

Policy Implementation in a School District: A Multiperspective Approach

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This paper will examine the beliefs and assumptions about the process of policy implementation held by the school board members, district administrators, principals, and teachers in one district in Western Canada and the effect of those beliefs on the implementation of two policies. Three different and conflicting conceptualizations of policy implementation were found to exist in the district. The Board felt that principals and teachers, as employees, should be willing to comply with policy and that implementation was simply a matter of doing what the policy required. The perspective of district employee groups is summarized in the statement: "If they (i.e., the Board) want us to do —, then they have to give us —." To them, policy implementation involves bargaining during which member interests must be protected and promoted. The main concern of the school staff was the perceived need for the policy and its likely effect on the work environment of the school. Such conflicting conceptualizations limit the likelihood of meaningful implementation and highlight the complex role of district administrators who are primarily responsible for policy implementation in the district.

Le but de la présente étude est d'examiner les opinions et les vues des commissions scolaires, des administrateurs de district, des directeurs et des enseignants d'un district scolaire de l'Ouest canadien concernant la mise en oeuvre des politiques, et l'effet de ces opinions sur la réalisation de deux politiques en particulier. Trois vues différentes et incompatibles sur l'exécution des politiques existent dans le district. La Commission est d'avis que les directeurs et les enseignants, en tant qu'employés, devraient être disposés à se conformer aux politiques, et qu'ils n'ont qu'à faire ce qui est demandé. Les vues des groupes d'employés du district peuvent se résumer à ceci: "S'ils (les membres de la Commission) veulent qu'on fasse —, ils n'ont qu'à nous donner —." Pour eux, l'exécution des politiques suppose un marchandage au cours duquel ils doivent protéger et promouvoir les intérêts de leurs membres. Le principal souci du personnel enseignant est le besoin d'une politique et ses effets éventuels sur le milieu de travail. Des vues aussi incompatibles limitent les chances d'une réalisation fructueuse des politiques, et font ressortir le rôle complexe des administrateurs de district, qui sont les premiers responsables de la mise en oeuvre des politiques à ce niveau.

Policy making is one means, and a potentially powerful one, by which organizations can coordinate and control the activities of their members. This is one reason why the policy-making function of the school boards has received considerable attention over the last 15 years. But policy is more than that; it is also a means by which elected officials can fulfill their representative function (Ingram, McCain, & Laney, 1980).

Only a small percentage of the public is involved actively in educational decision making (Fullan, 1982; Mann, 1977). Generally, public interests

are represented by the elected school board members. As Coleman says:

The trustee has been entrusted with ensuring that the wishes of the community are a part of the complex of forces that commonly occur on a wide range of issues in public education ... the trustee derives legitimacy not from expertise but from both the institutional machinery of representation and in particular the purposive element of this concept. (1974, p. 53)

The actual extent of school board responsiveness is, of course, questionable, with some arguing that boards are co-opted by district administrators (Zeigler & Jennings, 1974) and constrained by decisions made at higher levels of government (van Geel, 1976; Wirt & Kirst, 1975) and others that they exert influence by upholding values and setting expectations that district administrators hesitate to violate (Boyd, 1975, 1976; Mitchell, 1980).

Regardless of the extent to which public values and expectations on a particular issue are expressed in a policy, however, this is only one facet of the issue of lay control and professional autonomy. The success of a policy, the extent to which its intent is achieved, depends on what happens during implementation and the changes that actually occur in the school district or schools.

In the decade since Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) commented on the scarcity of studies of policy implementation, the number of such studies has grown rapidly. The multitude of findings on policy implementation presents a complicated and conflicting description of the process. According to Berman (1981), referring to studies of educational change in general and not just of policy implementation,

the state of the art at the level of specific findings and of practical advice appears to be in disarray. The past two decades' studies have indeed produced a multitude of findings, but the findings generally are not comparable ... the prevalence of contradictory findings only heightens this confusion. (p. 253)

He suggests that the inconsistency of findings reflects not so much methodological inadequacies as educational reality, the complexity of educational change, and its context-dependent, time-dependent nature. He then argues that research should focus on providing conditional explanations of variation in educational outcomes.

Given the importance of the policy-making function of school boards on the one hand and the complex and conflicting findings concerning policy implementation on the other, it is important to have a better understanding of what happens when a policy has been adopted by a school board and of how the context influences implementation at the

school level. This study of policy implementation provides an opportunity (a) to examine another facet of the issue of lay control and professional autonomy through professional response to the policy and (b) to obtain a dynamic and integrated view of the school district by focusing both on activities at the school level and on the relationship between the central office and the schools and how it influences school activities.

