

**Stephen P. Norris & Linda M. Phillips**  
**FOUNDATIONS OF LITERACY POLICY IN CANADA.**  
 Calgary, AB: Detselig Enterprises, 1990.  
 278 pp. \$19.95.

Having myself spent long hours examining various provincial literacy policy documents, I was pleased to be invited to review *Foundations of Literacy Policy in Canada*. Edited by Stephen P. Norris and Linda M. Phillips of Memorial University, this is a collection of essays based on papers presented in Newfoundland at a 1988 conference on the theme "Exploring the Breadth and Depth of Literacy." What the book title led me to expect was a description and discussion of the grounds on which literacy policies in Canada are presently formulated. I anticipated a comparison of provincial perspectives and a critical analysis of their different beliefs and value systems and the attendant problems for practice. Instead, this is a collection of essays establishing some foundations for literacy policy. It offers perspectives on what ought to or might be rather than on what is the case. The book's substance is thus, I think, more accurately denoted by the conference title than the book title. The range of the essays also reflects the inevitable gaps of a conference collection. While the editors rightly point out that no single volume can include all the information needed for policy-setting, it seems likely that a conscious selection of essays, rather than of respected scholars, would result in greater evenness of scope and depth.

That said, I found the collection very valuable and interesting and was particularly pleased to discover some work that was new to me. Almost all of the fourteen essays are published here for the first time. They are divided into three groups in order to highlight particular aspects of their arguments: philosophical, historical, and social perspectives on literacy. The six in the philosophical section offer provocative views, from Lloyd Brown's measured by generally conservative argument that social participation requires facility in the standard and dominant modes of discourse, to Suzanne de Castell's strong critique of schooling's inappropriate valuing of literate over affective and bodily knowing. As a group, the six essays critically examine common conceptions of literacy. Each puts forward an angle of vision on a dimension of literacy which warrants attention in any policy development: literacy and the development of reasoning; the relationship between literacy and social conditions; the adequacy of the concept of functional literacy and, particularly, of the means by which functional competence is tested; literacy and politics; and literacy and technology.

The section on historical perspectives is historically a little thin and it lacks the breadth of the philosophical. The inclusion of essays on math and science literacy seemed at first curious, but these proved very intriguing. The two which discuss mathematical and scientific/technological literacy, for instance, explain why and how their disciplines have come to include literacy

in their educational purposes. Math phobia is a disease of probably 90% of the population. In her article about math literacy, Carolyn Kieran explains how teaching computer programming through Logo makes it possible for children to set and solve problems and be inventive so that they think mathematically instead of learning about math. Knowing math is doing math. "A person gathers, discovers, or creates knowledge in the course of some activity having a purpose. This active process is different from mastering concepts and procedures," says Kieran, quoting from the 1989 NCTM publication *Curriculum Evaluation Standards for School Mathematics*. Scientific and technological literacy is distinguished from scientific knowledge in Glen Aikenhead's essay, by its capacity to lead to empowerment. Literacy in science and technology enables one to act on understanding, he argues, not merely to possess it. He quotes Prewitt's (1983) observation that

The scientifically savvy citizen. . . is a person who understands how science and technology impinge upon public life. Although this understanding would be enriched by substantive knowledge of science, it is not coterminous with it. (p. 56)

By reconceptualizing the objectives of math and science teaching to include literacy, these educators hope learners will better understand the real-life consequences and impact of these disciplines in their daily lives. Such an aim is long overdue in both math and science. The value and meaning of literacy appropriated in the essays on math and science corresponds to what Stanley Straw calls the social-construction period of current literacy theory in his essay "The Actualization of Reading and Writing: Public Policy and Conceptualizations of Literacy." Straw offers a capsule historical rendering of the development of conventional verbal literacy in order to make the point that what it now means to be literate is fully exploited neither by current teaching approaches, nor by the aims and means of literacy evaluation. Mona J. Beebe, taking an historical perspective, traces the development of research in reading to show that whole language approaches to reading have emerged out of literacy theory and in response to failure of skills-based methods.

In the section on social perspectives on literacy, three of the four studies presented were research done in Canada and thus are particularly helpful for Canadian policy setting. Merrill Swain and colleagues from OISE detail their Metropolitan Toronto study on "The Role of Native Language Literacy in Third Language Learning." The findings of their research are important for all teachers working toward literacy with multilingual/multicultural groups of children. They found, for instance, that "third language learning is enhanced through native language literacy" (p. 202) and that "knowledge of heritage language literacy is as important as using literacy skills" (p. 203). Social factors affecting literacy development in young children, adolescents, and adults are dealt with in the remaining three essays which collectively identify essential

issues to take into account in policy development. Gen Ling Chang and Gordon Wells report on writing in grade 3 and 5 classrooms; William Fagan documents socioaffective factors in adult literacy development; and Rodney Clifton with Trevor Williams and Jeff Clancy describe an investigation into "Ethnicity, English-Language Usage, and Academic Achievement: Evidence from Australia."

Few issues in education arouse as much public concern in Canada as literacy. Views on the use, meaning, value, and level of literacy required in any particular setting tend to vary according to which individuals and institutions happen to be consulted. Few people are likely to consider illiteracy an advantage in a highly literate society, but they may disagree about specific advantages and disadvantages. They may or may not be convinced, for example, by claims like those of the Canadian Business Task Force on Literacy (1988), that the disadvantages of illiteracy can be quantified in dollar costs to Canadian business and Canadian society as a whole. Whatever is believed about the individual and social consequences of illiteracy or, indeed, of literacy, those beliefs have a very significant impact on policy decisions for literacy programs. Educators, therefore, have a particular responsibility to decide and argue for the priority of interests they will listen to and serve when they accept or develop policy. Their literacy goals for children are likely to be quite different from the literacy goals of factory managers for adult workers. The intention of *Foundations of Literacy Policy in Canada* is "to provide educational policy makers the foundations in knowledge and concepts needed for making justifiable literacy policy decisions." As a collection, it offers perhaps not the foundations, but it certainly makes a much-needed, substantial contribution and will be stimulating and very useful to its intended audience.

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**CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK:**

**LEARNING THE ART.**

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**121 pp. \$24.50.**

Few teachers, or those who work with preservice and inservice teachers, would dispute the claim that learning to teach is an ongoing, complex process. A myriad of successive and differing interactions with students, subject matter, other teachers, teaching situations, administrators, curriculum materials, and the like, constitute the continuing realities of this complexity for teachers. *Constructive Feedback: Learning the Art* rivets our attention on many of these interactions and the feedback about the events of teaching they provide teachers.