of English, 1998).

An Elva M Knight Grant of the International Reading Association was awarded to Barbara Moss, University of Akron, for her research, "An Ethnographic Examination of Sixth Graders' Responses to Nonfiction Tradebooks." Her recent publications are: "A Qualitative Assessment of First Graders' Retellings of Expository Text," *Reading Research Quarterly* (1997) and "Exploring the Literature of Fact: Reading and Writing in Response to Children's Nonfiction Tradebooks," *Language Arts* (1997), co-authored with Mary Lou Di Pillo and Susan Leone.

Alice M. Scales, University of Pittsburgh, received the 1997 "Negro Educational Review Distinguished Service Award," for meritorious service as a teacher, scholar, and editor, and for sharing outstanding expertise with organizations throughout the nation. She published with co-authors Alethia W. George and Gre-

gory A. Morris, "Perceptions of One After-school Tutorial Program" in *Journal of Research and Development in Education* (1997).

Recent publications by Jeanne S. Chall, Harvard University, include: *Teaching Children to Read: A Step by Step Guide for Volunteers* (Continental Press, 1998), co-authored with Florence G. Roswell, Mary Beth Fletcher, and Deborah Richmond; *Roswell-Chall Diagnostic Test of Word Analysis Skills & Roswell-Chall Auditory Blending Test* (revised editions, Educators Publishing Service, 1997); and *Teaching and Assessing Phonics: Why, What, When, How: A Guide for the Reading Teacher* (Educators Publishing Service, 1996). Co-author is Helen M. Popp.

Professor Emeritus Lenore Sandel, Hofstra University, published two solicited book reviews, one in *Childhood Education* (1998) and the other in *Journal of Language and Literacy* (1998). She also received a grant award from Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development to continue as a facilitator, Whole Language Network, for the ninth year, and serves on the Advisory Board of the ERIC Clearinghouse for Reading, English, and Communication.

Sheila Valencia, University of Washington, has a new book, *Literacy Portfolios in Action* (Harcourt Brace, 1998). The result of a 7-year collaborative research project with K-8 teachers in Bellevue Public Schools, the book focuses on using classroom evidence to assess students' progress, improve instruction, and engage students in assessing their own learning.

Lorri Neilsen, Mount Saint Vincent University, Canada, authored *Knowing Her Place: Research Literacies and Feminist Occasions* (Caddo Gap Press, 1998), a collection of essays documenting Lorri's travels as a literacy researcher through several research perspectives over twenty years, from positivism to constructivism to feminist poststructuralism and beyond. Lorri is interested in hearing from researchers exploring alternative representations of literacy research (Lorri.Neilsen@msvu.ca).

Member Query

Lenore Sandel is writing, "Emergent Literacy of a Beginning Teacher: A Basic Vocabulary of Resource and Practice." The vocabulary, a collaborative compilation of selected vocabulary, represents those qualities which, in the judgment of respected voices in education, contribute to teaching excellence. NCRL members are invited to submit a word which names a quality of the successful teacher or teaching experience. Please include a rationale for your selection (a maximum of 500 words). Send your response to: Dr. Lenore Sandel, 33 Sherman Avenue, Rockville Centre, NY 11570.

First Class Mail

N C R L L Newsletter
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