This paper reports some of the findings of a qualitative study of policy implementation in a suburban school district in Western Canada. It is concerned generally with assessing the importance of a variety of influences which provide explanations of the level of implementation of provincial and school board policies in schools in the district. Other portions of the study have described school-level influences on policy implementation (LaRocque, 1985a, 1985b) and the significance of the linkages between the central office and the school for policy implementation (LaRocque & Coleman, 1985). Another influence is the conceptualization of policy implementation accepted either implicitly or explicitly by the various groups of actors in the district. This paper examines the beliefs and assumptions about the process of policy implementation held by school board members, district administrators, principals, and teachers and discusses some of their implications.

THE STUDY

The Site

The municipality of Lyttelfield² is located in a heavily populated area in Western Canada. It has a population of over 125,000 people, about 25% of whom speak English as a second language. The community is comprised of several distinct neighborhoods which differ in age and a number of socioeconomic status variables. In spite of its heterogeneity, however, Lyttelfield is relatively free of controversy, especially when compared to some of the surrounding communities.

When the study began, Lyttelfield school district consisted of 45 schools, 36 elementary and 9 secondary, but several were closed at the end of the year. The number of full-time students had dropped to 18,000 from a high of 20,000 in the late 1970s, although the continuing education program had risen to almost 20,000 registrants. The district employed about 1,100 teachers, 500 continuing education instructors, and 450 non-teaching staff, with an operating budget of well over \$60 million.

The officials included the superintendent, the deputy superintendent, and the secretary-treasurer. These three men comprised the *Administrative Services*. The deputy superintendent worked closely with the assistant

superintendent (secondary instruction), the assistant superintendent (elementary instruction), and the director of community education. He had several coordinators working under him and was also responsible for the Education Center.

Four schools within the district served as study sites. They were selected so that they differed in size, location, the manner in which they were implementing the policy under study, and general compliance with district requests, but they were judged by district administrators to be typical of the schools in the district. Three of the schools, Thompson, Fraser, and Columbia, were elementary schools; the fourth, Lyttelfield, was a secondary school.

The Policies

Two district policies, *community relations* and *elementary school self-assessment*, were selected for study. The first requires each school to examine its contact with the community and to promote two-way communication, specifically by establishing a parent advisory council. The second requires each elementary school to engage in a regular, ongoing process of assessment of its policies and practices in a wide variety of areas. These policies were selected because they dealt with matters of common concern in school districts, had an effect on many people, were well documented, and had been in place for some time.

Data Collection

The major data collection method was the interview, both formal and informal. Document analysis and observations of a wide variety of meetings were used as well. Formal interviews were always scheduled ahead of time, were held in locations selected by the respondent (usually an office or classroom), were generally 45 to 90 minutes in length, were audiotaped, and were conducted according to a flexible interview guide. At the district level, the respondents consisted of those people who were involved in implementing the community relations policy; at the school level, the respondents consisted of the principal, the vice principal or head teacher, and a selected group of teachers.

Informal interviews were generally brief, unscheduled encounters during which information collected during the formal interview was verified, clarified, or expanded. They were also used to obtain general background information about the context. At the district level, the respondents consisted of those who participated in the formal interviews plus other professional and clerical central office staff; at the school level,

the respondents consisted of those who participated in the formal interviews plus other staff members and a few parents.

Table 1 provides information about the number of respondents who participated in formal and/or informal interviews, and their role.

Data Analysis

A conceptualization of policy implementation encompasses attitudes and beliefs about:

1. The nature of the relationships between policy makers and policy implementers;
2. The likelihood of policy implementer co-operation;
3. The nature of policy;
4. The focal point of the policy implementation process;
5. The role of the policy implementer;
6. The nature of the policy implementation process; and
7. The most appropriate implementation strategies.

The interview transcripts were searched for references to each of the dimensions listed above, and then the similarity of responses within and between the various groups of actors was examined.

Because the study relied so heavily on interview data, several measures were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. These included determining the consistency of interview data cross time and within a group of actors and seeking confirmation of interview data from district documents and records and from observation data.

THREE PERSPECTIVES ON POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

School board members, principals and teachers speaking as members of their respective associations, and principals and teachers speaking as members of a school staff expressed different perspectives on the process of policy implementation. Each is described below. Note that the district administrators share all three perspectives, depending on those with whom they are dealing.

