

TRANSFORMING EDUCATION THROUGH  
CRITICAL LEADERSHIP, POLICY AND PRACTICE



# Policy Matters



Perspectives,  
Procedures,  
and Processes



DR. DAVID C. YOUNG, DR. ROBERT E. WHITE,  
AND DR. MONICA A. WILLIAMS

# **Policy Matters**

# Transforming Education Through Critical Leadership, Policy and Practice

**Series editors: Stephanie Chitpin, Sharon Kruse and Howard Stevenson**

*Transforming Education Through Critical Leadership, Policy and Practice* is based on the belief that those in educational leadership and policy-constructing roles have an obligation to educate for a robust critical and democratic polity in which citizens can contribute to an open and socially just society. Advocating for a critical, socially just democracy goes beyond individual and procedural concerns characteristic of liberalism and seeks to raise and address fundamental questions pertaining to power, privilege and oppression. It recognizes that much of what has gone under the name of ‘transformational leadership’ in education seeks to transform very little, but rather it serves to reproduce systems that generate structural inequalities based on class, gender, race, (dis)ability and sexual orientation.

This series seeks to explore how genuinely transformative approaches to educational leadership, policy and practice can disrupt the neoliberal hegemony that has dominated education systems globally for several decades, but which now looks increasingly vulnerable. The series will publish high-quality books, both of a theoretical and empirical nature, that explicitly address the challenges and critiques of the current neoliberal conditions, while steering leadership and policy discourse and practices away from neoliberal orthodoxy towards a more transformative perspective of education leadership. The series is particularly keen to ‘think beyond’ traditional notions of educational leadership to include those who lead in educative ways – in social movements and civil society organizations as well as in educational institutions.

# **Policy Matters: Perspectives, Procedures and Processes**

BY

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United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India – Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited  
Emerald Publishing, Floor 5, Northspring, 21-23 Wellington Street, Leeds LS1 4DL

First edition 2024

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**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-80382-482-6 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-80382-481-9 (Online)

ISBN: 978-1-80382-483-3 (Epub)



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*David Young would like to dedicate this book to the memory of his father, Clarke Young, and his grandmother, Emma Dawson.*

*Robert White dedicates this book to his parents, Dr Earle White and Winifred Mary White.*

*Monica Williams dedicates this book to her husband, Michael Williams, and their children, Kathleen, Mark and Anne Williams.*

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## Preface

*Policy Matters: Perspectives, Procedures and Processes* has been developed for educational leaders, practitioners and theoreticians. This book provides readers with the means to think critically and in so doing, understand policy initiatives and their ramifications. The goal is for theoreticians and practitioners to be able to understand the purpose of policy, how it may be effectively developed and efficiently implemented. Never have policy initiatives been so important and necessary. Neoliberal manifestations, climate change, civil rights movements and governmental reactions to these and other global forces have made education in policy analysis, development and implementation crucial to educational leadership and the evolution of school systems, at home and abroad.

Policy is often created for purposes of accruing power, expanding privilege and further marginalizing oppressed groups. Educating policy developers and consumers is but one means of harnessing the positive power of policy while restraining baser instincts that tend to pervert policy for the betterment of the more powerful hegemonic elite. Simply put, this book strives to put policy into perspective by demystifying it and making it accessible to a wide audience. This book is premised on the notion that policy development, analysis and implementation, both traditionally and historically, has sought to preserve the status quo rather than to formulate policy that is liberating and transformative. This book also focuses on the future, including the creation of educational policies that are grounded in research-based theories, practices and frameworks, and dedicated to strengthening teaching and learning for the benefit of *all* students.

This volume explores how policy formulation may truly be transformative in combatting hegemonic and neoliberal incursions into the educational arena. This book addresses some of the challenges associated with current neoliberal conditions which have spawned a plethora of social and structural issues. It will appeal broadly to a myriad of formal and informal leaders within social movements and civil society organizations as well as in educational institutions. As such, this publication will strive to eliminate the theory/practice divide by uniting educational policy with educational reality in order to empower educators, education stakeholders and citizens to use policy, policy development and policy initiatives for the betterment of society in general.

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## Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank the editors of the book series Transforming Education Through Critical Leadership, Policy and Practice: Stephanie Chitpin, Howard Stevenson and Sharon Kruse. They also extend a sincere debt of gratitude to the entire team at Emerald Publishing who have been unbelievably supportive as this book has unfolded.

