

Policy Studies for Educational Leaders

An Introduction

Third Edition

Frances C. Fowler

POLICY STUDIES FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

An Introduction

Third Edition



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Executive Editor: Darcy Betts Prybella Editorial Assistant: Nancy J. Holstein Production Manager: Wanda Rockwell

Cover Design: Bruce Kenselaar **Cover Image:** Getty Images, Inc.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Fowler, Frances C.

Policy studies for educational leaders : an introduction / Frances C. Fowler. — 3rd ed. p. cm.

ISBN 0-13-615727-0

1. Education and state—United States. 2. Education—Political aspects—United States. 3. School administrators—United States. I. Title.

LC89.F69 2009 379.73—dc22

2007050217

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

CMA 12 11 10 09 08

Allyn & Bacon is an imprint of



To my dear husband, Dr. Gene Collins, with love and gratitude.

Foreword to the First Edition

William Lowe Boyd¹

As I was perusing an issue of *Education Week*, I came on a remarkably sophisticated and insightful commentary article on the problems of school reform (Fowler, 1985). What made it remarkable was not only its insights, but a fact I discovered at its conclusion: Rather than having been composed by an exceptionally perceptive academic or policy analyst, it had been written by a sixthgrade teacher in Tennessee! I wondered, How did an elementary school teacher find the time and wherewithal to do this? This very exceptional teacher turned out to be Frances Fowler, author of this book. Because of the extraordinary quality of her writing and analytical ability, I contacted her and, despite her relatively unknown status at the time, invited her to contribute a chapter on the politics of school reform for the first *Yearbook of the Politics of Education Association*, which Charles Kerchner and I were then editing (1988).

Since that time, Frances Fowler has become a distinguished scholar of the politics of education. With the publication of this important book, she has reached a new level in an already impressive career. Few textbooks on the politics of education have been published, and none has offered the remarkable combination of qualities found in this book: a rich and comprehensive introduction to the field of education policy and politics for educators and lay persons; a remarkable blend of theoretical analysis and practical advice and guidelines; and a message and writing style that appeal to a wide audience, not only lay persons and educators uninitiated to the political world, but also experts and scholars.

Teachers and school administrators will welcome this book because the author genuinely understands their situation and speaks directly to their interests and concerns. Scholars also will welcome this book, not only because it will be enormously useful for teaching purposes but also because it accomplishes more than just didactic objectives: It makes a significant contribution to the literature on the politics of education in several ways. First, it achieves a balance and reintegration of the relationship between policy studies and politics. Scholars of the politics of education who have been worried that the recent trend toward policy studies has led to a deemphasis or even neglect of the politics associated with educational policy making will be gratified by the balance Fowler achieves here.

¹William Lowe Boyd is a Distinguished Professor of Education at The Pennsylvania State University.

Second, Fowler draws together the themes and analysis in her book through a sustained concern for the competing values at play in educational politics and policy making. She illuminates the resulting tensions with many examples throughout the book. Then, in a significant and original concluding chapter, she uses the lenses of four theoretical frameworks to consider likely future trends in American education policy in light of our political culture and competing values.

Fowler's sensitivity to competing values here is not surprising. One of her most important contributions to date has been her demonstration that the American school choice debate has been framed very narrowly and has neglected a number of important policy values. In large part, the debate has been dominated by neoconservatives utilizing economic models and public choice theory. Opponents of school choice proposals have generally been at a disadvantage, relative to advocates, because they have lacked a compelling theory with which to rebut the powerful logic built into economic theories. In response, Fowler (1992) has applied the neophuralist theory from political science to highlight neglected values and dangers to which school choice policies may be vulnerable, especially when poorly regulated. This quality in theoretical and policy analysis is abundantly present in this book.

A third contribution Fowler makes is to show in detail how political theory and analysis can be usefully applied in practical ways by school teachers and administrators. All too often, academics are better at analyzing and lamenting problems than in offering practical suggestions for how to solve or ameliorate them. This book is a notable exception to that pattern. From the opening of the book right through to the conclusion, Fowler speaks to the concerns of educators who are caught in the increased political turbulence surrounding education and troubled by the frequent disconnect between their understanding of their domain and how it is viewed by policy makers.

For example, Fowler provides practical guidelines, advice, and vignettes to help with such questions as: How might we influence the policy agenda for education? How can we improve public knowledge of education if our state, or area within it, suffers from Swiss-cheese journalism? How should we go about lobbying legislators? What questions should we ask in appraising the likely consequences of proposed policies? How can we determine if a policy is appropriate for our school or district context? How should we go about implementing policies, including unpopular ones? How can we tell if a proposed or completed evaluation is of high quality?