The Perspective of the School Board

It is clear that both the school board members and the district administrators in their relationship with the Board believed that the focus of change efforts should be the policy statement itself. This is suggested by the

TABLE 1
Respondent Role

<i>Respondents</i>	<i>Type of Interview</i>	
	<i>Informal</i>	<i>Formal</i>
<i>School Board Members</i>		
Chairman	*	*
Vice-chairman	*	*
3 community relations committee members	*	*
Other 2	—	—
<i>Central Office professional staff</i>		
Superintendent	*	*
Deputy superintendent	*	*
Assistant superintendent – elementary	*	*
Coordinating principal – elementary	*	*
Coordinating principal – secondary	*	—
Community relations coordinator	*	*
<i>Thompson Elementary</i>		
Principal	*	*
Head teacher	—	*
5 teachers	*	*
9 other teachers	*	—
Secretary	*	—
Community coordinator	*	*
Community coordinator's secretary	*	*
Parent advisory committee	*	—
<i>Fraser Elementary</i>		
Principal	*	*
Head teacher	*	*
7 teachers	*	*
10 other teachers	*	—
Secretary	*	—
Some parents (parent advisory committee)	*	—
<i>Columbia Elementary</i>		
Principal	*	*
Head teacher	*	*
4 teachers	*	*
9 other teachers	*	—
Secretary	*	—

TABLE 1 (*Concluded*)

<i>Respondents</i>	<i>Type of Interview</i>	
	<i>Informal</i>	<i>Formal</i>
<i>Lyttelfield Secondary</i>		
Principal	*	*
Vice-principal	—	*
12 teachers	—	*
35 other teachers	*	—
Secretary	*	—

disproportionate amount of time they expended on developing and refining the policy statement as opposed to planning and monitoring its implementation. For example, the Board devoted many hours over a 3-month period to refining the draft of the community relations policy but did not spend any time considering its implementation or specific changes resulting from the policy. Furthermore, when the Board perceived that the schools were reluctant to establish parent advisory committees, its response was to create another policy making these committees mandatory.

Similarly, all efforts concerning the elementary school self-assessment policy over a 2½ year period centred on developing the policy and accompanying booklets. In fact, the superintendent instructed the schools to delay any self-assessment activities until the district policy and assessment instruments were available. These Board and senior administrator actions suggest a belief not only that the policy itself is the focal point of change but also that policy making and policy implementation are bounded and sequential activities.

Board members played a very limited role in policy implementation. They expected the superintendent and his staff to oversee the implementation process, and they expected the principals and teachers, as employees of the Board, to comply with the policy. When the Board felt that the schools were not implementing the community relations policy as it wished, it instructed the superintendent on several occasions to express its views to the schools. Similarly, the senior administrators conveyed information to the principals, expecting that they would secure the compliance of the teachers. The Board and senior administrators' actions suggest a belief in the hierarchical structure of school district organizations and in a common value system shared by policy makers and policy implementers. In fact, the senior administrators refer to a co-operative principal as a "district man."

The senior administrators introduced both the community relations and the elementary school self-assessment policies by distributing copies to the principals with a request that they consider with their staff the implications for their school. In the case of the community relations policy, this was followed by a workshop attended by the principal and one teacher from each school. The senior administrators had also planned to hold a workshop to explain the elementary school self-assessment policy before they decided to postpone its implementation indefinitely.

The Board too advocated the use of workshops. When the principals were slow to establish parent advisory councils, even after these had been mandated, the Board suggested that a workshop be held to train them for this task. These implementation strategies suggest that the Board and the senior administrators consider policy implementation to be essentially a rational and technical process, a matter of providing the implementers with the appropriate information and with training in the required skills.

The Perspective of Employee Groups

When the current superintendent first came to Lytfield, the relationship between the district and its employee groups was characterized by conflict and distrust. He and his staff established a district decision-making structure that ensured participation of all employee groups in the development of any policy that would affect them, and they encouraged principals to involve teachers in school-level decision making. These measures were necessary in order to reduce conflict and increase trust among district employees. They were not effective at the time of the development of the community relations policy, however, and the non-involvement of principal and teacher representatives, according to the respondents, was a major reason for resistance to it. Another was that the Board was believed to have created the policy to gain votes rather than because of its value to the educational enterprise. The elementary school self-assessment policy, on the other hand, was developed by a committee consisting of central office staff, principals, and teachers selected by their respective groups to represent the group's interests. This was in keeping with district norms for participative decision making and for democratic procedures, yet it did not ensure a favorable reception by the principals and teachers, perhaps because the original impetus for the policy came from the ministry. The teachers' association and many of the respondents looked upon it as an attempt by the government to "score points with the voters" and to remove some teachers.

