

REVIEW ESSAY

Lieberman, Ann and McLaughlan, Milbrey W. (eds.) *Policy Making in Education*, 81st Yearbook, Part I, of the National Society for the Study of Education. Chicago: NSSE, 1982. xvi, 287 pp. \$15.00 (U.S.)

In 1981, the Faculty of Education at the University of Calgary underwent a major reorganization that resulted in the creation of two new departments: Educational Policy and Administrative Studies and Teacher Education and Supervision. The title of the first department reflects changes initiated in American higher education beginning in the 1960s and in the recent Canadian efforts to consolidate and rationalize graduate programs in the face of declining enrollments and stagnant finances; while the second was occasioned by a local initiative to insure a coherent and manageable undergraduate program for the B.Ed.

The use of the term "policy studies" implied a greater relevance for traditional disciplines than was possible within old Educational Foundations Departments. The mania for policy studies is not, of course, restricted to educationists as might be demonstrated by the rise of public history and historical policy studies. At the risk of being cynical, one might attribute the interest in policy studies as simply an effort to give an impression of utility for history and philosophy of education. I think that such attitudes may exist but that philosophers and historians have other reasons for adapting new labels. New titles often have the virtue of forcing us to reconsider familiar data, to recast our questions, to abandon old assumptions, and to seek for new ways of relating our present with the past. Surely it is these considerations that have prodded many educationists to recast their institutional arrangements. It is, therefore, with positive attitudes that I approached this Yearbook.

Prior to a discussion of specific issues raised by the articles in the Yearbook, several general considerations deserve comment. First, if social scientists are prone to demand formal definitions when analyzing research reports and proposals for institutional change, we are not unreasonable to expect that the requirement will be met in their work. Lieberman and McLaughlan cite the origins of the idea for the Yearbook as growing out of discussions and differing answers to such questions as: "What is policy? Who makes it? Where does it come from?" Regarding the first question, no formal attempt is made to answer it. Beyond the initial discussion by the editors, the chapter authors apparently assumed that we will recognize "policy" and subsequently "policy making" and "policy implementation" when they are discussed. After an initial irritation, the reviewer concluded that the absence of definition was liberating. A rigorous definition would surely have restricted or eliminated some of the approaches to policy studies found in the Yearbook.

Second, the strength of the chapters lies in the diversity of views and disciplines used. The sources of policy making, that is, the legislation units, the historical, sociological and psychological dimensions that shape the behavior of policy makers, and the problems of implementation are skillfully examined from the perspectives of various disciplines and policy-systems. A field of study that is too frequently given over to jargon, policy studies also has the advantage of loosely defended boundaries that are as easily penetrated by historians and philosophers as by social scientists and the purveyors of popular psychology. Indeed, as will become evident, those chapters that provided the best interpretation of policy making and implementations are precisely those that are quasi-historical and informed by the philosophical analysis of concepts and problems.

Finally, as befits a book produced by an American society, the problems, circumstances, and research are almost without exception from the experience of the United States during the past two decades. This is said not in some narrow carping nationalistic sense but to point out the difficulties in translating American experiences, successes and failures, into equivalent Canadian ones. Although superficially similar, the two nations have remarkably different histories, legal and political systems,

and national sensibilities that cannot be blurred by the sharing of a common North American standard of living and, for most on both sides of the border, an anglophone culture. The experience of the United States, at federal, state, and local levels, in forcing substantial changes in its social structure and particularly its schools simply have no Canadian equivalents. Although also a federal state, until the patriation of the British North America Act in 1982 with the adoption of a Charter of Rights, there has been no parallel in Canadian constitutional or legal practice to the litigation that has surrounded schooling in the United States since the early 1950s. The next few decades will determine whether the new constitutional arrangements will result in a legal and political system closer to the American model. On the other hand, provincial governments and local jurisdictions have traditionally been sensitive to change and innovation in the Republic. However, even when provincial governments moved to mandate changes in schools, the results have not been as far-reaching or disruptive as those undergone by American systems.

From the point of view of one located far from the American efforts to bring about substantial advances in equality and performances, the Canadian scene seems to inhabit another planet. Consequently, it is the underlying issues imbedded in the chapters that will be featured in this review.

As the chapters vary greatly in utility and power, I will dispose of those that offer little to the systematic understanding of "policy" and its implications. Although interesting, the middle third of the Yearbook, chapters four through six, are the most disappointing in this regard. In "Child Development Knowledge and Educational Practice: Using What We Know," Edward Zigler and Sharon L. Kagan provide us with six principles "that many child developmentalists [would] agree . . . are essential to help child growth and development." On the basis of these principles, the authors lay down prescriptions for educational practice. Although many prescriptions would be readily implemented - and some already operative, others are typical of the growing professionalization and bureaucratization of American education and life by which more and more intervention and control are passed into the hands of professionals. Indeed, given its moral tone, the chapter is strangely reminiscent of early inspirational educational literature in which extensions of the system and innovations were hailed as successful reforms. Compared with the restraint of the other chapters, it stands out like a tired and sore thumb.