A fourth contribution in this book is its extraordinarily systematic and comprehensive explanation of the state-level policy-making process. Recognizing the ever-increasing importance of state government in education policy, Fowler has provided a full and coherent presentation of information that is usually only available in piecemeal and incomplete accounts.

In sum, this is a rich and rewarding book. It is sure to be popular because it provides not only a comprehensive and insightful introduction to educational policy and politics but many valuable tools and learning exercises for those who wish to improve their skill in, as well as their understanding of, this domain. Tennessee lost an exceptional sixth-grade classroom teacher, but all educators can learn from her now.

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Preface

According to proverbial wisdom, necessity is the mother of invention. Proverbial wisdom is certainly correct in the case of *Policy Studies for Educational Leaders: An Introduction*. The idea for this book was born in the summer of 1990 when, new Ph.D. in hand, I was invited to teach a graduate course in education policy at the University of Tennessee–Knoxville. After discovering no suitable textbooks, I ordered a few paperbacks on current issues and put together a course packet consisting of articles on various aspects of education policy. Although my students were bright and motivated, I often felt frustrated; none had taken a college course in political science and few had been involved in the policy process at any level. I found, therefore, that I had to devote much class time to filling in the gaps in their knowledge. Often I longed for a good textbook that provided basic information, freeing up precious class time for substantive discussions of policy issues.

That fall, I began a new position at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, where one of my responsibilities was a graduate course in education policy. As I worked with my students over the next few years, my earlier feelings were reinforced. The lack of a good basic text hampered my teaching in various ways. Thus, the idea for this book was born. As I revised and restructured the course during those years, I also gathered materials for a future textbook, developing an organizational structure and a series of learning materials for students.

TEXT PHILOSOPHY AND FOCUS

Policy Studies for Educational Leaders: An Introduction is based on the following set of beliefs:

- 1. Educational leaders must be literate about policy and the policy process. The time is long past (if, indeed, there ever was such a time) when education administrators could tell themselves that, "Politics and education don't mix," and sit complacently on the sidelines while others made important policy decisions for the schools. In today's rapidly changing policy environment, those who lead our schools must have a basic understanding of education policy and how it is made; otherwise, they will be reactive rather than proactive, and when they move into action, they are likely to make serious blunders.
- 2. Educational leaders need both theories and practical information about education policy and policy making. Unfortunately, many people in education believe that theory and practice are unrelated and, indeed, opposites. I reject this view. If school ad-

- ministrators are truly to be reflective leaders, they need tools for thinking, deeply and critically, about education policy. Among these necessary tools are knowledge about major research findings, analytical frame works, and important political theories. However, people who are politically inexperienced also need practical advice about how to apply this abstract information. Therefore, this book presents both the underlying theories and specific recommendations for practice.
- 3. Educational leaders must understand power and how to use it responsibly. The underlying theory behind this book is *conflict theory*—the belief that policy grows out of conflict between different individuals, groups, and institutions. Because the outcome of these struggles is shaped by the balance of power among the participants, students must understand power. Conflict theory is a large theoretical house, ranging from the pluralists who focus on the dynamics of practical politics to scholars whose thinking has been influenced by Marx and Gramsci, with many stops in between. Unfortunately, education scholars in the United States tend to set up a binary opposition between the pluralists and more "critical" thinkers, focusing on either practical politics or cultural politics to the exclusion of the other. In my opinion, these approaches are neither theoretically adequate nor pedagogically sound, leading either to students who understand day-to-day politics (but ignore the more subtle play of power that shapes most social injustice) or to students who have a good grasp of how powerful cultural institutions shape consciousness (but do not know what happens in a legislature or court). My book transcends this unfortunate dichotomy by using Oxford University professor Steven Lukes' (1974) integration of pluralist and "critical" perspectives with studies of the mobilization of bias to yield a holistic theory that encompasses the many faces of power. Thus, instructors can teach their students about both the dynamics of everyday American power politics and how powerful interests use institutions and culture to perpetuate injustices based on race, gender, and class.
- 4. All public policy, but especially education policy, is value laden. In political science, one school of policy analysis seeks to conduct "value-free" analysis. In my opinion, their work is misleading, because it is based on a fundamental misconception about social reality. I agree, therefore, with those political scientists who consider policy making to be inherently intertwined with values. This book reflects that belief. Not only is an entire chapter devoted to policy values and ideology, but throughout the book, I raise issues of values. Because many of the conflicts in which school leaders become embroiled turn on questions of deeply held values, this emphasis lays the foundation for a good understanding of where and when struggles over values are most likely to arise.
- 5. State government has become increasingly important since the late 1970s and will probably continue to be so. In the United States, education policy is developed at four levels: federal, state, district, and school. Although this book touches on all four levels, it emphasizes the state level, which not only is growing in importance, but is the least understood for several reasons: the federal focus of most civics and government courses, the split national—local focus of the media, and the patterns of practical experience that most educators develop during their careers. Therefore, filling this gap seemed essential.