David Young would also like to recognize the love and support of his wife Lori and daughter Emma. On more than one occasion they overlooked and tolerated his absence as he engaged in writing and research. He also wishes to acknowledge his mother, Barbara Ann Young, for all that she has done and continues to do.

Robert White would also like to acknowledge the people who have supported him on this journey; you know who you are. Chhunly Tiv, Bopha Ong and their daughter, Cibo, have offered unstinting support throughout this process. A special debt of thanks is also due to Karyn Cooper, who allowed numerous projects to slide so that this volume could be completed in a timely fashion.

Monica Williams would also like to acknowledge the unfailing love and support of her husband Mike and their children, Kathleen, Mark and Anne, who have made it possible for her to contribute to the field of education in many ways, including this publication, which is her first book.

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## Chapter 1

# So, What Is Policy, Anyway?

From our first days in the classroom to the end of our careers, education policy shapes all aspects of our work as educators. Beginning with the hiring policies that regulate the recruitment and appointment of teachers, continuing with the curriculum and assessment policies that guide classroom instruction and concluding with the retirement policies that frame professional departures, policies underpin each stage of our careers. Despite their pervasive impact, policies often remain invisible to educators until a policy disrupts their daily routines, adds to their workloads and/or challenges their core beliefs and values. Sudden policy changes and major policy reforms may provoke considerable consternation and uncertainty, especially given the increasing number of competing policy demands placed on teachers and educational leaders today.

Each of us has vivid memories of our first major encounter with education policy. On her first day on the job as a newly minted Speech-Language Pathologist, one of the authors of this book (Monica Williams) was asked by the Superintendent of Schools of a large rural school board to establish this new service by creating an operating budget, purchasing supplies and equipment, and drafting a school board policy and supporting procedures. This baptism by fire marked the beginning of a long career in educational leadership that centred on the development, implementation and reform of an ever-expanding network of school, school board and provincial policies for special education and inclusive education.

For another author (David Young), policy, at least in the practical sense, became readily apparent during his stint as a student teacher. From policies around accepting late submissions to after-school supervision, it seemed as though everything teachers could or could not do was regulated, at least to a degree, by some type of policy. While this author recognized that policies were vital to ensuring that disparate parties to the educational enterprise remained on the same page and teaching and learning operated smoothly, there was also a gradual realization that some policies can be ineffective, leading to barriers associated with interpretation, understanding and co-operation. Because of this early experience, this author has spent much of his career examining how policies can be used as a legitimate vehicle to improve education.

According to a third author (Robert White), he recounts an experience in high school that centred upon attendance policies. Unfortunately, this author firmly

believed and continues to believe that schooling should never be fully responsible for one's education. The recognition of policy transgression occurred one Friday afternoon at the Winnipeg Art Gallery when the author was educating himself regarding the nuances of modern art, when he ran directly into his school principal. After a stilted conversation and a hasty exit from the gallery, this author became dimly aware that Friday afternoons were routinely reserved for schooling. Years later, while reminiscing about this misadventure, it suddenly dawned upon this author to question what his principal was doing in the art gallery on a Friday when school was still in session.

For each of us and for educators everywhere, our first forays into education policy often spawn many questions: What is education policy? Why is it developed? Who is responsible for implementing it? How does it impact educators' daily work? As we progress through different stages of our careers and navigate successive policy changes and reforms, more questions arise concerning our evolving roles and responsibilities as policy developers, interpreters, implementers and challengers. The purpose of this book is to address common questions about education policy by examining different policy perspectives, procedures and processes and exploring their impact on educators, at home and abroad.

To offer an illustration, some time ago, an individual purchased a new keyboard for their computer. The old one had keys that tended to stick, an irritating habit that often prevented any reasonable communication. In fact, this is reminiscent of the old joke about the person who put dozens of monkeys in one room, equipped them with typewriters (you see how old this joke is?), and waited to see if one of the monkeys would eventually reproduce a classic work of literature. To this person's wonderment and consternation, after some months, one of the monkeys typed, 'To be or not to be, that is the *gzorgnplatz*'.

The old, key-stuck keyboard was behaving like this exceptional monkey, so a decision was made to replace it. The consumer asked all the right questions about compatibility, the return policy and the like and brought the new keyboard home. Unfortunately, the new keyboard was ultimately returned to the store. The clerk greeted the consumer warmly and reassured them that, indeed, if necessary, the keyboard could be returned for a full refund. The consumer then produced the keyboard and placed it on the counter. The still smiling clerk asked after the box that it had come in, with the consumer noting that the box had been thrown out. The smile faded. The clerk told the consumer they could not return it without the box. The consumer asked why and the clerk said they could no longer resell it as a new keyboard if the box was missing. Suspecting the consumer was about to run up against 'policy', the consumer announced that the keyboard *was* used, as they had in fact used it several times, already.

