Chapter 1

The Evolution of Education Policy Implementation

Allan R. Odden

When implementation research began to analyze local response to the 1960s "War on Poverty" programs, the findings were sobering. Most studies found misuse of governmental funds, services provided to the wrong clients, and in some cases, outright local resistance to these new governmental initiatives. In education, for example, early research showed that there was a lack of both capacity and will at all levels of government—the U.S. Office of Education, state departments of education, local district offices and local schools—to develop and implement newly created governmental programs, particularly Title I of ESEA, which was enacted to provide educational services to selected groups of students. Research showed not only that most local educators did not want to implement such programs (the will was not there), but also that they did not know how to implement them (the capacity was not there).

Subsequently, a large body of implementation research emerged that essentially argued that federally (or state) initiated programs, for education or other social services, were doomed to failure on the beaches of local implementation resistance, and that the priorities, orientations, and pressures of local governments (school districts in the case of education) were simply at odds with those of higher level of governments (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973; Derthick 1976).

When regulatory structures were created during the 1970s to give greater clarity to the intent and acceptable operations of the new federal and state governmental programs, there was considerable analysis that showed the initial weak impact these regulations had on local behavior and the continuing dominance of local priorities (Barro 1978). Astute analysts realized that "street level bureaucrats" (those local educators

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who had to implement admittedly grandiose state or federal programs usually without sufficient resources) made the key policy decisions because what they did in the school and classroom constituted the program as implemented, despite legislative intent or regulatory requirements (Weatherly and Lipsky 1977). And in the early 1980s, seasoned implementation researchers concluded that it was difficult, if not impossible, for state or federal government programs to garner the interest, effort, and commitment of local educators to the higher level government's objectives (Elmore and McLaughlin 1981).

A complementary line of research—on the local educational change process—concluded that it was difficult to get new programs (created or designed outside the local school district) implemented (Sarason 1982) unless there was a "mutual adaptation" process in which local educators could tailor (adapt, change and mold) the program to meet their unique, local needs and circumstances (McLaughlin 1976). In short, early implementation research findings coupled with somewhat later research findings on the local educational change process concluded that local response was inherently at odds with state (or federal) program initiative. If higher level governments took policy initiatives, it was unlikely that local educators would implement those policies in compliance with either the spirit, expectations, rules, regulations or program components.

These tenets of "conventional wisdom" led to great skepticism about the efficacy of the state education reform movement that began in 1983 with publication of *A Nation at Risk* and large numbers of subsequent state commission reports calling for major overhauls in the country's elementary and secondary schools. Boyd (1987) provided one of the most elegant critiques of state education reform initiatives, invoking both the early implementation research findings and the early local educational change findings to argue that the top-down nature of state education reforms rendered them unlikely to accomplish their goals of improving local educational practice. Peterson (1983) criticized both the reform report rhetoric and the reform proposals themselves as largely without research support and thus doomed to failure.

Moreover, Cuban (1984b) was articulate in voicing his skepticism of the probability that new state education standards and mandates would make local school districts, schools, and classrooms better. Through a series of local newspaper articles, Cuban took issue with California's chief state school officer, Bill Honig (a major designer of California's 1983 education reform and a rapidly rising state education leader) and strongly questioned the efficacy of that state's efforts to improve the quality of local districts, schools, and curriculum and instruction in classrooms.

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Further, since state political leaders and the business community had designed education reforms with little input from the education community, there was concern that resistance would form simply because local educators had been denied participation in the education reform process. Finally, there was widespread concern that the new policy push for excellence and quality might "smother" and push aside the two decade-old focus on improving equity in the nation's schools. In short, state education reformers appeared to face an army of skeptics and a consensus—at least among many educators and educational researchers—that state education reform and other efforts to improve fundamentally local education systems "would not work."

But several other indicators at that time, largely ignored by state education reform critics, provided hope that state education reform initiatives might not be dashed by local implementation resistance. First, several state education policy initiatives created during the 1970s—school finance reform, collective bargaining, minimum competency testing—not only spread across the states at a faster diffusion rate than traditional political science predicted (McDonnell and Fuhrman 1986) but also appeared to have at least some success (Odden, McGuire, and Belsches-Simmons 1983). Second, while almost totally ignored by state education reformers, several states in the early 1980s had enacted a variety of school improvement programs (Dougherty and Odden 1982), often based on the emerging effective teaching and schools research (Cohen 1983). Studies showed that several of these early state efforts had substantial impact on local school operations (Anderson et al. 1987). Third, there were indications from several other sources that local educators were beginning, on their own initiative, to improve the regular curriculum and instruction program, so that new state programs in those same areas at least had a chance of reinforcing and strengthening local priorities rather than pushing them in different directions (which clearly was a major characteristic of governmental programs in the 1960s and 1970s).