The examples of implementer reactions to the policies demonstrate that their co-operation cannot be assumed and that the legal authority of

the policy makers is not sufficient to ensure compliance. Negotiation and bargaining become important activities in the implementation process. For example, many respondents summarized their concerns in the form: "If they (i.e., the Board or the senior administrators) want us to do —, then they have to give us —," where the second dash was generally fewer teaching hours and more pay. Similarly, the central office staff used the buy-sell analogy when describing policy implementation — they have to *sell* principals and teachers on the idea, and principals and teachers have to *buy into* the idea if implementation is to be successful. The senior administrators feel that they have little direct influence on what happens in the schools, having to rely on persuasion rather than the manipulation of sanctions and rewards. Their commitment to participative decision making also inclines them to favour persuasion.

The Lytfield policy-development processes assume that each group of participants has its own specific interests and goals that it is trying to protect and promote. The employee groups find it advantageous to make their concerns known during the policy development process instead of trying to make changes after the policy has been adopted; the senior administrators find it advantageous to accommodate employee concerns during policy making rather than during policy implementation. This suggests that the district administrators and employee groups view the processes of policy making and policy implementation as closely intertwined, with the policy resulting from the negotiations and compromises of the policy makers and policy implementers.

Nor do these activities stop once the policy has been adopted. For example, when the Board expressed concern about school-level implementation of the community relations policy, a special all-day principals' meeting concluded that the most important school community relations activity is the individual parent-teacher relationship and that the best public relations for a school is a happy child. The implication was that the activities suggested by the Board (e.g., newsletters and parent advisory councils) would not be as effective as those the schools were engaged in already so that there was no need for the schools to change. Also, the principals argued for and won more administrative time on the basis of the extra work demanded by implementation of the elementary school self-assessment policy, even though implementation had been postponed indefinitely. Thus, policy implementation appears to be highly political and interactive in nature.

The absence of any systematic district monitoring system can be seen as the result of a compromise between the central office and the principals: the central office agrees not to interfere in the school, the domain of the principals, and the principals agree to co-operate and to support district

initiatives. Of course, the compliance of the principals is often more symbolic than real, but there are none of the signs of conflict and distrust that characterized the district less than a decade ago. This interpretation is supported by the fact that Lyttelfield principals value their autonomy and frequently compare themselves favorably with their colleagues in other districts in this respect, in spite of the fact that most budget, program, and teacher assignment decisions are made centrally. It is also supported by the fact that the senior administrators agree that they would never have had an elementary school self-assessment policy if it had not been mandated by the ministry, nor are they in a hurry to implement the one they have. This would upset the compromise that had been worked out.

The Perspective of School Staffs

Few of the objections of principals and teachers to the community-relations and the elementary school self-assessment policies were based on their intrinsic characteristics. It was their effect on established relationships and procedures, on the work environment of the school, that was resisted. So, for example, many respondents criticized the policies on the grounds that implementation required considerable time and other resources for which no provisions have been made. Thus they saw policy implementation as detracting from teaching, and consequently they felt it had a potentially negative effect on student achievement. Some respondents believed that community relations and school self-assessment are not the responsibilities of teachers; others felt that schools are already doing a good job in these areas. In either case, they did not perceive a need for the policies and this increased their resistance.

Moreover, these two policies concerned the implementers' relationships with parents and other community members in one case and with their colleagues in the other. These are matters about which the respondents felt deeply and had strong opinions. For example, many staffs were reluctant to establish the mandated parent advisory councils because the policy mandated the kind of relationship the school was to have with the community and increased the likelihood of public interference in matters of professional concern. Similarly, many staffs resisted the elementary school self-assessment because it required them to deal collegially with instructional and curricular issues that they preferred to deal with individually. The more that the policy challenged or threatened established patterns, the greater the resistance to it.