Suddenly, the 'return policy' evaporated. The consumer was unable to return the product, even though they had never been told about the box. This gave the consumer pause to consider how porous and flexible the term 'policy' had become. Although the consumer was not disgruntled, they returned home somewhat less than grunted, and decided to investigate the store's policies around returned items and the re-selling of used goods as new products.

To dive deeper into this illustrative case, we begin with the definition of 'policy'. The online Merriam-Webster dictionary (<https://www.merriam->

[webster.com/dictionary/policy](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/policy)) defines policy as: (1) a definite course or method of action selected from among alternatives and in light of given conditions to guide and determine present and future decisions, and alternately, as (2) management or procedure based primarily on material interest, and finally, (3) a high-level overall plan embracing the general goals and acceptable procedures especially of a governmental body. Clearly, this aforementioned brush with policy was an embodiment of the second definition. A legal definition of policy, also from the Merriam-Webster dictionary, identifies policy as an overall plan, principle or guideline that is formulated outside of the judiciary obligated to consider policy on the matter to be decided upon. This definition stresses the fact that most policies are developed independently of the people who are expected to implement that policy. This topic will be expanded upon in subsequent chapters.

## **Definitions of Policy**

Many different types and kinds of policy abound, not to mention the act of deploying policy. For example, policy may be introduced as a contract, such as an insurance policy that is legally binding for all parties concerned. Policy may also be a system of guidelines or rules determining a specific course of action (Merriam-Webster). This is an interesting definition in that it may be a system of rules, which brings it close to the level of the legally binding policy, but not quite. On the other hand, it may also be seen as a set of guidelines. This means that it may be flexible enough to offer some form of social justice for those would typically be influenced by such a set of guidelines. In addition, policy may be ‘in the eye of the beholder’, meaning that different implementers of a particular policy may view that policy in different ways. For example, one may see a particular policy as an inviolate rule, whereas a different individual may have a much more relaxed interpretation of how that particular policy is to be implemented. At any rate, the term is suitably malleable enough to give pause for consideration as to how its meaning should be interpreted whenever one hears the word being used.

Given that the English language has the largest word pool of any language, there are numerous words that may act on behalf of ‘policy’. Policy may alternately be viewed as a code of conduct, a guideline for action, a prescription for managing affairs, a method of practice or even a programme or protocol. Softer versions of the term may be found in words such as custom or design. Order is another way that policy may be used and has also been referred to as ‘red tape’ (Merriam-Webster).

The first mention of the word, ‘policy’, in the English language, seems to have occurred in fifteenth century, either from the Middle English or Middle French ‘*policie*’. From here, it can be traced back even further to the Italian ‘*polizza*’, and further still to the ancient Roman ‘*apodeixis*’ and ancient Greek ‘*apodeiknynai*’ (Merriam-Webster). In its more current iterations, ‘policy’ bears a strong resemblance to the word ‘police’, seeming to imply that one should take the notion of policy very seriously. It also bears a striking resemblance to the term

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'politics', which many of us have come to understand as entertainment, although there was a time when politics was an intensely important activity, particularly during the time of nation-building, several centuries past. Seriously enough, however, the notion of politics and its attendant and seemingly incessant policy construction are clearly and inextricably intertwined.

In conjunction with the many definitions of the term, 'policy', according to Proctor English Dictionary (<https://www.ldoceonline.com/dictionary/policy>), it may also be used as a way of doing something that has been agreed upon, thus making it a de facto instrument that, once introduced and maintained within the system into which it has been introduced, disappears within the framework of customs, values and beliefs that we tend to refer to as 'culture'. Thus, embedded within any culture are a multiplicity of policies in terms of procedures, protocols, guides and rules, which keep us connected to the society within which we serve as citizens.

Within the field of education, policy takes on a different hue. [Cunningham \(1963\)](#) noted that 'Policy is like an elephant – you recognise one when you see it, but it is somewhat more difficult to define' (p. 229). This may be very true, as illustrated by the following parable - a version of which, taken from a much more ancient parable, originated in China during the Han dynasty (202 BC–220 AD).

### Three Blind Men and an Elephant

One day, three blind men happened to meet each other and gossiped a long time about many things. Suddenly one of them recalled, 'I heard that an elephant is a strange animal. Too bad we're blind and can't see it'.