1. The Evolution of Implementation Knowledge and Theory

As the following chapters show, policy implementation has evolved through several stages during the past twenty five years. The first two stages primarily addressed macro-implementation issues of whether and how policies initiated at higher levels of government get implemented at lower levels of the system, i.e., penetrate school districts and schools. Stage one began with the expansion of intergovernmental

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grant programs in the 1960s and is characterized by early implementation problems and "inherent conflict" in federal (or state) initiated but locally implemented programs. Stage two, which began about a decade later, showed that programs ultimately get implemented, but through a mutual adaptation process. Stage three has just begun. It includes various attempts to improve local education systems rather than just create new categorical programs at the margin, including such diverse policy initiatives as comprehensive state education reforms, teacher professionalism proposals, major curriculum change and school restructuring. As the latter chapters in this volume show, these policies do penetrate local districts and schools and also create a new set of implementation challenges, more difficult than the simpler problems created by the newness and redistributive character of the early 1960s War on Poverty education programs.

A key message throughout the book is that the realities of policy implementation are no longer entrenched in the simple "lack of capacity and will" problems unearthed by early implementation research on such programs as Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The policy objectives today are grander, the programs more comprehensive, and implementation challenges more complex. A second message is that state and federal initiatives rather quickly affect local practice—the system is a bit more tightly coupled than previously thought. Another key message is that the understandings about effective implementation processes for the 1960s and 1970s categorical education programs, while providing a more sophisticated base of knowledge for addressing current education policy issues, nevertheless fall quite short of describing effective strategies for restructuring the curriculum, the teaching profession and schools—the policy goals of today. Thus, the chapters show that, in the early 1980s, just as local educators and researchers solidified understandings of how to cope effectively with governmental initiatives to create narrow categorical programs for specific groups of people or to change single curriculum programs, the policy focus shifted to improving the overall education system, a much tougher substantive implementation challenge for which more knowledge is still needed.

2. The First Stage of Education Policy Implementation

The first stage of implementation research was based mainly on late 1960s and early 1970s research on several programs (for education as well as several other functions), and concluded that there was

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inevitable conflict between local orientations, values, and priorities and state or federally initiated programs. New governmental programs met hostility at the local level. Most research showed that local governments had neither the capacity nor the will to implement initiatives designed by higher level governments (Murphy, chapter 2). The expectations and hopes of state and federal program designers were dashed on the shoals of local resistance and ineptness (Derthick 1976; Pressman and and Wildavsky 1973). At best, higher level governmental programs created opportunities for continuous bargaining with local governments over the values, foci, and substance of the new programs (Ingram 1977). But according to expectations at this stage, conflict would continue, bargaining would never abate and programs would rarely get implemented.

Early implementation research showed that implementation problems not only emerged from faulty program design but also, and even more importantly, from the policy's relationship to the local institutional setting. Indeed, much early implementation research showed that local governments often used new program fiscal resources for purposes other than those for which the programs were designed (Murphy, chapter 2). As a result, regulations were developed to constrain noncompliant local behavior and to force correct use of funds (Barro 1978 and Peterson, Rabe, and Wong, chapter 4). Theories addressing both policy design (including needed regulations) and, in part, local institutional settings were developed to improve policy implementation (Sabatier and Mazmanian 1979). Yet, conventional wisdom held that ongoing and continuous conflict was inevitable, that higher level government programs simply did not work, and that local governments would never implement them faithfully. Indeed, these understandings of implementation undergirded many criticisms of the 1980s state education reforms (Boyd 1987 and Timar and Kirp 1988).

3. The Second Stage of Education Policy Implementation

Changes in understanding the workings of government program implementation began to emerge with publication of several studies that investigated late 1970s and early 1980s implementation realities of policies designed in the 1960s and early 1970s. These studies focused on program implementation after the initial start-up years and addressed the question of whether, after fifteen years of effort, programs in compliance with legislative design and accompanying regulations could be implemented.