These findings suggest that the beliefs and values of the implementers—particularly whether they perceive a need for the policy or a compati-

bility between the assumptions of the policy concerning the implementation environment and their assumptions – are important in policy implementation. It is not just the beliefs and values of implementers as individuals that are important, however, but the differences between the beliefs and values of groups of actors within the district. The Board members, the central office staff, and the school personnel appear to belong to different subcultures, all linked by their involvement in education but separated by their specific goals and interests. Nor can all school personnel be considered a unitary subculture. The four schools in the study had distinctly different community relations programs, and the diversity and comprehensiveness of these programs were related to the extent to which the staff shared the norms of collegiality and continuous improvement and to the principal's leadership style (see LaRocque, 1985b). In sum, each school appeared to be a separate subculture. One reason for the relative lack of success of policy implementation efforts in a school district may be that the Board and the central office staff treated the school staffs as if they were indeed a single subculture. The Lyttelefield senior administrators frequently described the schools as "different but equal," the Board members explained that the policy mandating parent advisory councils was intentionally vague to allow each school to establish a council suited to its circumstances, and the elementary school self-assessment committee was concerned throughout its deliberations that the policy be sufficiently flexible to permit schools to adapt it to their needs. These actions indicate a recognition of the uniqueness of each school. Yet the implementation strategies are directed toward all schools equally and uniformly, as if implementation were expected to proceed along the same paths in each and as if implementation were beginning at the same point in each.

In the study, the schools that were developing the most comprehensive and diverse community relations programs were those whose staffs discussed their reasons for such programs, their consistency with the school philosophy and other characteristics, implications for practice, and similar matters. They were developing an understanding of the purpose and meaning of community relations that arose from their attempts to implement plans and that was specific to their context. Similarly the elementary school self-assessment committee devoted most of its time to trying to conceptualize the meaning of self-assessment and its purpose. The actual writing of the policy and assessment instruments took relatively little time.

Both these examples demonstrate that developing conceptual clarity is difficult, time-consuming, and does not depend on policy specificity. It seems, however, that it is a necessary component of meaningful policy

implementation. It is also apparent that the implementation strategies of dissemination of information and training in specific skills contribute little to the development of conceptual clarity.

THREE MODELS OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The various actors in the school district held three quite different beliefs and assumptions about the process of policy implementation, each resembling in many respects one of the three major theoretical perspectives on policy implementation. These are the *classical* or *technological* model, the *political* model, and the *cultural* or *evolutionary* model. They constitute different perspectives on, or "ways of seeing," the implementation process, and "act as interpretive frameworks for understanding" it (House, 1981).

Each perspective seems to describe policy implementation from the point of view of a different set of actors, and, in doing so, accounts for and illuminates different aspects of the findings. The classical or technological perspective most closely resembles the process as seen by the school board members or, more accurately, as they seem to wish it would proceed. The political perspective corresponds to the views of the district employee groups. The cultural or evolutionary perspective parallels the point of view of school staffs.

Classical or Technological Model

In the classical or technological model, the relationship between policy makers and policy implementers is assumed to be hierarchical, that of superordinate to subordinate. Moreover, it is assumed that the two groups share a common value framework and accept that the policy is in their common interest, so that the co-operation of implementers is automatic. In sum, implementers are viewed as passive consumers. The crux of implementation is the clarity and specificity of the policy, the effective transmission of instruction from policy makers to policy implementers, the ability of the implementers to carry out the instructions, and the means to monitor and ensure compliance (Edwards & Sharkansky, 1978).

Policy making and policy implementation are assumed to be bounded and sequential activities, with implementation resulting from the "irresistible unfolding" (Majone & Wildavsky, 1979) of the policy. In other words, the policy is all, and, given a well-formulated policy and appropriate introduction of it, implementation is inevitable. Thus, the focal point of this perspective is the policy itself, and the problem is how best to design it.

There is a belief that there is one means best to achieve each common end and that technology and research will provide that means.

Finally, policy implementation is assumed to be a rational and technical process. Consequently rational-empirical implementation strategies, those which attempt to justify the proposed change to implementers in terms of rational arguments and to demonstrate to them how they will gain in terms of improved performance and increased efficiency (Chin & Benne, 1976), are employed. This accounts for the heavy reliance on dissemination of information, staff retraining, and the use of consultants to facilitate both.

It is apparent that the perspective of the school board members concerning policy implementation resembles the classical or technological model, especially with respect to the heavy investment of time and effort in developing the policies, in the utilization of rational-empirical implementation strategies, and in the assumption of hierarchical structure. A comparison of the perspective of the school board and the classical model is presented in Table 2.

Political Model

Nakamura and Smallwood (1980) provide a detailed description of this model. The relationship between policy makers and policy implementers is assumed to be based on a balance of power, with each group having different resources under its control. Implementers have their own goals, values, and interests which may differ from and even be in conflict with those of policy makers; so co-operation cannot be assumed and often must be negotiated. On the other hand, because both groups accept the same general value framework, consensus on broad goals at least is possible. Implementers are not viewed as playing a passive role but instead are seen as engaging in a power struggle with the policy makers.

