

THERE'S MANY A SLIP 'TWEEN CUP AND LIP... :

***A CASE STUDY OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN A
CHANGING CONTEXT ®***

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Abstract:

Education and schooling increasingly are subject to direct political involvement by Ministers and system level authorities. The perceived political benefits would suggest a continuation, or even an increase, in this trend. The data presented in this paper come from a Tasmanian study of policy making, implementation and evaluation. Data were collected from teachers, principals, school and departmental documents, and from the researcher's participation in the professional development workshops which were conducted for the Key Teachers. The development of the policy, its announced nature, and its subsequent implementation were found to vary, particularly where political and educational agenda conflicted.

Teachers' needs and professionalism should be respected by the policy process. Individuals' readiness, confidence, skills and credibility affect implementation outcomes. In providing supportive leadership, policy makers need increasingly to be aware of sharing their visions with all stakeholders. Ultimately, teachers and students in classrooms will determine the success or otherwise of policy implementation. Dependence on teachers for successful and lasting change must be recognised and valued. *This paper first, will demonstrate the limited nature of much recent theorising about and practical implementation of the policy process and second, outline ways of enhancing the likelihood of successful implementation.*

During 1993 and 1994 the Tasmanian media were running stories, at times daily, on "inappropriate student behaviour". Comments and opinions, lamenting a fall in standards, were common in the media. Debate concerned the effects of some students' behaviour on

safe and positive learning environments in schools. The issue had become "fashionable" (Hogwood & Gunn, 1992:68) and necessitated a political response.

The Minister for Education sought advice from the Tasmanian Education Council (TEC), an advisory body to the Minister (TEC, 1994a). In turn, the Council invited submissions from members of the public. The Minister had instigated a process of seeking information from members of school communities and the general public in order to develop the strategy he would eventually announce for addressing the issue of inappropriate student behaviour (Lindblom, 1980; Burch & Wood, 1986).

Context: Policy and Political Ingredients

Public interest in the issue of student behaviour was reflected in the over two hundred submissions the TEC received from schools, school councils, support services, and individuals including three students (TEC, 1994b). In its final report the TEC recognised the impact of inappropriate behaviour by a small number of students on schools' learning environments. The Council's report described the complexity of the problems surrounding inappropriate student behaviour, and suggested that broad ranging strategies displaying "recognition that social solutions are necessary" would be most effective, if not essential, to address the problems (TEC, 1994b:18).

"Supportive School Environment" programs, already implemented by Tasmanian schools to address the issue of inappropriate student behaviour received prominent attention from the Council. A theme which recurred in many of the suggestions was that while the Education Department "promotes and establishes worthwhile approaches such as these" it falls short in assuring their continuity. Factors such as time and resources, and recurrent training and support were listed as strategies to aid schools in developing "useful 'living' documents" (p 10). The need for "recurrent funding for recurrent needs" was reflected in many responses to the TEC's Discussion Paper (p 16).

The TEC offered 84 recommendations for consideration. The Education Department, in its response to the Council's report, recognised that the issues were complex and stated "that no simplistic or short-term solutions" were possible (DEA, 1995:1). Of the 21 initiatives the Department listed, one proposed an "intensive" professional development program for "one teacher in every secondary school" (p 2). It was this initiative which provided a strategy for the Minister to demonstrate, almost immediately his commitment, and the government's, to addressing the problem. Despite the TEC's recognition of the "complex nature of behaviour management," an individual program had been identified which placed emphasis on a single focus, that of developing teachers' skills. Much of the Council's analysis and recommendations and the Department's response had been ignored in the decision-making process.

There are several factors which provide some background to explaining this process. The ability to respond with a strategy which enabled speedy implementation and which was easily publicised, accords with Cohen & Barnes' (1993:260) reference to a politician's desire to "claim quick credit with constituents" and Porter's (1992:82) identification of "preservation of the individual's own political position." The suggested policy was developed within the limitations of being affordable and manageable and, importantly, the ability to be implemented in the short term. To achieve an almost immediate response, the Minister required an expeditious announcement. He had imposed his "frame of reference on reality" (Dery, 1984:4) to determine a view of the problem and the action he would take.

