The National Research Council report *Scientific Research in Education* claims to present an inclusive view of science as it responds to federal government attempts to legislate educational research. This author argues, however, that the report in fact narrowly defines science as positivism and methodology as quantitative. These definitions are made possible by the outright rejection of postmodernism and the rejection by omission of other theories including queer, feminist, race, postcolonial, critical, and poststructural theories. The chief issue in this report is, in fact, not “science” but the larger issue of epistemology, from which methodologies like conventional science emerge. After using postmodern analyses to illustrate the danger of the report’s normalizing and totalizing discourse, this author urges researchers to be on guard against those who would reject diverse epistemologies and methodologies in educational research.

F
euer, Towne, and Shavelson’s article “Scientific Culture and Educational Research,” which appears in this issue of *Educational Researcher,* interprets for American Educational Research Association members the National Research Council’s (NRC) (2002) Committee on Scientific Principles for Education Research’s longer report, *Scientific Research in Education.* The NRC committee’s report professes to temper the desires of those in the federal government who want, in the words of Representative Michael Castle (R–DE), to end “education fads that masquerade as sound science” (quoted in “House Passes Legislation,” 2002). *Fads* here refers to practices informed by research that is not scientifically based (SBR) or evidence based (EBR); that is, research that is not “real” science. Though the NRC report initially seems well intentioned and claims to resist the de-
Unfortunately, it is often the case that those who work within one theoretical framework find others unintelligible.
fact, that disciplinary work has already begun with the publication of the report.

The NRC report should scare us all to death. The report’s master narrative of science is what Jean-François Lyotard and other postmodernists reject “as the unacceptable remnant of a ‘totalizing’ philosophical tradition and as the valorization of conformist, when not ‘terrorist’ ideals of consensus” (Jameson, 1984, p. x). Why do people fear difference when “disensus stirs the pots of democracy” (Caputo, 1993, p. 120)? If educational researchers follow the recommendations of the NRC report, we will be unable to “produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently” in the service of education (St. Pierre, 1997, p. 175). Is that what we want?

It is difficult to know what to make of the NRC report. How scared should we be when the federal government endorses a particular view of science and rejects others? Is the NRC report a volley in another skirmish of the paradigm wars? Is it another example of a federally sponsored report that, in the long run, will carry little, if any, weight?

My position is that we cannot afford to take it lightly. This latest attempt to marginalize certain epistemologies and methodologies in order to discipline and control science, to reduce it, to center it, cannot go unanswered. Fortunately, postmodernism is firmly entrenched in educational research, and, like Foucault (1984/1985), postmodernists are always prepared “to begin and begin again” (p. 7) their work of decentering, in this case, an oppressive science that produces the “creeping tides of conformity and methodological zealotry” (p. 1) that Feuer et al. claim to reject. Postmodernists are well practiced in the “persistent critique” (Spivak, 1993, p. 235) that is necessary to keep educational research an open field of play in which science does not obstruct but enables the proliferation of knowledge.

REFERENCES


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