TEXT ORGANIZATION

This book is divided into twelve chapters that can be grouped in the following four categories:

- 1. Introductory chapters (Chapters 1 and 2). The first two chapters lay a general foundation for students, most of whom have never taken a basic political science course. Chapter 1 presents an overview of education policy and the policy process. Chapter 2 deals with power, presenting Lukes' theory in detail, and applying it both to day-to-day politics and the more subtle power mechanisms that maintain inequalities based on race, class, and gender. It also provides an introduction to discursive analysis.
- **2.** The policy environment (Chapters 3–5). As a social phenomenon, policy grows out of a specific socioeconomic context. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 provide background for students about the most important dimensions of this context: economics, demographics, political structures, political culture, values, and ideology.
- 3. The policy process (Chapters 6–11). Students can understand education policy—and how to influence it—only if they understand how it is developed, implemented, and assessed. Chapters 6 through 11 focus on this process, using the classic stage model. Chapter 6 introduces the major policy players, and the following chapters show them in action as policy issues are defined, moved onto the policy agenda, formulated, adopted, implemented, and evaluated.
- **4.** Retrospective and prospective (Chapter 12). Chapter 12 seeks to provide students—who should now have a much more sophisticated understanding of education policy than they did when they started the book—with a historical framework for understanding the current education reform movement and one of its major products, the No Child Left Behind Act.

SPECIAL FEATURES

I have tried to make this book as user-friendly as possible for both students and professors. To that end, I have provided the following special features:

- **1.** Focus questions. Each chapter opens with several questions that relate to the major content of the chapter. These questions serve as advance organizers for students, helping them identify the most important points as they read.
- 2. Figures and tables. The figures and tables in this book summarize important points that would be tedious in paragraph form, give a visible form to theoretical material for visual learners, and provide an easy reference for the most important principles of political action.
- **3.** End-of-chapter activities. Every chapter (except Chapters 9 and 12) ends with at least four of these five types of learning activities for homework or class discussion: questions and activities for discussion, a case study, a news story for analysis, a pro-con debate, and an Internet assignment. These activities can also be used as the basis for short papers.

4. For further reading. Each chapter (except Chapter 9), ends with a short, annotated bibliography of books and articles on the topic covered in that chapter that students and professors can use to extend and deepen their understanding of the material in each chapter.

NEW TO THIS EDITION

Much has happened since I prepared the final manuscript of the second edition in 2002: the technological revolution has continued unabated; immigration has reached virtually unprecedented levels; and the United States entered a prolonged war in the Middle East, leading to high levels of debt and a reduction of the resources available for schools. In education policy, *No Child Left Behind* was implemented, stimulating sharp controversy and, in some instances, outright resistance among educators. Therefore, numerous changes were needed for this second edition, as listed here:

- 1. Economic information has been updated. Chapter 3, which deals with the economic and demographic aspects of the policy environment, has been updated. It incorporates the economic changes resulting from both the expected downturn of the business cycle and the impact of the war in Iraq.
- 2. Up-to-date news stories for analysis and case studies are provided. All the news stories for analysis from the second edition have been replaced by new stories. Moreover, in selecting new material, I include stories that relate not only to the major concepts of the chapter they follow, but also to current issues such as charter schools, bilingual education, high-stakes testing, and the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. In addition, a new case study dealing with the teaching of Intelligent Design has been added.
- 3. The chapter on implementation has been expanded and updated. Since the late 1990s, a considerable body of new implementation research has developed. As a result, Chapter 10, which deals with implementation, has been expanded. It now contains a section that presents the new research on implementers as learners as well as new research on the challenges of scaling programs up from one or a few sites to many.
- **4.** The final chapter has been significantly revised. Chapter 12 now includes a lengthy discussion of the No Child Left Behind Act as well as suggestions about how education leaders can exercise their influence to shape the law to reflect some of their major concerns about it.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A book is a monumental and often frustrating project, one that requires much assistance and support if it is ever to reach completion. Therefore, I acknowledge the contributions of the following people:

 Deborah R. Alexander, Tennessee Technological University; Ann Allen, The Ohio State University; Thomas Alsbury, Iowa State University; Elizabeth Davenport, Florida A&M University; Jack Klotz, University of Central

- Arkansas; Dana Mitra, The Pennsylvania State University; and Joy C. Phillips, University of Houston, for their reviews.
- My husband, Dr. Gene Collins, who has been endlessly patient when I had to spend time on the book rather than with him, doing more enjoyable things.
- My editor at Pearson/Merrill, Darcy Betts Prybella, and her assistant, Nancy Holstein. Over the past year I have shouted "Help!" many times, and they were always prompt to respond to my requests or questions.
- All the people in Anderson County and Nashville, Tennessee (their name is legion), who acted as my mentors when I was active in politics and gave me practical knowledge of how it is really done.
- My students at Miami University, who were eager to learn much of the material that eventually wound up in the first edition of the book and who also made valuable suggestions for the second.
- William Boyd, Professor of Educational Leadership at the Pennsylvania State University and a fellow East Tennessean, who asked me to contribute a chapter to a Politics of Education Association Yearbook when I was still a sixth-grade teacher, and who has supported and assisted me on many occasions since I entered higher education.
- My late parents, George and Louise Fowler, who taught me such a great love of books that even as a child I wanted to write one.
- My late aunt, Ruth Fowler Shipe, who taught high school American history and government, and whose avid and lifelong interest in the policy process was contagious.
- And, finally, all those other relatives, friends, and colleagues whose support, pride, and encouragement helped me through the rough times and made sure that I finished the book.

Brief Contents

	Dedication		v	
	Foreword to	the First Edition	vii	
	Preface		хi	
Chapter 1	Policy-What	It Is and Where It Comes From	1	
Chapter 2	Power and E	Power and Education Policy		
Chapter 3	The Economy	y and Demographics	52	
Chapter 4	The Political	System and Political Culture	78	
Chapter 5	Values and Id	deology	105	
Chapter 6	The Major E	The Major Education Policy Actors		
Chapter 7	-	Setting the Stage and Getting on It: Issue Definition and Agenda Setting		
Chapter 8	_	Getting the Words and the Money: Policy Formulation and Policy Adoption		
Chapter 9		Looking at Policies: Policy Instruments and Cost Effectiveness		
Chapter 10		Policy Implementation: Getting People to Carry Out a Policy		
Chapter 11	100 NO 10	Policy Evaluation: Determining If the Policy Works		
Chapter 12	Education Policy in the United States: Retrospective and Prospective		333	
	Glossary		365	
	Appendix A	Useful Web Sites for Following Education Policy	367	
	Appendix B	How to Locate Government Web Sites for Specific States	370	
	References		371	
	Name Index		393	
	Subject Index		397	

Contents

	Dedication v
	Foreword to the First Edition vii
	Preface xi
Chapter 1	 Policy—What It Is and Where It Comes From WHY STUDY POLICY? 1 School Leaders in Oz 1 DEFINING POLICY 3 A Brief Definition 3 Policy and Expressed Government Intentions— Racial Segregation 4 Policy, Law, and Racial Segregation 4 THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE EDUCATION POLICY ENVIRONMENT 8 The Way It Used to Be 8 The New Policy Environment 8 Reasons for These Changes 9 Changed Roles of School Leaders 10 THE POLICY PROCESS 13 Policy Issues 13
	 Applying the Stage Model to Standards-Based Reform 14 THE SCHOOL LEADER AND POLICY STUDIES 18 Administrators as Policy Makers 18 Administrators as Implementors of Policy 19 Administrators as Followers of Policy Issues 19 Administrators as Influencers of Policy 19 FINAL POINTS 20
Chapter 2	Power and Education Policy INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS 24 DEFINING POWER 25 A "Contested" Concept 25 A Working Definition of Power 25 DISCOURSE AND POWER 26 School Administration as Talk 26 Texts 27