The frames of reference of policy-makers and those of people who implement policy typically differ and are linked with the conflicting values concerning identifying worthwhile innovation

outcomes. Specifically, teachers place great value on being able to identify positive benefits of proposed change for their students' learning (Lieberman & Miller, 1981). The significance of this is commented upon by Churchill, Williamson & Grady (1997) who observed that teachers characteristically place importance on seeing functional advantages for their professional practice before they will commit themselves to change. Often teachers view change to be motivated by political gain, or administrative or organisational goals, rather than educational priorities.

Finite resources and the inability to explore all relevant aspects impact on policy development. Politicians and senior policy implementers often allocate greater weight to the repercussions of the positions they adopt than crucial questions about problems, their possible causes, or outcomes (Hogwood & Gunn, 1992). In fact, Elmore and Sykes (1992) report that "policy making often has little to do with instrumental action" (p189). The conflict in assigning importance to problems, causes, outcomes, and issues other than the problem often results in changes to existing policies that are limited to incremental, or "marginally different," ones (Lindblom cited in Quade, 1982:27).

The Ministerial media statement announcing the outcome of the policy making stage, in part, stated:

Every Tasmanian secondary school and college will be provided with at least one key teacher specially trained to handle students with behaviour problems ...

The key teacher program will incorporate a minimum of 13 days' training and by offering the course each year it is expected that a pool of specially trained staff can be built up ...

Such a team approach to professional development [teachers and District Support Service Staff to be trained together] has already worked very successfully in the prep literacy program, with resource teachers working alongside classroom teachers. (Beswick, 1995)

The "key teacher" concept to which the Minister referred had already been employed in a range of Education Department programs. Programs in English, science, and literacy, provided key teachers with regular and ongoing professional development sessions which they, as resource people and leaders in a specified area, would disseminate in their schools.

High- and district high schools were invited to designate a teacher who would, as their school's Key Teacher Behaviour Management, take part in the "intensive training program in behaviour management" (Taylor, 1995). The Department provided money for employment of relief teachers to release one Key Teacher per school for the proposed seven days to be conducted in the first year of the Program. The Ministerial announcement occurred after schools had established their priorities for the funding of teacher professional development, programs and materials for 1995. Schools were expected to budget for most of the costs of teachers' participation in 1996.

Departmental correspondence (Taylor, 1995) acknowledged the importance of: (1) coordination of this innovation with what was already happening in schools; (2) networking and collaboration; and (3) schools' individual needs and priorities which would influence their choice of a key teacher and the focus of their role. Tyack & Cuban (1995), Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin (1995) and Pauly (1991) highlight the importance of recognising these realities of policy implementation. *Classroom* differences, not just variations at a school level, should be valued, not viewed as "obstacles" according to Pauly (1991:112-3)

who warns against setting "prescriptive policies" which dictate "what to do and how to do it". Participation was optional and the decision regarding participation was to be a school-based one, acknowledging the need for professionals to identify their needs and the best way of meeting these.

Fourteen of the 18 schools invited to participate in one regional centre's professional development nominated a Key Teacher participant. Most principals reported reaching the decision about their school's participation because of a belief that there were gains to be had by participation in the program. One school nominated two teachers to work together. This school was required to pay all costs of the second teacher's participation. In addition, 4 school support services staff participated. This strategy was employed, in part, as a response to the Minister's reference to a "team approach" where "resource teachers" would "work alongside classroom teachers" (Beswick, 1995).

The Emerging Gap between the Rhetoric and Reality

The Minister's announcement appeared to promise extra staffing for schools. However, this was not the case and no provision had been made for additional staffing. A prominent feature of the minister's announcement of the Key Teacher Behaviour Management (KTBM) Program was its comparison with the Prep literacy program, in which funding enabled teachers to work collaboratively.

