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The Great Speckled Bird: Multicultural Politics and Education Policymaking

Catherine Cornbleth, Dexter Waugh

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This unique volume takes readers behind the scenes for an "insider/outsider" view of education policymaking in action. Two state-level case studies of social studies curriculum reform and textbook policy (California and New York) illustrate how curriculum decision making becomes an arena in which battles are fought over national values and priorities. Written by a New York education professor and a California journalist, the text offers a rare blend of academic and journalistic voices. The "great speckled bird" is the authors' counter-symbol to the bald eagle--a metaphor representing the racial-ethnic-cultural diversity that has characterized the U.S. since its beginnings and the multicultural reality of American society today.

The text breaks new ground by focusing on the intersections of national debates and education policymaking. It situates the case studies within historical and contemporary cultural contexts--with particular attention to questions of power and knowledge control and how influence is exercised. By juxtaposing the contrasting cases of California and New York, the authors illustrate commonalities and differences in education policymaking goals and processes. By sharing stories of participants at and behind the scenes, policymaking comes alive rather than appearing to result from impersonal "forces" or "factors."

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