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A Technology for Policy Implementation:

Minimizing Incongruity Between Ostensible Policy and the Policy at Work

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In complex educational systems, there is often incongruity between ostensible policy and the policy at work (Kingdon, 1984). Policy is not always put into action with the empathy for which it was first envisaged. Lindblom (1980) argues that an augmenting factor is, "Implementation [which] always makes or changes policy in some degree." (p. 65) How ostensible policy is changed during its implementation, and strategies for minimizing policy change are important considerations when developing technology for policy implementation.

Educational systems are notorious for their lack of control and coordination over classroom instruction (Myer and Rowan, 1984). A phenomenon known as "loose coupling," where the system is rigid and lacks internal connections, is often to blame. Such a situation fosters segmented teaching with little or no evaluation of actual classroom practice. As a result, loose coupling can be a major contributor to changes in policy (Myer and Rowan, 1984). It is the teacher's professional role that can help maintain loosely coupled educational systems.

A professional is characteristically autonomous (Freidson, 1986). The professional autonomy that teachers enjoy helps to foster loose coupling within educational systems. Myer and Rowan (1984) contend that principals and superintendents avoid close inspection of teachers, and employ elaborate displays of trust and confidence in order to increase the teacher's commitment to the profession.

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By agreeing that teachers have instructional competence and by visibly not inspecting instructional activities, an administration shifts maximal social responsibility for upholding the rituals of instruction to the teachers. The myth of teacher professionalism and the autonomy associated with it, for example, function to increase the commitments of teachers. (p. 99)

The teacher's autonomy in the classroom and "myth" of professionalism may contribute to incongruity between ostensible policy and its efficient implementation in the classroom. Notions concerning teachers' professional autonomy should be considered during policy implementation.

Incongruity between ostensible policy and the policy at work is further exacerbated by the allocation of resources. Who allocates what resources, for what purpose, and to whom, are essential elements in implementing policy. Resources are generally the domain of policy makers. As Freidson (1986) points out, "Management exercises direction by the use of its exclusive power to allocate the resources necessary for the work,..." (p. 149) The allocation of resources has two effects on classroom teachers, (a) it limits their autonomy, and (b) it becomes a point of controversy between the professional and the bureaucracy. The deployment of resources can say as much about policy as the written or spoken word. Policy makers can aid congruence between ostensible policy and the policy at work, by allocating sufficient resources for policy implementation.

Ostensible Policy

Policy can be defined as general decisions that serve as rules, precedents, or guidelines for future decisions (Kingdon, 1984). Definitions, however, do not always represent the full implications associated with a single word, like policy. Probably the best way to investigate ostensible policy is to look at its role and function in institutions and society. Hicks and Tillin (1977) say the role of policy is:

...to guide all members of the staff toward the achievement of desired objectives. Policies furnish guidelines for those to whom responsibilities have been delegated, and help them avoid undesirable decisions and misuse of authority. Policies provide standards for action and decision making, standards which are developed on the basis of previous decisions that have been found desirable. (p. 95)

Basically, policy's role is to guide, denote responsibility, and set standards, as directed by management. Functionally, however, policy is an instrument of communication.

When authority is reserved by top management the decisions made should be expressed as largely as possible in the form of policy so that they may be applied

to similar problems that come up on the operations level of the organization. (Hicks and Tillin, 1977, p. 35)

It is the function of policy as a communication device that deserves further investigation and refining of technique.

During metamorphosis from ostensible policy to policy at work, technology and policy merge and mingle as one. Technology has the potential to communicate ostensible policy accurately and precisely. A skilled technologist able to recognize needs and utilize all of the resources available, both human and non-human, can attain the goals and objectives of the planned change. This planned change, in turn, becomes a complementary classroom technology, which is designated policy at work. Should the ostensible policy wax incongruent with the classroom practice, fault lies not with technology, but with how technology was applied in communicating the policy.

The Technology of Policy Implementation

The technology employed to implement ostensible policy has an effect on the communication of that policy. The textbook or classic theory approach to implementing policy involves planning, designing, supervising, controlling, and revising. It is often displayed in a flow chart form with anecdotal asides and super clarification. Sometimes it is detailed and minutely listed down to the last quantitative assessment of student involvement. All of these models end with *revision* and *go back to the beginning.* For many reasons, such classic theory is doomed to fail (Lindblom, 1959).

