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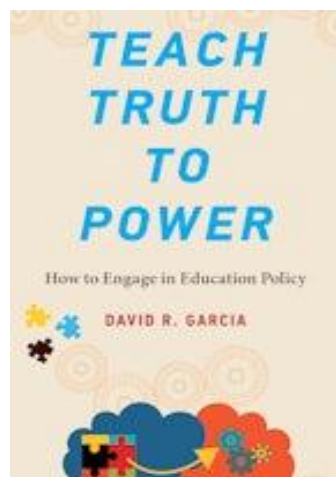
Garcia, D. R. (2022). *Teach truth to power: How to engage in education policy*. MIT Press.

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**Reviewed by Emily M. Hodge
Montclair State University
United States**

On the back cover of *Teach Truth to Power: How to Engage in Education Policy*, Teachers College Professor of Political Science and Education Jeffrey Henig writes, “David Garcia is the perfect person to write this book.” I would go one step further. David Garcia is the *only* person who could have written this book. As an education professor at Arizona State University and multi-time candidate for major political office, including governor of Arizona, Garcia is uniquely positioned to offer insight into not only what it really means to engage with politicians, but also how to do it. As Garcia puts it, the goal of this volume is to “make explicit the hidden curriculum of engaging in education policy” (p. 17).



This volume comprises 14 chapters divided between two sections. The first section, “The Shift,” describes common misconceptions that many academics hold about who is influential in the policy process and the types of information that politicians find helpful. Readers are encouraged to “shift” their thinking about the policy process to a view of “research utilization as direct engagement in a local policy context” (p. 18). The second section offers concrete guidance on many aspects of how to engage successfully with politicians on education policy issues: proactively building relationships and trust with local politicians; finding common ground with unexpected allies; sharing research-based predictions of likely outcomes of policy decisions; and using frameworks and visuals to make complex relationships comprehensible to a general audience. Garcia proposes a means of accomplishing these goals: the research “one-pager,” a brief, visually appealing policy document that opens with a practical problem and ends with a concrete “ask.”

“The Shift” provides a much-needed corrective to the discussion sections of many academic articles, which provide implications for an assumed, generic “policymaker.” The more productive audience for these policy recommendations is usually professional staff. While the number and responsibilities of a politician’s staff will vary based on the size of the office, these individuals most often hold the responsibility of understanding policy at a deeper level within multiple areas, one of which will be education.

In contrast to professional staff, politicians are asked to make decisions on a huge array of issues. Therefore, politicians themselves only need or want what Garcia refers to as “half-knowledge” (p. 64): essentially, enough knowledge to take action on a practical problem. Garcia’s use of call out boxes reflecting on his personal experiences as a politician and an academic were some of the most fascinating portions of this book. For example, on the value of half-knowledge to a politician, he describes being “surprised” at this set of incentives that was so different from the behavior he was rewarded for in the academic world: “As a professor, I am rewarded for researching widely and bringing together seemingly unconnected theoretical perspectives or concepts to create a new understanding of education issues ... As a candidate, I found it extremely difficult and even counterproductive to communicate multifaceted ideas in the shortened format of campaign speeches and media soundbites” (p. 65). It makes sense that a nuanced view of a policy issue is not compatible with the types of political speech needed to win an election, but what about afterwards? Can researchers help politicians understand the nuances of policy issues and communicate them to others? Overall, Garcia argues that they can, but certain barriers must be overcome.

Garcia provides insight into why politicians may not perceive research and researchers as objective and trustworthy. Essentially, research is only one form of actionable knowledge that politicians bring to bear on decision-making. They may act based on what they hear of others’ personal narratives and the emotions they invoke, their religious convictions, their implicit trust in others they perceive to be similar to them, or their own personal experiences and memories related to an issue, in addition to what the research evidence says on an issue. When research evidence conflicts with these other ways of knowing, it is unlikely to compel action. Further, when research findings are brought in, unasked, from an unknown outsider, this information is not often perceived as trustworthy.

