Policy Studies

for

Educational Leaders

An Introduction

Third Edition

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Frances C. Fowler

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Miami University, Oxford

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

Foreword to the First Edition

William Lowe Boyd[1]

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 sixth-grade 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.

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[1]William 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 neopluralist 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:

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- 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.
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- 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

Contents