"Bridging the Gap: Policy Research Rooted in Practice" by Glen E. Hall and Susan F. Loucks is a detailed discussion of "contour research" as an alternative strategy to "convergent research." Without dismissing the research strategy itself, the difficulties with the chapter include the failure to convince us of the centrality of "contour research" despite the polemical insistence that "policy development must share the essential attributes of contour research," that is, "policy makers must become apprised through first-hand experiences of life in schools, they must have clearer images and descriptions of the operational forms of their policies, concepts must be co-developed through dialogue with school people, and they must acknowledge the multivariate and systematic complexity of school life." Although sympathetic to the gap between policy formation and implementation, the authors systematically fail to come to grips with the divergent interests of the "makers" and school people that are developed in several other chapters. Moreover, the gap between researcher and practitioner is not the same as the one between policy maker and practitioner. Indeed, as other studies demonstrate the gap between researcher and policy maker is as unbridgeable as the former. Finally, the incessant demand for taking the real world of the school into account may be seen as a covert attempt to deflect unpopular mandated change.

The final chapter in this group, "The Policy Implications of Status Variables and Schooling" by Carol Camp Yeakey and Edmund W. Gordon, while pointing out the limited power of schooling to counter social class, relies too heavily on secondary historical evidence. In brief, it is an analysis of sociological, historical and social comment literature in the style of the revisionist history of education of the late 1960s and early 70s. Like the chapter by Zigler and Kagan, it seems strangely out of place.

The first two chapters will also be summarily treated for dissimilar reasons. "Public Policy and the Handicapped: The Case of Mainstreaming" by Seymour B. Sarason and John Doris is an abridgement

of a chapter in a 1979 book by the authors. Although written by major scholars, especially Seymour, one is nevertheless disappointed that an already published work was included in the Yearbook. Seymour and Doris made a significant contribution to the historical understanding of educational handicap and public policy in their 1979 study. The tremendous variety of contemporary printed sources on the issue of mental retardation and its relation to schooling should serve as a model for non-historians who attempt to draw upon historical scholarship to inform their understanding of policy making over time. Finally, Sarason and Doris have the happy facility of giving their discussion not distance but rather "objectivity" in Ernst Cassirer's sense of hanging together. One comes away with a sense of understanding and without a feeling of having been preached at.

"A Usable Past: Using History in Educational Policy" by Elisabeth Hansot and David Tyack was a disappointment. As one who has admired and benefitted from Tyack's previous work on the history of American education, I found the piece pedestrian and strained. Historical studies do not so much inform our thinking about present issues as those issues assist historians to rethink and ask new questions about the past. Even if one rejects the old adage about history as philosophy teaching by example, there does seem to be some necessity that historical policy studies be related in a clear logical way to present issues. The central problem with the chapter is that its existence or non-existence in the Yearbook was irrelevant.

The most interesting and relevant chapters are the final four, which may be conveniently divided into two related sets. "Strategic Choice in Federal Educational Policy: The Compliance-Assistance Trade-Off," by Richard F. Elmore and Milbrey W. McLaughlin and "Progress and Problems: The Paradox of State Reform" by Jerome T. Murphy nicely complement each other as do "Research on Teaching: Policy Implications for Teacher Education" by Karen Kepler Zumwalt and "Practice Makes Policy: The Tensions of School Improvement" by Ann Lieberman. Moreover, the four chapters speak intelligently to the issue of "policy making in education" and help us understand more clearly the significance of the other chapters in the Yearbook.

In particular, Elmore and McLaughlin point out that policy enforcers have the tendency to use "the narrowest possible definition of success," which means in most cases designating specific actions and expenditures that can be counted. The authors have labeled such indicators of success "proxies," and demonstrate that symbolic representations of social objectives have the unfortunate tendency to encourage both the enforcers and compliers to manipulate them. Fundamental to the displacement of objectives by proxies is the fact that although "policies are authoritative declarations of intent," they do not contain "the knowledge required for their own success." Another basic reason for such failures is succinctly put by Murphy, namely that large-scale intervention at the state and local levels required the establishment of sophisticated state agencies. Drawing a parallel with Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*, Murphy demonstrates that the reform of state educational agencies have created new professional and public interests networks that are skillful in manipulating policy and proxies as well as advancing their own interests. Policy statements, definitions of performance, and the development of sophisticated state educational agencies seemingly have created new problems of compliance. This intractable nature of policy implementation is, of course, re-enacted on much smaller stages as will be attested to by department heads and deans where significant institutional changes have occurred in universities and colleges.