Departmental correspondence to schools had demonstrated a sound understanding of the interaction between innovations and individual schools. However, the political constraints meant that the chasm would grow ever wider and deeper between the professional development program in its articulated and implemented forms. Tyack & Cuban (1995:10) recognise that change "in the daily interactions of teachers and students" is both the most important change and the most difficult to accomplish. They point out that to achieve this change "requires not only political will and commitment but also an accurate understanding of schools as institutions."

Teachers find each other the most helpful source of support in professional development (Fullan, 1991). "Good teachers are also good learners" in the words of Hargreaves & Evans (1997:3). The literature (see for example, Fullan 1991; Little, 1982; Berman & McLaughlin, 1978) suggests the practices of working together, pursuing high but attainable standards, undertaking joint planning, observation and experimentation occur alongside positive change. An Australian study (DEET, 1988:40) indicates that Australian teachers are no different in these respects. In part, it states:

Effective teacher training and development

- recognises that teachers are learners who need to relate new knowledge to their career and classroom experiences; who need to apply and critically evaluate new practices in their own contexts; and who require support and encouragement throughout the process
- takes place when systems, institutions and individuals commit themselves and their resources to the pursuit of personal and collective professional learning.

The only way in which Key Teachers in the Behaviour Management Program would be able to work alongside other teachers was if individual schools were to reorganise teaching loads provided that schools had sufficient flexibility to exercise this option.

Changes between the policy as announced and its implementation were now becoming apparent. The number of professional development days had decreased from the initially

recommended "minimal period ... of 20 days" despite Departmental acknowledgment of the fact that "where such a program has been offered in other states it is usually for a period of between one term and a full year" (DEA, 1995:5) to the "minimum of 13 days" professional development announced by the Minister, to the 12 days announced to schools, and eventually to the 11 day program which was implemented.

When Departmental funding ceased to support the Key Teachers coming out of their schools to attend professional development, there was a significant drop in the participation rate, particularly at the sessions not coordinated by the statewide facilitators. Fullan (1991:262) observes that "governments cannot mandate implementation, and the more remote they are from the local scene the less influential they will be." The participation rate dropped to a minimum of five out of the 19 original Key Teachers for some sessions. Reasons given for the drop in participation revolved chiefly around teachers having other school-based commitments to which they had to give higher priority. On the days when the Key Teachers organised the program themselves, the central administration of the Department had no presence.

The Role of the Teacher: Policy and Implementation

Union action is identified by Hogwood & Gunn (1992) as an obstacle to implementation effectiveness. In the case of this policy, the teachers' union, the Australian Education Union (AEU), temporarily placed a ban on the Program implementation. The AEU argued that the Minister and Department were "questioning the adequacy of employees' skills rather than the adequacy (or inadequacy) of resources" (AEU, 1995). In addition, these employees were those being depended on for successful policy implementation. Pauly (1991:209) recognises the importance of teachers in educational policy implementation by noting the need to "rely upon the people in classrooms to carry out the work of education-not because they will always do it well, but because they are the only ones who can do it at all."

The Program drew heavily on the expertise of participants in a collegial atmosphere. The Program facilitators established a process through which participants would be able to contribute their knowledge and expertise. These approaches are supported by the literature, for example McDonough and Noon (1994) highlight the importance of structuring the implementation process to enable implementers to *be* part of the process rather than solely to *do* it. Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin (1995) and Tyack & Cuban (1995:10) indicate the importance of "enlisting the support and skills of teachers as key actors in reform" to increase the likelihood of positive outcomes from the policy's implementation. The provision of opportunities for teachers to work collaboratively *over time* is highlighted by Fullan (1993), Wiske & Levinson (1993) and DEET (1988) as a crucial factor in ensuring implementation.

The Minister's announcement had identified a professional development role for the Key Teachers in their schools as a crucial outcome of their own professional development. However, there was no provision of resources for schools to enable the Key Teachers to perform this role. This pattern is well-established and diminishes the effectiveness of policy implementation. Darling-Hammond (1993:760) specifies a need for policies to:

encourage and allow schools to structure shared planning time for teachers to engage in dialogue about practice and for collective inquiry into what is working well and how students can be better served.

