

Reviews

Handbook of Teaching and Policy

Lee S. Shulman and Gary Sykes, editors
New York and London:
Longman, Inc., 1983.

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Handbook of Teaching and Policy deserves serious attention as a refreshingly sound treatment of the complexities of America's schools. Divided into four parts, the book deals with complexities of schools and classrooms, teaching as work and profession, teaching from the perspectives of teachers, and the relationships of teaching and educational policy. Editors Shulman and Sykes merge research on teaching with an analysis of policy. The ever increasing number of people seeking to influence education has largely ignored this task.

Shulman and Sykes offer a humorous and telling metaphor of policy's influence on the school. The metaphor traces the evolution of the American high school: "At the century's turn, the school was an avocado: a solid core of adult authority, a meaty homogeneous middle layer of students, and a thin skin of external policies"; but the high school turns into a "cantaloupe" during the 50s, and by the 80s becomes a "watermelon with a thick rind of external policies, a large and diverse student body, and adult authority scattered throughout like watermelon seeds." This metaphor rings true to practitioners charged with establishing priorities or responding to time-consuming mandates. Policies often translate into a maze of regulations that weaken the school's ability to function and to serve an academic purpose.

Chapters by Michael Rutter and Thomas Good, in part one, provide useful summaries of that burgeoning research that attempts to confront and comprehend classroom complexities.

Those interested in attracting and keeping good teachers should ponder part two, "Teaching as Work and Profession," a thorough and thoughtful study of the circuitous nature of policy regulations and labor relations. Douglas Mitchell and Charles Kerchner's claim that "most school districts now contain two distinct social organizations—each competing for the loyalty and cooperation of teachers" commands attention. Spiraling mandates to counteract strong stands by labor often result in "compliance rather than excellence, maintenance of effort rather than appropriateness of service, and following guidelines rather than responding to needs."

Part four, "Teaching and Educational Policy," provides the meat and potatoes of the handbook. Effective implementation of power does not come tumbling from the top down. Richard Elmore emphasizes that the teacher's role, so often absent, must also be addressed. Without teacher support, the "hierarchical" or mandated implementation becomes meaningless; and "the game is essentially lost." Michael Kirst points out that the effects of legislative policy on teaching depend on "proper formulation to secure compliance from teachers." Trusting and training teachers, too frequently overlooked in policy making and implementation, may be necessary if a policy is to succeed.

From superintendents to teachers, educators are beset with efforts to influence their work. Lee Shulman theorizes that the mandatory process in itself may be self-defeating, because those people who must carry out the mandate feel like subordinates who must grudgingly concede their lack of power. The current media focus on education may only aggravate such feelings of helplessness. Shulman and Sykes believe that "manipulating education to bring about social change, as public policy and mandate attempt to do, weakens the very foundation of



education's purpose of seeking excellence in education."

Policy making assumes that schools can be assigned clear-cut goals and that teachers can be monitored and held accountable for those goals. John Schwille calls for a "backward mapping of decisions: to see whether what goes on in the classroom bears any resemblance to what policy dictates." He describes and decries the "political brokering" that forces teachers to give up their commitment to what is good for students in the face of conflicting mandates.

Gary Fenstermacher and Marianne Amarel warn that "teachers, like learners, may be advised, encouraged, offered evidence, asked to consider possibilities, and questioned; but commanding, mandating, or insisting on compliance does not aid their understanding of their work, nor does it permit them to learn from their work." David Greenstone and Paul Peterson claim that "policies, rules, and instructions issued from outside the school are ignored, subverted, and implemented in ways unintended by their authors."

In the light of ever increasing attempts to influence education, an understanding of policy making in education requires study. Those involved must understand the difference between policy intention and policy implementation, between simple solution and complex reality, and, most of all, between legislating schooling and inspiring individuals. *Handbook of Teaching and Policy* furthers such understanding.

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