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Kirst and Jung (chapter 3) produced the first second stage synthesis of federal education program implementation, focusing on Title I of ESEA. They claimed that late 1970's research showed that early Title I implementation problems had essentially abated by the late 1970s. A combination of new rules and regulations that "tightened up" Title I, a political support system of extreme interest groups, and Title I program protectors in the Congress helped shape a clear Title I program structure. By the close of the decade, local school districts had not only learned how to administer Title I in compliance with rules and regulations but also had even begun to sanction the education priorities embodied in Title I.

Their claim was substantially strengthened by publication of a series of research products that emerged from several federally sponsored studies. These research efforts, conducted between 1981 and 1983, investigated the state level interaction and local implementation of several similar federal and state categorical programs including compensatory education, special education, bilingual education, vocational education, and other civil rights rules and regulations (Moore, Goertz and Hartle, chapter 5; Knapp et al., chapter 6). These studies found, at both state and local levels, that the federal (and state) programs: (1) were being implemented in compliance with legislative intent and accompanying rules and regulations; (2) were providing extra services to students who needed them and who probably would not get them if the state and federal programs did not exist; (3) did not cause curriculum fragmentation in local schools and, in fact, allowed local educators to create a set of relatively integrated services for eligible students; and (4) were, in the minds of local educators, worthwhile because they provided needed extra services, despite extra paper work.

A few years later, additional Title I (then changed to Chapter I of ECIA) research showed that even when rules and regulations were waived (but subsequently reinstated) state and local district implementation practices maintained behaviors that had been required by the rules and regulations (Farrar and Milsap 1986). These studies showed that, over time, the grand expectations and rigid regulations of federal and state program designers were adapted to a program that could work locally, that local opposition was transformed into support for new program initiatives for targeted students, that local capacity was developed to run the programs in compliance with rules and regulations, and that eligible students were provided appropriate services (Jung and Kirst 1986).

Peterson, Rabe, and Wong (1986) produced a book about this implementation stage that provided both a new theory of program

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implementation and empirical data for programs in education and for other functions to support the theory. Peterson et al., chapter 2, identified two types of higher level governmental programs—developmental and redistributive—and argued that the implementation process differed for each.

Developmental programs, such as community development, transportation, and, in education, curriculum, instruction and vocational education, are those in which most local governments are involved anyway. Thus, federal and state policies in these areas tend to reinforce local initiatives and program priorities as well as provide extra resources for them, usually with marginal new program requirements. Based on several case studies of such programs, Peterson et al. showed that developmental programs typically get implemented fairly quickly and with a relatively uncontentious implementation process.

Redistributive programs, such as compensatory education, special education, and desegregation assistance in education, require local governments—school districts in the case of education—to engage in activities in which they had not been involved and to provide more service to some clients—students—than to others. Through an analysis of multiple case studies of a number of these programs, Peterson et al., chapter 2, concluded that redistributive programs experience a relatively contentious initial implementation process but that, over time, get fully implemented in compliance with legislative intent, rules, and regulations. Initial grandiose redistributive program goals and initial local resistance get tailored through a mutual adaptation process that produces a workable program for both local and higher level governments. This process is aided by the interaction of two other processes: the development of internal professional expertise and an external political support structure. The internal professionals write rules and regulations to define the program, use them to administer the program, and discover classroom practices to use in delivering the program's services. The professionals are undergirded by the external political community of special interest groups and congressional or state legislator program fixers. The professional and political communities work formally and informally over time to put a workable program into place.

Over time, then, most governmental programs, even redistributive programs, eventually become implemented, but the implementation process is different and more contentious for redistributive than for developmental programs. Hargrove (1983) provides both a theory about and empirical data for the politics of redistributive program implementation. The important overall conclusion from stage two implementation research is that higher level government programs

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eventually get implemented locally, that the initial conflict gets worked out over time, and that the opportunity for bargaining ultimately produces a workable program for both parties. Another conclusion is that state and federal initiatives do impact local practice: there may be questions about the impact, but impact occurs.

4. The Third Stage of Education Policy Implementation

Claiming that programs get implemented, however, is not the same as claiming that they are effective, i.e., that they solve the problems for which they were created. At about the same time as stage two implementation research knowledge emerged, so also did the realization that many programs were not having their desired impact. Students receiving extra services did better than similar students who did not receive services, but the impact was small and often eroded over time (Odden, chapter 7). Indeed, as the 1980s began, several analysts argued that there were direct trade-offs between compliant implementation and program quality, and noted that efforts to develop rules and regulations to get programs implemented had overlooked issues of program substance, quality and impact (Elmore and McLaughlin 1981; Elmore and McLaughlin 1983; Hargrove 1983).