Tyack & Cuban (1995) confirm that while innovations add to teachers' workloads, seldom is there recognition of the need to resource teachers to undertake change. The assumption that change would automatically result from the involvement of one teacher's involvement in professional development without sufficient resourcing to undertake a leadership and mentor

role is addressed by Adelman & Walking -Eagle (1997:101) who state that policy-makers and school community members need to value the time teachers spend in non-classroom roles:

In the old paradigm, teachers were almost exclusively in their classrooms teaching students. In the new one, teachers are instructors, but they are also leaders, mentors, curriculum developers, and staff developers.

The assumption that the purpose of innovation is to improve students' learning outcomes through the provision of more effective educational programs, means that those who are responsible for developing policy should be cognisant of the need to value opportunities for teachers to develop positive relationships with each other. Effective implementation is dependent upon the provision of opportunities for teachers to work with their colleagues within their schools and with teachers from other schools. This Key Teacher program did not resource such opportunities sufficiently.

This program was implemented at a time when teachers felt overloaded and that their skills were undervalued (AEU, 1995). The literature suggests these perceptions are well-founded. The number of changes teachers are expected to cope with at any one time results in a situation, described by Mintrop and Weiler (1994:272), where the "teachers' primary task is coping with change, rather than enacting it." The amount and complexity of change reflected in, for example, school curricula, pedagogy, assessment, and use of technology, is unlikely to decrease (Churchill et al., 1997). In fact, Tyack & Cuban (1995) point out that "reforms tend to accumulate" (p 63) and "have tended to layer, one on top of another" (p 76).

The climate in which people are working impinges upon outcomes of implementation. Findings such as those by Sabatier & Mazmanian (1979:490) have described "hostile" agencies "whose personnel may be so preoccupied with existing programs that any new mandate tends to get lost in the shuffle." One principal of a school participating in the Key Teacher Behaviour Management Program commented that his school had "missed an opportunity" because of the "difficulty in identifying priorities ... the number of departmental demands contributes to this predicament, even stated [Departmental] priorities are not always supported [by the Department]."

Elsewhere in Australia, teachers' experiences and feelings about implementing many changes simultaneously reflect similar confusion (Churchill et al., 1997). One of one hundred South Australian and Tasmanian teachers in their study commented:

the rate of change is so much, it's so unco-ordinated and it comes from a variety of places ... it makes things very complex, makes people very frustrated and probably doesn't work efficiently either (p 147).

The deluge of policies and accompanying lack of support is highlighted by Tyack & Cuban (1995:83) who state that "reforms have rarely replaced what is there; more commonly, they have added complexity"; such a convoluted approach to innovations typically results in their failure to be implemented in any lasting way.

Participants' and Colleagues' Perceptions

The participants in the Program reported from the start that its existence, in large part, was politically motivated. However, they resolved they would take every opportunity the Program offered to take control of the process so as to achieve the most beneficial outcomes for students, teachers and schools. It was fortunate for the Key Teachers that they and the facilitators could "see through" the political agenda.

While many of the Program's participants viewed positively their participation in the professional development, in only one of six participating schools surveyed, were positive outcomes concerning change in both the Key Teacher's professional practice and school-wide practices reported.

Comments from teachers who participated in the Key Teacher Behaviour Management Program reflected the importance of taking local needs into consideration, sufficient resourcing and identifying an appropriate teacher as components of the effective implementation equation. For instance, one key teacher stated:

My involvement this year [1996] will be very dependent on what is offered. A lot of our [school] priorities have been established and earlier notification of the program would have been useful... .

Another teacher expressed the concern:

Three sessions in a year is not enough. The literacy key teachers met regularly over two years, there's no comparison. Just a handful of days ... I want to reinforce that if they are going to do a program, they need to give it substance and personnel to support the program. This key teacher program is pretty low key.