The processes of policy making and policy implementation are seen as closely intertwined. In fact, the policy-in-practice is thought to be determined as much, or possibly even more, by the process of implementation as by the policy itself. Thus the focal point of this perspective is the policy-in-context, with policy seen more as a set of bargaining points than of explicit instructions. Policy implementation, then, is highly interactive in nature and is characterized by bargaining and negotiation.

Finally, policy implementation is assumed to be a complex and dynamic process influenced by such strategies as persuasion, inducements, and coercion (what Chin & Benne, 1976, classify as power-coercive implementation strategies) rather than by technical knowledge and research

TABLE 2
The School Board Perspective and the Classical Model of Policy Implementation

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>School board perspective</i>		<i>Classical model</i>
PM-PI relationship	Employer-employee	Superordinate-subordinate	
PI co-operation	As employees, principals and teachers must comply	Automatic	
Nature of policy	The policy statements tell the principals and teachers what they must do	Set of instructions	
Focal point	Spend time and effort on policy development rather than implementation	Policy	
PI role	Principals and teachers just have to do what the policy says	(characteristics and components) Passive consumption	
Nature of policy implementation	Principals and teachers know what they have to do from the policy statement, although they may need training to be able to do it	Unfolding of plans: systematic and rational; succeeds and is separate from policy making	
Implementation strategy	Dissemination of information and workshops	Rational-empirical	

NOTE: PM = policy maker; PI = policy implementer

findings. The implementation environment is seen as containing a variety of different actors, all attempting to influence the course of implementation. It is the task of those charged with directing the implementation process to co-ordinate the activities of these actors in a way that will lead to successful and effective program performance even when, as is often the case, the policy directives are ambiguous and diffuse. They may not have the power to secure compliance from all actors through the manipulation of sanctions and rewards and so must rely heavily on negotiation, persuasion, and compromise.

The political model, then, captures the point of view of district employee groups. The objections raised by such groups to the community relations and elementary school self-assessment policies, their relationship with the Board and the senior administrators, and their desire to control the policy process during both development and implementation are all accounted for by this model.

Table 3 presents a comparison of the perspective of district employee groups and political model.

Cultural or Evolutionary Model

In this model (see House, 1981; Majone & Wildavsky, 1979, for a detailed description), policy makers and policy implementers are considered to belong to different cultures or different subcultures within the same culture. Each culture or subculture is characterized by a distinct set of beliefs, values, interests, norms, and traditions, which may be so different that one group cannot understand the other's perspective. Not only can a common framework of values, even on a general level, not be assumed but there may not even be an accepted procedure for reaching agreement. Thus implementer co-operation is uncertain, depending as it does on the development of shared understanding and traditions between policy makers and implementers.

Policy is assumed to be a set of multiple dispositions to act, the realization of which depends both on the intrinsic qualities of the policy and on the characteristics of the implementing setting. The policy-in-practice is inextricably linked to the original policy idea and to the context – policy shapes implementation, but implementation also shapes policy.

Policy implementation, then, is seen as the evolution of the ideas or dispositions inherent in the policy within specific settings. Given the continuity and stability of cultures and subcultures and the value placed on tradition, change cannot be expected to occur quickly. If the policy is to have anything other than a symbolic impact, then implementation must

TABLE 3
The District Employee Groups Perspective and the Political Model of Policy Implementation

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Employee group perspective</i>	<i>Political model</i>
PM-PI relationship	Adversarial	Balance of power
PI co-operation	"If they want us to do —, then they have to give us —."	Negotiated
Nature of policy	Reflects the interests of the various employee groups	Set of bargaining points
Focal point	Participative policy development process	Policy in context (power relationships)
PI role	Protect and promote the interests of their members	Power struggle
Nature of policy implementation	Redefine the policy to limit the degree of change necessary and/or seek compensation for extra work required by the change effort	Interaction of factions; negotiation of interests; intertwined with policy making
Implementation strategy	Persuasion, negotiation, and compromise	Power-coercive

NOTE: PM = policy maker; PI = policy implementor

be characterized by mutual adaptation and clarification. Implementers must make fundamental changes in their beliefs and practices, and this must be guided and supported by normative-reeducative implementation strategies (Chin & Benne, 1976), those which focus on problem solving, adaptation, and professional growth.