Thus, a focus for stage three implementation research was to determine not only how to get programs implemented but also how to make them "work." Several approaches have been suggested for this twin objective. McDonnell and Elmore (chapter 9) suggest that new research should focus less on specific programs and more on policy instruments such as mandates, regulations, incentives, funds, etc. They argue that the underlying policy instruments used in any new program may be the most important element for program impact and that more needs to be known about how different policy instruments work across different types of programs.

McLaughlin (chapters 8 and 10) takes a different tack and suggests that program quality and impact issues are most promisingly analyzed by focusing on local, micro-implementation issues, and the connections between micro- and macro-implementation concerns. McLaughlin argues that program impact depends on focusing those who deliver services—teachers in education—on the substance of the particular program and in having those professionals apply state-of-the-art knowledge in the delivery of appropriate new services. McLaughlin sees this task as a micro-organizational/implementation issue that is informed more by the local educational change literature (Fullan 1982; Huberman and Miles 1984)

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than by political science literature. Indeed, in assessing the findings of the Rand Change Agent Study after fifteen years, she argues that the "problem" is still one of how to enhance the professional expertise of local educators (chapter 8).

Given the problem for which the program has been developed, the implementation issues are, according to McLaughlin: (1) what is known about effective practice at the service delivery level; (2) how local practitioners can be influenced to apply their energies and attentions to that problem; (3) what strategies can be used to make local practitioners experts in the effective practices they need to apply; and (4) how higher-level policy at the district, state, and/or federal level can be designed to help local practitioners put these practices into local use. Thus, McLaughlin suggests an approach closer to Elmore's (1979–80) "backward mapping" that emphasizes intra-organizational implementation issues and a local change orientation.

There is an additional issue, related to the nature of the program itself, to consider in deciding how to approach analysis of education policy implementation today. The 1980s education reforms, and likely the 1990s reforms as well, are substantively different from the education reforms of the 1960s and 1970s. The earlier reforms targeted special programs to particular types of students. Even when there was overlap between the types of students who could be served in the various programs, the implementation issue was whether services could be delivered to the targeted students. Rarely did a categorical program from the 1960s and 1970s focus on the regular curriculum program or the overall local education system. By contrast, current state education reforms are being created to improve the regular curriculum and instruction program—to change the quality of the local education system. Thus, the implementation issue is not just whether some or all of the programs were implemented but also whether they worked together to improve local schools and districts. The remaining chapters present implementation findings of several policy strategies designed to accomplish that goal.

Fuhrman, Clune, and Elmore (chapter 11) show that the early 1980's education reform implementation was quite different from what skeptics predicted. Indeed, these authors found that many local districts not only quickly and faithfully implemented the key elements of state education reform programs but also went beyond state requirements and standards. Rather than the lack of capacity and will and implementation resistance found in the first round of research after the War on Poverty Programs (and predicted by many for education reform policies), this study found sufficient capacity and will and, further, several

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"active user" districts (Firestone 1989) who latched onto new state initiatives and went beyond them (i.e., used them to reinforce local initiatives with similar objectives). Odden and Marsh (1988) found the same pattern for several California districts actively responding to California's comprehensive 1983 state education reform program. Odden and Marsh (1989) further made the point that education reforms were developmental (i.e., reinforced activities in which local districts already were engaged) and not redistributive programs and, thus, implementation should have been relatively swift, relatively uncontentious, and strongly linked to extant local priorities.

If education reform implementation findings confounded most pundits, subsequent findings about other 1980s policy initiatives began to raise a series of new and more complex issues. While education reform generally was a strategy to intensify conventional notions of education excellence and in the main did not require substantial change in teacher pedagogical practices (Fuhrman, Firestone, and Kirst 1989), the next reforms calling for major curriculum change, teacher professionalism, and school restructuring entailed fundamental change in teacher and administrator behavior and school organizational structures. Chapters 12, 13, and 14 show that these initiatives have experienced several dimensions of effective implementation as well as raised a host of new issues about both the types of program designs and combinations of implementation strategies that are needed to change dramatically local education systems.