On the matter of the selection of the Key Teacher, a colleague commented that "the program hasn't been useful because the wrong person was selected." Responding from another school's perspective, a colleague observed that "the school has been lucky to have a good Key Teacher who is doing the Program justice." This school's decision to become involved in this initiative was made by a team, rather than the Principal alone, the choice of Key Teacher was supported publicly by the school's leadership team, and this teacher was encouraged and supported by a reallocation of some teaching duties in performing the Key Teacher role. These factors reflect elements which Berman & McLaughlin (1978) identify as strong influences in effective implementation and continuation; it is possible that there was a higher level of morale and degree of teacher participation in decision-making in this school than in some of the others from which data were collected. In other schools, the outcomes ranged from some changes to individual aspects of the school's practice, through to no more than some self-reported changes in the key teacher's individual professional practice.

The perception of the Program's facilitators and participants was that they were part of a focused and supportive group of colleagues. Positive teacher attributes are crucial to effective program outcomes; so too is a principal's support for an innovation and for collaborative leadership (DEET, 1988). This is particularly so given the paradox of greater devolution of decision-making to the school level coupled with tighter central regulation which adds to the issue of "who owns the innovation?" To increase the likelihood of a program's longevity, the principal's support needs to be dynamic and ongoing (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978). One key teacher's response indicated the principal's strong support for the program dissipated over time. None of the other five teachers who responded indicated any level of support by the principal. The statement of one principal not only highlighted the need for the principal's support but focused on the required level of that support:

Behaviour Management is such a political issue in schools that everybody has to be involved in the dialogue and the solutions must be agreed. Can one person who is not the principal even lead this?

The movement of Key Teachers from their schools as a result of transfer or promotion or taking leave created obstacles during the implementation phase. When such staff movement happened shortly after the professional development phase of the Program, schools were

left without the Key Teacher for the phase of implementation following the professional development. If a teacher's appointment changed during the professional development phase, there was some interruption to implementation. When a teacher moved to another school which had not elected to participate in the Program, the data indicate that the new school was unlikely to demonstrate interest in utilising their experiences and knowledge gained from their previous role.

Account has to be taken of the impact of the human factor on capacity and interest in implementing change. Thoughts and feelings about what a specific change means for individuals, and their stage of personal and professional readiness and skills are identified by Hall & Hord (1987) as factors influencing the implementation of change. Some Key Teachers were experienced both in classroom practice and in school leadership roles; other were relatively inexperienced. Some felt confident in presenting professional development back in their schools and believed that had sufficient credibility with their colleagues to do so; others did not. There was a report that one teacher was sent to one of the regional centres for professional development because their principal had decided they needed help with classroom management.

Data from the Research Project

One of the teachers, who had considerable experience, was more effective as a Key Teacher Behaviour Management than both the more and less experienced teachers. Although, in this instance, the school leadership team's support is likely to have contributed significantly to their effectiveness in the role. This finding contrasts to some extent with Berman & McLaughlin's (1978) findings that the greater years of experience teachers had, the less likely a program was to be effective. They found that more experienced teachers can be "less likely to change their own practices or to continue using project methods after then end of federal funding" although evidence suggests this is not insurmountable (p 32).

Principals of two schools which did not participate in the Program cited lack of opportunity and funding for staff to work collaboratively over a sustained period of time and their belief that the Program did not sufficiently meet their schools' needs at the time as the reasons for deciding not to nominate a key teacher. Their responses are reflected in research findings which emphasise that for teachers to engage in learning which is most likely to lead to change, policy must enable them to reflect and learn collaboratively and perform significant roles in implementation (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Wiske and Levinson, 1993; Burke, 1992; Hogwood & Gunn, 1992; and Edwards, 1980). In addition, Tyack & Cuban (1995:83) state that change should be viewed "as principles, general aims, to be modified in the light of experience, and embodied in practices that vary by school or even by classroom. Churchill et al. (1997:156) point out that teachers will "adapt rather than adopt innovations" and that what teachers do in classrooms "remains largely a matter only between themselves and their students and in that sense they claim the right to ultimate decision making in implementation matters at the classroom level."