The perspective of school staffs is best represented by the cultural or evolutionary model, which is able to account for their resistance to the community relations and elementary school self-assessment policies, the school-specific nature of policy implementation, and the ineffectiveness of district policy implementation strategies.

Table 4 compares the perspective of school staffs to the cultural or evolutionary model.

Summary

Each of the three perspectives on policy implementation illuminated different aspects of the findings. The classical or technological perspective accounted for the disproportionate amount of time and effort invested in policy development as opposed to policy implementation and for the use of such implementation strategies as the dissemination of information and workshops. The political model, on the other hand, accounted for the resistance of district employee groups to the policies, their relationship to the Board and the district administrators, and their desire to control the policy process. Finally, the cultural or evolutionary perspective accounted for the school-specific nature of community-relations activities, the general resistance of school personnel to district policy, and the relative ineffectiveness of district implementation strategies.

Each perspective also seemed to describe policy implementation from the point of view of a different set of factors. The classical or technological perspective most closely resembled the process as seen by the school board members or, more accurately, as they seemed to wish it would proceed. The political perspective corresponded to the views of the senior administrators and the district employee groups. The cultural or evolutionary perspective paralleled the point of view of school staffs.

IMPLICATIONS

This analysis of the beliefs and assumptions about the process of policy implementation held by the various groups of actors in the school district identifies two major areas of concern: (a) the conflict between the

TABLE 4
The School Staff Perspective and the Cultural/Evolutionary Model of Policy Implementation

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>School staff perspective</i>	<i>Cultural model</i>
PM-PI relationship	Outsider-insider	Members of different subcultures
PI co-operation	"Why don't they let us get on with the job we were hired to do?"	Problematic
Nature of policy	Goals or intentions that must be operationalized	Set of dispositions
Focal point	Perceived need for the policy; perceived compatibility between the policy's assumptions concerning the work environment of the school and those of the staff	Context (meanings, values, traditions)
PI role	Develop a shared understanding of the purpose and meaning of the policy, and its implications for practice	Adaptation and clarification
Nature of policy implementation	Operationalizing a policy within a specific context	Evolution of dispositions: mutual adaptation; intertwined with policy making
Implementation strategy	School-based discussion and feedback	Normative-reeducative

NOTE: PM = policy maker; PI = policy implementer

different conceptualizations of policy implementation that exist in the district, and (b) the role of district administrators in policy implementation.

Conflicting Conceptualizations

It is clear that different groups of actors held different and conflicting views of the process of policy implementation. Not only was each group unable to understand the perspectives of the others, it was perplexed by the inability of the other groups to understand its own perspective. So, for example, Board members expressed bewilderment at the resistance of the schools to their requests and a helplessness to make the desired changes happen. The incumbent members said they had learned that change occurs very slowly but did not understand why this had to be. The central office staff described themselves as the men in the middle, feeling a commitment to both the Board members and the school personnel and trying to help each understand the other's perspective. Principals and teachers expressed resentment at the interference of others and the disruptive effect this had on their teaching. They could not understand why others would not let them get on with the job they were hired to do.

These conflicting conceptualizations and the misunderstanding and mistrust they engendered limited the success of the implementation efforts. As a consequence, lay control of education in any meaningful sense is made very difficult. Moreover, consideration of the intrinsic merits of a policy is made unlikely.

The governance structure of school districts favours the classical or technological model of policy implementation, so it is not surprising that the school board members accept its assumptions. The training and socialization of teachers, on the other hand, make their acceptance of the cultural or evolutionary model highly likely. The challenge of policy implementation, then, is to pursue the goals of the policy while maintaining the integrity of each school's culture. How well this challenge is met depends to a considerable extent on the implementation strategies utilized by the district administrators.

Role of District Administrators

The district administrators were in the unique position of having close and frequent contact with all the other actors and so of having to deal with the different beliefs and assumptions about the process of policy implementation that existed in the district. As the district administrators were expected to oversee policy implementation, they had to try to ensure

that the goals of the policy were pursued within the unique contexts of the various schools. This required using implementation strategies that promoted clarification and mutual adaptation.