'Ah, yes, truly too bad we don't have the good fortune to see the strange animal', another one sighed.

The third one, quite annoyed, joined in and said, 'See? Forget it! Just to feel it would be great'.

'Well, that's true. If only there were some way of touching the elephant, we'd be able to know', they all agreed.

It so happened that a merchant with a herd of elephants was passing, and overheard their conversation. 'You fellows, do you really want to feel an elephant? Then follow me; I will show you', he said.

The three men were surprised and happy. Taking one another's hand, they quickly formed a line and followed while the merchant led the way. Each one began to contemplate how he would feel the animal, and tried to figure how he would form an image.

After reaching their destination, the merchant asked them to sit on the ground to wait. In a few minutes he led the first blind man to feel the elephant. With outstretched hand, he touched first the left foreleg and then the right. After that he felt the two legs from the top to the bottom, and with a beaming face, turned to say, 'So, the strange animal is just like that'. Then he slowly returned to the group.

Thereupon the second blind man was led to the rear of the elephant. He touched the tail, which wagged a few times, and he exclaimed with satisfaction, 'Ha! Truly a strange animal! Truly odd! I know now. I know'. He hurriedly stepped aside.



The third blind man's turn came, and he touched the elephant's trunk, which moved back and forth turning and twisting and he thought, 'That's it! I've learnt'.

The three blind men thanked the merchant and went their way. Each one was secretly excited over the experience and had a lot to say, yet all walked rapidly without saying a word.

'Let's sit down and have a discussion about this strange animal', the second blind man said, breaking the silence.

'A very good idea. Very good'. the other two agreed for they also had this in mind. Without waiting for anyone to be properly seated, the second one blurted out, 'This strange animal is like our straw fans swinging back and forth to give us a breeze. However, it's not so big or well made. The main portion is rather wispy'.

'No, no!' the first blind man shouted in disagreement. 'This strange animal resembles two big trees without any branches'.

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‘You’re both wrong’, the third man replied. ‘This strange animal is similar to a snake; it’s long and round, and very strong’.

How they argued! Each one insisted that he alone was correct. Of course, there was no conclusion for not one had thoroughly examined the whole elephant. How can anyone describe the whole until he has learned the total of the parts?

This parable, which dates back to Buddhist, Hindu and Jain writings, is useful in reminding us that, while numerous definitions and permutations of policy and its subsequent analysis abound, there will be an appropriate choice for the policy initiative at hand. Otherwise, like the three blind men and the elephant, one might suggest a procedure that is completely at odds with what it is that the project is attempting to resolve. As an interesting aside, if the elephant were to represent policy, it becomes clear that the three blind men each interpret the ‘policy’ in different ways. This underscores the myriad issues relating to policy as written and policy as implemented, simply because those who write policy are rarely the individuals who are expected to implement that policy.

### **Public Policy**

While these previous definitions of policy are suitable for the general public, there are a number of more academic and politically oriented definitions to be found. These definitions go beyond a generic statement of what policy is and offer a more nuanced view of public policy, policy analysis and typical policy contents. First of all, public policy, according to [Howlett et al. \(2009\)](#), comprises the matching of policy goals with policy means, characterised as ‘applied problem-solving’ (p. 4). At its core, this is about identifying issues and finding solutions for them, using policy ‘tools’.

The process has two distinct dimensions – technical and political. The technical aspect requires the identification and application of appropriate instruments for developing the optimal relationship between goals and the processes used to achieve those goals. The political aspect, on the other hand, recognises the inherent problems involved in the policy makers’ agreement on what the issues are with respect to the policy required and also what the most appropriate solution would be. This matter is also compounded by the state of current knowledge relating to socio-economic issues, as well as the policy makers’ various ideas, norms and principles regarding the best way forward ([Howlett et al., 2009](#)). Thus, given the complexity and ‘messiness’ of creating public policy, it has been described as ‘Anything a government chooses to do or not to do’ ([Dye, 1972](#), p. 2). However, this definition does little to differentiate between trivial or significant manifestations of government activities, but does address the notion that policy tends to be made by governing bodies. [Dye \(1972\)](#) also notes that there is choice surrounding the initiation of a policy process and its resolution, even if that choice is to maintain the status quo. As such, choices made around policy initiatives are conscious choices. Happenstance is seldom involved, except

possibly in terms of unintended consequences of the implementation of the policy (Howlett et al., 2009).