Marsh and Odden (chapter 12) report on implementation realities of California's major curriculum reform initiatives, a bold set of reforms broader than the curriculum reforms outlined in the *Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983) report but somewhat less grandiose than the total school restructuring outlined in *Caught in the Middle* (Superintendent's Middle Grade Task Force 1987). Noting the less than optimistic findings from the previous NDEA post-Sputnick curriculum changes attempted during the 1960s and 1970s (Atkin and House 1981; Ravitch 1984), this study identifies how the current California curriculum reforms are substantively different from the NDEA curricula and outlines advances in knowledge of curriculum change learned from research in the thirty years between 1960 and 1990 (see Crandall 1982 for example). One key finding from this curriculum implementation study is that changing one curriculum area at a time is much easier than changing several simultaneously, which is what California is attempting to accomplish. Further, the study notes that local efforts to change fundamentally the curriculum runs into the central dilemma outlined by McLaughlin (chapter 8) of how to enhance

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the professional expertise of local teachers and administrators. The findings confirm McLaughlin's hunches that infiltrating local professional networks is a powerful strategy for accomplishing this goal. Nevertheless, the results show that fundamental curriculum change is a hard and slow process, akin to what Elmore and McLaughlin (1988) call the "steady work" of American education reform.

McDonnell (chapter 13) outlines quite clearly how teacher professionalism proposals raise fundamental issues about who controls American education: the public or professional educators. She shows how several implementation snags with different state approaches to professionalizing teachers are linked more to this fundamental political dilemma than to traditional notions of local capacity and will. Her chapter thus adds a new dimension to implementation research—how issues beyond technical feasibility and local capacity and will affect implementation. McDonnell argues and shows from implementation research that policy implementation may be difficult when a governmental initiative fundamentally challenges traditional notions of who governs schools.

Marsh and Crocker (chapter 14) report on a study of California middle school reform that not only focuses on the difficulties of restructuring an entire school organization but also on the role that two types of state policies can play in that process. In the mid-1980s California synthesized knowledge about effective schools for early adolescents into a report entitled *Caught in the Middle,* which outlined a vision for what a good middle school should be. The vision included a restructured curriculum, changes in teacher and administrator roles, instructional strategies, changes in student activities, and changes in school organization. The report was disseminated as a stimulus for middle school change but was not mandated. Simultaneously, however, the state's School Improvement Program (see Marsh and Bowman 1989, for a description) was expanded for middle schools to provide planning and implementation funding with the requirement that the *Caught in the Middle* vision was the program to implement. Marsh and Crocker's results show some of the positive impacts as well as shortcomings of these twin policy initiatives as well as document the difficulties of dramatically restructuring a school—even when a clear and substantively strong vision exists and there is money both to plan and carry out implementation.

Finally, Wohlstetter (chapter 15) describes new mechanisms that states have devised to monitor education policy implementation for the variety of wide ranging policies they enacted in the 1980s. Indeed, the existence of these oversight initiatives themselves show how sophisti-

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cated the states have become about the implementation process. In the late 1960s, there were no such entities. Even in the 1970s few states established mechanisms to track formally the implementation of broad new education policies. But across the country during the 1980s states created a variety of different implementation monitoring mechanisms, from a broadly based committee of business, political, and education leaders in South Carolina who were sanctioned to monitor reform implementation as well as suggest changes in the strategic directions of policy, to technical and program specific "watch dog" committees in several other states. Wohlstetter is not overly sanguine about the ultimate impact of these oversight strategies. She found that the political payoffs for legislative involvement in oversight are pretty small. She nevertheless suggests that some oversight is better than none at all and hopes that these fledgling beginnings could mature into yet another element of the implementation structure of the 1990s that make policy implementation both more interesting, more sophisticated, and more complex in this decade.

The last chapter attempts to synthesize key points in the entire book and emphasizes findings in chapter 12 through 15. Chapter 16 shows how yet another stage of implementation began to emerge in the late 1980s post-"Wave I" education reform era as states began efforts to alter dramatically the curriculum, the teaching profession, and traditional school organization. This chapter shows how successful implementation of these ambitious efforts entail both an antecedent stage of teacher development and new dominant teachers' roles in advanced implementation stages. This chapter also argues that well designed state policies and programs can both inform the local visions of good curriculum, instruction, and school organization and reinforce several key aspects of the implementation process needed to put those visions into practice. While all facets of successful local implementation strategies are not identified, the chapter shows that the effective implementation processes used to implement "Wave I" education reform are relevant and need to be augmented as districts, states and schools seek fundamentally to restructure curriculum, the teaching profession, and school organizations in the 1990s. Additional research will be needed for these topics in order to firm-up and deepen the implementation knowledge base required for the country's education systems to meet the bold education goals outlined by the President and state governors in the early 1990s.

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