Most policy implementation skips procedures and takes short cuts. In reality, policy makers narrow down the choices and implement the most politically and economically expedient alternatives (Kingdon, 1984). White (1985) encapsulates the real world of policy when he writes, "We reach conclusions, and then decide why they were valid conclusions." (p. 62)

There is a need to ensure equity between ostensible policy and the policy at work. A technology for implementation can work. However, the same technology will not work for every situation, and the "science of muddling through" is inconsistent (Lindblom, 1959). The technology employed should embrace altruistic principles and guard the integrity of ostensible policy during the process of implementation. Such technology may be difficult, but not impossible, to construct. Technologists should be aware of the "non-incremental" nature of many policy decisions when constructing technology for policy implementation.

Most policy that is voiced or written is "non-

incremental" policy (Kingdon, 1984). That is, policy that does not logically extend from the present situation. This creates problems for policy implementation. First, all policy must be incrementally implemented (Kingdon, 1984). The policy at work must complement and extend from present practice. Metaphorical connections need to be made between present practice and ostensible policy. Second, non-incremental policy opens the door for what Lindblom (1980) refers to as the strategic problem solver, a subversive "policy pirate." Strategic problem solvers use "nibbling" as a strategy that shifts the policy through a series of incremental changes. Hence, technology for policy implementation must guard against implementation "nibbling," and compound the new upon past practices. Policy *cannot* be instituted non-incrementally.

Policy implementation must be planned incrementally and involve an extensive professional development program to help teachers cope with the changes expected in their work environment. This professional development program must be adequately resourced and given a priority equal to the importance of the policy's implementation.

Resourcing Policy Implementation

Education systems have extensive resources dedicated to the schooling of society. These resources are renewed and updated annually. By allocating or reallocating these resources to support policy decisions, the policy makers help to communicate the importance placed on any given policy. A committed policy maker will find the resources to implement policy, and subordinates will gauge the policy maker's sincerity by the proportion of available resources that are allocated to the task. Resources talk, and a policy without resources is not productive. It is non-communicative.

An example of non-communicative policy is the hardware and/or software "drops" that were associated with computer education. Many schools have computers in the classroom. Yet, many teachers have forsaken them in favor of traditional classroom technology. No one denies that the computer is having a profound effect upon our society and personal lives. That is not the issue. Teachers wanted to know how to address those changes, where the computer fits into the curriculum, and when to teach it or teach with it. Issues like these were not addressed through the policy maker's hardware and software "drops."

Policy is sometimes communicated in writing with no resource allocation at all. Often, the implicit message accompanying the ostensible policy is for school leaders to reallocate resources, within their own jurisdiction of responsibility, to achieve the policy aim. Policy without resources can be

dangerous for two reasons. First, resources will not be reallocated, and nothing will be done. Second, the policy and resource reallocation will be mismanaged by "strategic problem solvers" to achieve their own ends.

If a policy is highly valued by policy makers it is best communicated through a well-resourced professional development program. Selecting the right people to communicate the policy is of utmost importance. People can be "resistors" or "amplifiers" to change. Finding the leaders who can amplify the issues persuasively is the key to initiating policy implementation.

The chosen leaders should be involved in policy decisions and strategy planning early. As Hicks and Tillin (1977) write, "...policies need to be developed by the manager in concert with those other professionals on the staff who will be involved in putting these policies into practice." (p. 95) Burns (1978) concurs, "Leaders can also shape and alter and elevate the motives and values and goals of followers through the vital teaching role of leadership. This is transforming leadership." (p. 425) Without effective leadership the dutiful implementation of policy is lost. Policy implementation needs good leadership.

Once the right people are in place, resources must be allocated to facilitate technology for policy implementation. The right people need the right materials, both human and non-human. This means designing a vehicle for translating the policy into concrete terms. It could be a curriculum document, videotape, written guidelines, advisers, and/or hardware. The right people and the right resources are all important to the accurate communication of the policy.

The personnel, the professional development program, and the resources should all be given some institutional credentials. The policy will not be communicated effectively unless there is some institutional clout that will command the attention of the teaching profession. It has been said that, "Knowledge is power" and Freidson (1986) contends that there is no knowledge until it has been institutionalized. By empowering the leaders of policy change with the good will and symbols of the policy maker's approval, the knowledge that they bring to the chalk-face will be infinitely more acceptable in the eyes of the rank-and-file professional in the classroom.