Consistent with Dye's definition, Pal et al. (2021) describe public policy as a guide to action, a plan or a framework. In their view, public policy is a course of action or inaction embarked upon by public authorities to address a specific problem or interrelated set of problems, or to take advantage of an opportunity. Although policies are problem-solving instruments, they express and impact values, as well. The main, overarching value in public policy is the public interest, which is variously defined and comprised of diverse views, interests, and values. As roadmaps or guides for problem solving, the three main elements of public policy are (1) the definition of a problem; (2) the targeted goals to be achieved; and (3) the instruments or means for addressing the problem and achieving the goals. As shall be discussed in a subsequent chapter, and as can be viewed above, most policy initiatives can be characterized by a pre-policy phase (problem definition), a policy phase (meant to address the issue and achieve the policy goal) and a post-policy phase (the means by which the policy is implemented).

Another definition of public policy comes from Jenkins (1978), who states that public policy is

A set of interrelated decisions taken by a political actor or group of actors concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them within a specified situation where those decisions should, in principle, be within the power of those actors to achieve.

(Jenkins, 1978, p. 15)

As can be ascertained from this definition, policymaking is a dynamic and goal-oriented process that involves a set of interrelated and conscious decisions on the part of the policy-makers. As can also be divined from this definition, numerous internal and external constraints on any policymaking decisions may influence the final policy (Howlett et al., 2009). Perhaps one of the more concise statements relating to policy matters is Pal's (1997) contention that defines policy analysis as the 'disciplined application of intellect to public problems' (p. 233). As an example of this disciplined application of intellect, let us view, for a moment, the Government of Canada's public policy to facilitate immigration of sponsored foreign nationals excluded under the immigration and refugee protection regulations. While this is not educational policy, it does represent a fair example of a 'disciplined application of intellect to public problems'.

## **An Example of Public Policy**

First of all, the immigration and refugee protection regulations act as a policy within the *Constitution* of Canada. The policy selected for closer scrutiny can, therefore, be seen as a policy amendment. However, in order to avoid a very cumbersome dissection of the master policy network, this amendment will serve current purposes. As with any good policy, this policy sets out the background

relating to immigration and refugee protection in Canada. This is necessary in terms of recognizing the purpose of the policy. In this case, the ‘regulation’ was established to encourage full disclosure by immigration applicants in order to protect the health, safety and security of current Canadian citizens. Following this is a section on ‘Public Policy Considerations’.

Apparently, ‘stakeholders’ and the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration have concerns regarding the impact, particularly on immigrant children, who would be prevented from entering Canada should one or more parent be ineligible for consideration. This identifies the significance of the policy and establishes why it was required in the first place. Next, conditions are established in the form of eligibility requirements, followed by a section on exactly which eligibility requirements may be waived, typically in the case of an absentee parent who was initially denied entry to Canada. This section is more explicit regarding fees, definition of dependent children, geographic exceptions where policy may vary, as in the province of Quebec, and the duration of the policy in terms of deadlines by which the applicants must apply. A final note states that the policy may be cancelled at any time, ensuring that the balance of power remains in the hands of the Canadian government (Hussen, 2019).

## **Educational Policy and Policy Analysis**

Leaving governance to its own policymaking devices, literally and figuratively speaking, let us move to the development of educational policy. It seems that, in the field of education, there may easily be as many definitions of policy analysis as there are practitioners of policy analysis. These variable definitions reflect contradictory conceptualizations of policy, from Bell and Stevenson’s (2015) assertion that education policy is the realization of contested meanings, to the contention by Pal et al. (2021) that policy comes from those invested with the authority to enact normative guidelines for action. However many definitions may be available, Duke and Canady (1991) contend that a commonly accepted definition of policy remains elusive in research literature and in educational practice. This may also be true of public policy, as well.

Taken together, educational policy may be seen as a statement of purpose that embodies broad guidelines that provide a framework for a school and its programmes (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988), an authoritative communication identifying how individuals in certain positions ought to conduct themselves (Sergiovanni et al., 1999), and an authoritative guideline to institutions, including determination of a society’s intents and priorities, as well as resource allocation (Downey, 1998). All told, Delaney (2002) identifies four elements that resonate throughout these definitions. They all suggest, to a greater or lesser degree, that policy is a formalized act, has a pre-agreed upon objective, is sanctioned by an authoritative body and provides standards for measuring performance. Once in place, it is important to determine if the policy is responsible for the desired change or if there were other factors that created the change. If other factors *are* responsible, there would be no need for the policy, as framed. As a result, many policy analysts