	Discourse Practice 27
	Social Practice 27
	 THE THREE-DIMENSIONAL MODEL OF POWER 28
	The First Dimension of Power: Explicit Uses of Power 28
	The Second Dimension of Power: The Mobilization of Bias 33
	The Third Dimension of Power: The Shaping of Consciousness 37
	POWER IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS 39
	The Power of Education Policy Actors 39
	Analyzing Power Relationships 39
	Building Power 43
	ETHICAL ISSUES SURROUNDING POWER 45
	The Dangers of Power 45
	Power as Means and End 45
	Using Discursive Power Ethically 46
	• FINAL POINTS 47
bapter 3	The Economy and Demographics 52
	• WHY ANALYZE THE POLICY ENVIRONMENT? 52
	Defining Policy Environment 52
	Policy and Its Social Context 53
	 THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT 54
	Importance of the Economy 54
	Overview of U.S. Economic History 54
. Do . E-	Short-Term Economic Changes 58
	Long-Term Economic Trends 60
1,	 DEMOGRAPHICS AND THE POLICY ENVIRONMENT 63
	The Importance of Demographics 63
	Long-Term Demographic Trends 64
	 IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION POLICY 69
	Implications of the Business Cycle 69
	Implications of Long-range Trends 70
	"Do More With Less" 71
	"Do a Lot More With a Little More" 72
	Reading Between the Lines 72
	 HOW ABOUT LARGE NEW INVESTMENTS IN SCHOOLS? 73
hattan 1	The Political System and Political Culture 78
hapter 4	The second secon
	THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LESS OBVIOUS 78 THE LIS POLITICAL SYSTEM 79
	 THE U.S. POLITICAL SYSTEM 79

Contents

Federalism 79 Separation of Powers

Chapter 4

Chapter 3

•	Judicial Review 85	
•		
	IMPLICATIONS OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM	
	FOR SCHOOL LEADERS 85	
	Competition Among Governance Bodies 85	
	Multiple Veto Points 87	
	Timing Policy Concerns with Elections 88	
	Network and Coalition Building 90	
•	POLITICAL CULTURE 92	
	Defining Political Culture 92	
	Traditionalistic Political Culture 93	
	Moralistic Political Culture 95	
	Individualistic Political Culture 96	
	Political Culture and Education Policy 96	
	Implications for School Administrators 97	
•	FINAL POINTS 100	
V	alues and Ideology	105
•	THE IMPORTANCE OF IDEAS 105	
•	BASIC VALUES IN U.S. POLITICS 107	
	Self-interest and Other Values 107	
	Self-interest Values 107	
	General Social Values 108	
	Democratic Values 110	
	Economic Values 114	
•	VALUES INTERACTING WITH EACH OTHER 117	
	Cyclical Shifts in Dominant Values 117	
	Important Value Conflicts 118	
•	IDEOLOGY 122	
	Defining Ideology 122	
•	MAJOR U.S. IDEOLOGIES 122	
	Conservatism 122	
	Liberalism 124	
•	OTHER IDEOLOGIES 126	
	Extremist Ideologies in the United States 126	
	Ideologies in Other Countries 127	
	C	
•	SCHOOL LEADERS CAUGHT IN IDEOLOGICAL CROSSFIRE 129	
•	SCHOOL LEADERS CAUGHT IN	
•	SCHOOL LEADERS CAUGHT IN IDEOLOGICAL CROSSFIRE 129	

Fragmentation of Governance 83

Chapter 5

α				1
Ck	a	t.e	2V	0

The Major Education Policy Actors

140

167

 THE DRAMATIS PERSONAE OF THE POLICY DRAMA 140

The Legislative Branch 142
The Executive Branch 146
The Judicial Branch 149
Local Government Actors 150

 NONGOVERNMENTAL POLICY ACTORS 152

Interest Groups: What They Are and What They Do 152

Education Interest Groups 152

Noneducation Interest Groups 154

Policy Networks 155

Policy Planning Organizations 155

The Media 156

 IDENTIFYING AND LEARNING ABOUT POLICY ACTORS 157

Overall Approach 157

Locating Elected Government Officials 158

Identifying Appointed Officials and Groups 159

Identifying Policy Planning and Related Organizations 160

 COUNTERACTING "SWISS-CHEESE JOURNALISM" 161

Chapter 7

Setting the Stage and Getting on It: Issue Definition and Agenda Setting

- PERCEPTION AND REALITY IN THE POLICY PROCESS 167
- ISSUE DEFINITION: SETTING THE STAGE 168

Defining Issue Definition 168

The Education Policy Planning and Research
Community 170

THE POLICY AGENDA 180

Defining Policy Agenda 180

Types of Policy Agendas 180

How Agendas Relate to Each Other 181

Getting on the Governmental Policy Agenda 182

Staying on a Policy Agenda 185

Nondecisions 185

 SCHOOL LEADERS AND THE EARLY STAGES OF THE POLICY PROCESS 186

Following the Early Stages 186
Influencing the Early Stages 187

xxii Contents