Clarification and mutual adaptation have been identified as fundamental attributes of implementation. Clarification refers to the process by which implementers develop a clearer understanding of the meaning, philosophy, and operational objectives of the policy – that is, of what it is they are doing and why. “The conceptual clarity critical to project success and continuation must be achieved during the process of implementation – it cannot be ‘given’ to staff at the outset” (McLaughlin & Marsh, 1979, p. 80). It can only occur during implementation and must not be confused with policy specificity, which is a design feature. Mutual adaptation involves change on the part of both the implementers and the policy: implementers must modify their practices in response to the policy, but the policy also must be modified in response to the local environment (McLaughlin, 1976).

The Lytfield senior administrators utilized implementation strategies that disseminated information about the policy and provided training in specific tasks required by the policy (e.g., how to write a newsletter or how to organize a parent advisory council) but ignored the issue of conceptual clarity. Furthermore, the district administrators were not involved in implementation at the school level unless the school requested some help. Thus the schools were not forced to develop conceptual clarity about the policy and those that did received no feedback about the correspondence between their conceptualization and that of the originators of the policy.

Only if district staff work directly with the schools, monitoring their implementation of the policy but recognizing their need to adapt the policy to their specific circumstances, is meaningful policy implementation likely. But this assumes trust and a sense of common purpose between the various groups of actors in the district. Such is not the case in Lytfield, so that diversity in school policy implementation is largely due to co-optation and symbolic compliance rather than mutual adaptation.

CONCLUSION

This case study supports the view that effective implementation is much more difficult and complex than was believed even a decade ago. In general, the conclusions of the Rand Change Agent study, summarized in McLaughlin and Marsh (1979), are supported. These conclusions have obvious implications for further research; less obvious are the implications for senior administrators, whose jobs are normally considered to

include responsibility for policy implementation. In particular, administrator training programs might well re-emphasise the complexity of policy implementation in education.

NOTES

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² All names used in this report, including those of the district and the schools, are pseudonyms.

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Diese Abhandlung untersucht die Ansichten und Postulate über die Durchführung der Verfahrenspolitik der Mitglieder des Schulausschusses, der Schulbezirksverwalter, der Direktoren und Lehrer eines Schulbezirks im Westen Kanadas und die Auswirkung solcher Ansichten und Postulate auf die Durchführung zweier Verfahren. Es stellte sich heraus, daß in dem Schulbezirk drei verschiedene und widersprechende Vorstellungen über die Durchführung der Verfahrenspolitik vorhanden waren. Der Schulausschuß hielt die Ansicht, daß die Direktoren und Lehrer als Angestellte, die Verfahrenspolitik willig unterstützen sollten und daß die Durchführung einfach eine Sache der Ausführung der gestellten Verfahrenspolitik sei. Die Ansichten der Angestellten des Schulbezirks kann in den folgenden Aussagen zusammengefasst werden: "Wenn die (der Schulausschuß) wollen, daß wir — machen, dann müssen sie uns die folgenden Mittel zur Verfügung stellen — ." Für die Angestellten enthält die Durchführung der Verfahrenspolitik eine Verhandlung in der die Interessen der Mitglieder geschützt und gefördert werden. Die Postulate der Schulverwalter befaßten sich hauptsächlich mit der Notwendigkeit der Verfahrenspolitik und ihrer Auswirkung auf das Arbeitsklima in der Schule. Solche, einander widersprechende, Vorstellungen verringern die Möglichkeit einer effektiven Durchführung und betonen die komplexe Rolle der Schulbezirksverwalter, denn sie tragen die Hauptverantwortung für die Durchführung der Verfahrenspolitik im Schulbezirk.

El propósito de este informe es examinar las opiniones y asunciones acerca del proceso de implantación de políticas de los miembros del concejo escolar, los administradores de distrito, directores de escuela y docentes en un distrito del Oeste canadiense, y el efecto de tales opiniones sobre la implantación de dos políticas en especial. Se encontraron tres conceptos diferentes e incompatibles en el distrito en lo referente a la implantación de políticas. El Concejo piensa que los directores y docentes, en su calidad de empleados, debían estar dispuestos a obedecer las políticas, y que su implantación es simplemente hacer lo que se les pide que hagan. El punto de vista de los grupos de empleados del distrito puede resumirse así: "Si ellos (los miembros del Concejo) quieren que hagamos —, pues tienen que darnos — ." Para ellos, la implantación de políticas implica regatear y salvaguardar y promover los intereses de sus miembros. Las preocupaciones principales del personal

docente es la necesidad de la política y su probable efecto en el ambiente de trabajo de la escuela. Tal conflicto de concepción limita la probabilidad de una implantación eficaz y subraya el complejo papel de los administradores que tienen la responsabilidad primaria de implantar las políticas en su distrito.

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