Elmore and McLaughlin offer five elements of a New Federal Strategy in education that can be extended to other circumstances since the fundamental question is "what combinations of assistance and compliance is likely to produce 'lasting inducements to innovation and improvement' at the level of the system [institution] where the education actually occurs?" The first element is the requirement to use assistance to stimulate state and local policies consistent with federal objectives. The second recommendation is to develop lateral networks of state legislators or practitioners to consider common problems before initiating federal policy. The third element grows out of the variety of responses to what might appear as self-evident policies of procedural requirements. Elmore and McLaughlin recommend a positive view of variability of response since it can be used to foster policy making and accountability at lower levels in the system. Fourthly, there is need for greater attention "to the

within-school, within-district, and within-state effects of policy decision" as against aggregate data such as targeting of funds. Finally, they recommend a reconsideration of the concept of "authority" inasmuch that recent emphasis has been on authority in the sense of "power or right" instead of "knowledge, competence, or experience." As mentioned earlier, Elmore and McLaughlin have indicated broad principles relating to policy making that are applicable to a wide range of institutional settings. Indeed, the principles have much to say to those engaged in reorganization and innovation in faculties of education.

Murphy's conclusions on state reform of educational agencies strike a familiar note: agencies are more modern and sophisticated; political processes are more open and responsive; the "have nots" are better organized and influential; leaders are better trained and more talented but have less scope for leadership; bureaucracies are better managed but more fragmented; information is better and more distributed but there is less agreement about the past and the future. Governmental processes are open but jammed; and government was reformed to be more just but is perceived to be less responsive. Once again, all these outcomes are depressingly familiar to us in faculties of education. Perhaps, however, the universality of the gloom should be reassuring since it seems to endemic to modern institutions.

The final two chapters deal directly with teacher education and teachers: "Research on Teaching: Policy Implications for Teachers Education" by Karen Kepler Zumwalt and "Practice Makes Policy: The Tensions of School Improvement" by Ann Lieberman. Like the search for teacher-proof curricula in the 1950s, recent research on teaching has been motivated by an assumption that "a more valid and powerful knowledge base for teacher education . . . [would have] clearly indicated policy implications [which] if implemented [would] insure better teachers . . ." Closely related to this assumption was the belief that governmental mandated reforms in teacher education would lead to the better education of children. Zumwalt identifies two basic orientations: "technological" in which teaching is seen as a composition of definable repertoire of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that can be used to bring about certain changes in learners; and "deliberative" with its commitment to reflection and growth moreover, Zumwalt sees two major emphases in research on teaching as supporting the two orientations. "Process-product" research with its emphasis on teacher behavior and educational outcomes that can be quantified and "descriptive" research with its concern for describing classroom phenomena in order to increase understanding. Zumwalt comes down squarely on the side of the deliberative orientation and descriptive research. Her decision is based on the belief that "a teacher education program built around lists of prescriptive behavior denies the very thinking behavior that is critically important in teaching and provides a model which may be miseducative in the classroom."

Ann Lieberman convincingly points out the gap between mandated improvement and the social realities of the classroom and in the process reminds us again of the different, if not conflicting, interests of professors and teachers. From the perspective of teachers, Lieberman sympathetically examines the results of two decades of school improvement programs in the United States. If one theme runs through the chapter, it is the failure of researchers and policy makers to understand the realities of the classroom and the school, the confusion of abstraction and formal thinking with lived experience, and the adoption of slogans as ideas. Lieberman argues persuasively for a proper consideration of school personnel along with the regnant views of the policy makers and managers.

There are several conclusions to be drawn from this volume. First, prescriptive direction of lower levels of any educational system is probably counter-productive. It encourages the top level to rely on proxies and thus negate its own policy objectives, destroys local responsibility and accountability, and saps the strength of all levels. Second, lower levels cannot be permitted to drift but must be supported to comply with the mandated objectives. This is, of course, related to the first conclusion in that the daily decisions and actions necessary to keep the system running are most often made at the basic unit. Third, if Zumwalt is correct, a prescriptive approach inherently carries the seeds of stagnation and repetition. It serves as a model that stifles initiation and encourages an unhealthy reliance on authority. Finally, we are reminded of the need to understand the social realities of the world in which we live, whether our own immediate one or that inhabited by others in the same system. If we are to understand

those diverse worlds, then the basic research on educational topics needs to be undertaken from a diverse range of disciplines: history, philosophy, sociology, and anthropology to name only a few.

The way is long and difficult but the joy of understanding and the satisfaction of improvement are not insignificant.

R.L. Schnell
The University of Calgary