While the literature suggests that teachers will have "the final say" regarding the outcomes of implementation, there was little support for the Key Teachers to undertake reflective and adequate planning on which they could build in their schools. One program facilitator, who was also a participant, offered the following comment:

People needed time to do an action plan. We did professional development, then there should have been time to set goals, act on them, reflect, it was too open ended. If there was an expectation of change then this should have been planned for, there was only time for a rushed action plan at the end of one busy day. ... [There were questions like] How am I going to be a Key Teacher when I have a lot of other responsibilities already?

Transferability of knowledge and skills

In 1997 a new initiative, Managing and Retaining Secondary Students at School (MARSSS), was announced which demonstrated the continuing political importance of the provision of supportive environments for student learning in schools. The Department's expectation was for schools to link their previous Supportive School Environment and Behaviour Management work to this new program (Callingham & Langridge, 1999). The initiative offered secondary schools an opportunity to tap into the skills and expertise of the Key Teachers Behaviour Management. Each secondary school was allocated some teacher time depending on student numbers and school needs. Of six Key Teachers in the Behaviour Management Program surveyed, one reported being involved in the development and implementation of their school's MARSSS program. In addition, this teacher reported having a role at district level. One teacher indicated they had responsibility for the school's MARSSS program and another stated that they were one of their school's MARSSS teachers. The remaining three teachers knew of the MARSSS initiative but had no role in their schools' programs.

Failure to tap into the professional development experiences of the Key Teachers in some instances raises questions about the perception of the Behaviour Management Program and the Key Teacher selection process in some schools. Both system and school level support are essential ingredients of effective implementation. The provision of both "relevant internal and external support services" is highlighted by DEET (1998:40). Some schools may not have made an adequate connection between the Key Teacher Behaviour Management and MARSSS Programs. This may have resulted from their insufficient incorporation of the Key Teacher Behaviour Management Program into their strategic vision.

The Role of the Minister and Policy Implementation

The Minister was interviewed after the conclusion of the professional development phase of the Program to determine his view of what implementation should achieve. He listed his expectations as, first, the provision of professional development teachers could "conduct in their schools" and second, for the Key Teachers to be "a point of reference" and "an immediate source of assistance." He explained that he had received a little feedback about the Program's progress because there were many Departmental issues with which he was concerned.

There is some correlation between less effective implementation of policies and the interest politicians display in policy outcomes (Hogwood & Gunn, 1992). In this case, lack of feedback indicates that the Ministerial announcement to placate a concerned public was a greater political priority than successfully addressing a complex social problem. It was, in essence, more about managing perceptions than managing either organisations, people or change.

Enhancing the likelihood of successful implementation

Viewing policy as a uniform process with a single set of outcomes is clearly not a useful model to adopt (Morris, 1999). In the case of the Key Teacher Behaviour Management Program outcomes ranging from positive through to negative were observed. Not surprisingly, the data suggest the following strategies may increase positive outcomes of policy implementation:

- recognise the need for policy makers and policy implementers to communicate more openly and to develop a closer working relationship, this in turn to lead to the

likelihood of a greater understanding of others' needs, and thereby increase the possibility of reducing the "gap" between political and education agendas.

- allocate sufficient resources over time to support the change process. Those who implement policy may develop a cynicism towards change which they perceive to be "symbolic" more so than "instrumental" in nature (see for example Morris, 1999; Elmore and Sykes, 1992).
- the education policy process should respect teachers' needs and professionalism ;
- engage school leaders in policy implementation - this in turn to lead to the likelihood of incorporation of the planned changes into the school's vision and support for teachers in implementation.

Conclusion

Policy-makers often work in a socio-political policy context that is rapidly changing. In seeking to develop and implement policies which will make a difference, increased collaboration between policy makers and those who implement policy is required. While this poses challenges the risks are even greater if policy makers ignore - or mismanage - those upon whom they depend to implement policy.

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