So, how should researchers interact with politicians? Many vie for the time of a politician after elections. *Teach Truth to Power* emphasizes the importance of building relationships with politicians over the long term, starting before politicians are politicians, but instead when they are local civic actors involved in municipal organizations, for example. The advantage of such an approach is that relationships can be stronger and more authentic. As Garcia notes, “If the academic is bringing research to the novice politician without an established relationship, then the academic is effectively

indistinguishable from the lobbyists, constituents, or intermediary organizations that are also vying for attention on their issues” (p. 51). Trusted insiders are valued sources of advice and expertise; building relationships over time is key.

Further, what types of contribution are ideal? Frameworks, Garcia argues, because they help politicians assess not only current but future actions. Frameworks translate a set of complex relationships into a summary statement comprehensible to a general audience. He provides an example of his own use of the “85/15” framework. This proportion reflects the surprisingly small number of hours that children spend in public school between ages 5 and 18—only 15% of children’s waking hours over that 12-year period is spent in school. This framework is easy to understand and easily leads to discussions of the important role of community and family supports and the unrealistic expectations placed on schools and teachers—realizations that would then shape politicians’ actions. Further, politicians listen closely and are more likely to act when the same message comes to them from unexpected allies. Garcia points out that organizations in the education community and the business community, for example, often have contrasting positions and political affiliations. When those communities are aligned in their advocacy efforts, politicians listen.

Finally, in terms of how to communicate potential policy actions to politicians, Garcia agrees with some of the typical guidance for academics writing for politicians—use plain language and a short format, with stories from individuals affected by this policy issue, and suggestions for concrete but politically realistic actions. However, he also suggests that many ways that academics put these suggestions into practice still miss their target audience: academics add bullet points but keep the complex sentences of an academic article; academics include policy recommendations at the end but recommendations are too vague and context-free to be actionable; too few stories are used to bolster the recommendations (pp. 179–180).

Instead of the common “policy brief” format, Garcia recommends what he calls a “research one-pager,” based on a similar genre he learned as a legislative staff member needing to summarize a bill and its impact in one page. Assume that politicians will scan this one-pager rather than read it closely and use the “if the reader goes no further” guideline to put the most urgent information front and center, using the following basic structure:

- Open with a real-world problem, clearly connected to an important, broad value and one that affects both local constituents and a broader set of people.
- Explain succinctly how this real-world problem could either improve or deteriorate depending on the action taken or not taken.
- Present a policy suggestion with briefly stated, supporting research evidence.
- End with a realistic “ask” of the politician.

Garcia emphasizes that the effort of putting together a one-pager is wasted without an “ask.” Politicians regularly ask others for money or support, and they expect to be asked. So, what are realistic actions you can ask *for*? In some contexts, it can be reasonable to ask a politician to support, oppose, or alter a specific piece of proposed legislation or policy. Other types of requests can also lead to eventual policy change. Politicians can facilitate connections among researchers (and the research presented in the one-pager) and others on their staff or in their social and professional networks. Alternately, politicians might agree to attend an event or join a recommended group that would expose them to information in line with research evidence and desired policy outcomes. The idea of a research one-pager is a major contribution, in my view. One supplement to this book that would be beneficial is a collection of model one-pagers. If the book offered more concrete examples of one-pagers linked to specific issue areas or resources on how to craft one-pagers, it would have helped readers put these suggestions into practice.

Teach Truth to Power ends on a note of urgency and optimism, reminding academics that they have skills of critical value to politicians, namely the ability to see how new changes and contexts are likely to affect policy based on our longitudinal view of prior policy changes and outcomes over time. As Garcia notes, “Prediction is an invaluable asset in policymaking, and academics possess a tailor-made skillset to predict policy outcomes in an education landscape that is constantly changing...” (p. 211). This volume offers a wealth of insight into how to engage meaningfully with politicians and professional staff. I recommend it to any scholar of education policy, as well as to school board members, parents, and others who care about education policy at all levels and would like to know how to build more effective relationships with politicians.

About the Reviewer

Emily M. Hodge is an associate professor in the Department of Educational Leadership at Montclair State University in New Jersey. Her research uses qualitative methods and social network analysis to understand the unintended consequences of equity-focused education policies. Prior projects have included identifying contested visions of literacy instruction during Common Core State Standards implementation and how school structures like tracking shape teachers’ curricular decisions.





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