Professional Development

Professional development programs are excellent vehicles for communicating policy to teachers. When planned sequentially and adequately resourced, implementation of policy can be accomplished with a large degree of altruism.

The program must lead participants through various stages of development, beginning with current experience and understandings. The professional development leaders cannot expect teachers to unconditionally accept policy decisions. Remember, teachers are autonomous in their classrooms. They must be *convinced*. Teachers exist to maintain the continuity and integrity of the system itself (Lindblom, 1980). Unless teachers can be logically extended to believe that the policy, when implemented, will benefit their role and function in the system, they will not buy into a change in the system environment.

Once teachers have accepted ownership in the notion of successful implementation of the policy, policy makers take on a new role. They become facilitators. The metamorphosis from policy advocate to facilitator will occur naturally as teachers' commitment to the ostensible policy will strike an intrinsic desire for them to gain greater control over the new situation and retain their classroom autonomy.

To empower teachers, the policy maker/facilitator can follow a plan characterized by key elements which ensure the successful implementation of ostensible policy. First, establish an "implementing force" in the school. The nature of this force can take many shapes, from physical resources to high public opinion. This force should be "seeded" by the professional development leaders and fostered by a "policy advocate" on the teaching staff. The policy advocate should be, "Proactive rather than reactive, flexible rather than rigid, visible rather than secluded, experimental and innovative rather than solid and unimaginative" (Peterson, 1974, p. 38). It is the responsibility of professional development leaders and the policy advocate to identify and initiate implementing forces and nurture their subsequent effect on changing the school's educational environment, virtually softening the ground for change.

Implementing forces should not only affect teachers, but school administration must be receptive as well. All school administration must value the policy and assist the professional development leaders in documenting the policy's implementation. Administration can assist by juxtaposing time and agenda items for staff development purposes. They can institute "Action Research" programs that can serve as official documentation of policy implementation and feedback for policy revision. Administration should value the policy and, like the teachers, be bound by the same rules of ownership. Accurate policy implementation will not tolerate an "Okay for them, but not for me" attitude by administration.

Second, the policy should be broken into con-

crete strategies that relate to concepts embodied in the policy. They should be based on existing practice and lead to new ways of thinking about the school environment. This is the practice of incrementally implementing the policy. The professional development leaders, policy advocate, administration, and staff should all corroborate when listing the concrete strategies.

Third, sufficient resources must be allocated or reallocated. The professional development leaders or school level policy advocate should take responsibility for familiarizing the teachers and administration with the resources. As well, the establishment of a central resource area can aid implementation. The resource area can house all materials necessary to support the policy at work. The area should be supervised, easily accessible, and comprehensive, according to the needs of the staff and school. Remember, resources can communicate as much about the policy as the written or spoken word.

Finally, the school's staff should set aside meeting times where *every* teacher has an opportunity to share concrete strategies for policy implementation with *all* staff members. Teachers can relate and show the results of the strategies they have employed to manifest the policy at work. Such meetings can inspire others on staff to employ similar strategies in their classrooms. Sharing at these meetings can be documented and the results used to account for accurate implementation of the policy. The documentation may also be published and may assist others who are implementing or revising the same policy.

Conclusion

The educational policy at work can correlate more closely with ostensible policy if there is clear, logical communication between the policy makers and teachers. As part of the communication, resources and professional development programs can combine to amplify the empathy with which policy is drafted. Paramount to successful implementation is good leadership and not simply the exertion of power. "...It is the exercise of leadership rather than that of 'naked power' that can have the most comprehensive and lasting causal influence as measured by real change" (Burns, 1978, p. 239).

Good leadership means sensible policy decisions that teachers will accept as rational exensions of the present. Policy makers and implementation technologists must remember that every teacher is autonomous in his or her own classroom; they wield great power over their immediate work environment. Teachers will display altruistic behavior when they are empowered with clear reasons for implementing an educational policy. They will dutifully lead their class in implementing ostensible policy in its most practicable form, if that policy is communicated clearly, through a well-resourced professional development program. The key to better correlation between ostensible policy and the policy at work is better communication. The key to better communication is good leadership practices, effective professional development programs, and adequate resourcing, all working in concert to achieve intended objectives. □

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