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CORWIN

THE ENTREPRENEURIAL BUREAUCRACY:
Biographies of Two Federal Programs
in Education

*The Entrepreneurial
Bureaucracy:
Biographies of Two Federal
Programs in Education*

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Foreword

Since the National Institute of Education (NIE) in Washington, D.C. was created in 1972, it has awarded millions of dollars annually in grants and contracts to universities, private firms, and state and local governments. These funds have been used to support a wide range of research, development and demonstration programs, and projects relating to education. This book consists of studies of two of the more ambitious of these programs, namely (1) the Research and Development Utilization Program (RDU) funded at \$10 million, which operated between 1976 and 1979, and (2) the Rural Experimental Schools Program (ES), which was funded at \$6.4 million during the years 1970 to 1978.

These programs had many features in common. Both were initiated by a federal agency. Both had a fixed life span. Both entailed direct working relationships between federal officials and educators at the state, intermediate, and local school district levels. Both provided large sums of money to a select number of schools or school districts for the purpose of helping practitioners make certain changes in their practices and procedures which they had identified as necessary for their own improvement. And both included a smaller, but nonetheless substantial, research component for the purpose of learning from the experience.

Underlying these similarities, however, were some critical differences that evolved from the unique origin and history of each program. These distinctive features have fortuitously served to illuminate different properties of their parent organization, the National Institute of Education. In particular, RDU was solely the

product of NIE, designed and administered to meet this fledgling agency's emerging priorities and needs. RDU has thus provided a rare opportunity to observe up close how a program came into being in the precarious social climate of this new agency. Therefore, in the case of RDU I have chosen to focus on the dynamics behind program *design* and to give only secondary attention to the way the program was managed.

ES had a slightly different history. It was instituted by the U.S. Office of Education (OE) shortly before NIE was created and later transferred to NIE as one of numerous ongoing programs that NIE reluctantly "inherited" from OE. What has proved to be most sociologically revealing about ES is the way the program was *managed*. Therefore, in the case of ES, I have chosen to focus on the various roles and management styles exhibited by NIE program officers as they administered the program. While the designs of both programs impacted their operations, I am less interested in comparing the two cases than in capitalizing on the distinctive ways that each program can contribute to an understanding of some critical features of the policy process in this federal agency. Taken together, the two programs include a broad range of the activities that marked the early stages of NIE. A close examination can serve to expose aspects of the social milieu that prevailed there during its first decade. Of course, as only two of innumerable programs that could have been chosen for study, RDU and ES can obviously provide only a partial and selective picture of this complex agency. No two programs can be said to be representative. But when considered as pieces of the larger mosaic, RDU and ES do provide a valid portrayal of at least some critically important features that characterized NIE during its formative years.

Some of the events associated with these two programs can help illuminate a number of intellectual issues which are of general interest to social scientists, policymakers, and the practitioners associated with federal programs. Some of the issues to be addressed here include:

- The key identifying features of an emergent type of organization, the entrepreneurial bureaucracy.
- How discretionary programs come into existence (in contrast to many other studies of federal programs which have focused on existing, legislated programs).

- How program designs are shaped and altered by the organizational context of their sponsoring organizations—the structural constraints, the incentives, and the internal politics of such organizations.
- How the fate and impact of a program are determined by the processes used to design it.
- Various ways in which program designs can become accommodated to the realities under which programs must operate.
- How relationships between federal agencies and local communities are influenced by the competing roles that program officers are expected to perform.
- How a program officer's choice of role priorities is, in turn, fixed by features of his/her social context.
- The benefits and costs that accrue when federal agencies attempt to provide technical assistance to local communities.

Details from the two programs, RDU and ES, pertaining to these and related issues will be described in the following pages.

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Part I

The Setting

Chapter I

The Life and Times of an Entrepreneurial Bureaucracy

The National Institute of Education (NIE) is a relatively new federal agency which has had a stormy career. Established by the Nixon administration and funded in 1972, NIE, with a vague, often controversial mission and harboring grandiose ambitions, has sometimes seemed naively smug to an incredulous Congress. Pushed and pulled by its constituencies and bothered by opposing factions within the Congress, it remains, a decade later, a favorite target. As part of the new Department of Education, one of the agencies the Reagan administration has singled out for termination, its fate is uncertain. As this publication goes to press, it remains to be seen whether NIE will be dismantled, consolidated with another agency, or reorganized in some other way. The persistent vulnerability of this agency is an important and inescapable part of the story behind ES and RDU.

AN ARCHITECTURE OF CONTRADICTIONS

NIE had an inauspicious beginning. It was the product of a multitude of consultants and much advanced planning in its parent agency and within the federal structure (Levien, 1971). Tacked onto a larger bill, the authorization moved through Congress without arousing much interest. From the beginning, NIE has been torn over whether its primary mission is policy analysis, fundamental research, or delivery services. While confusion over such matters is probably not uncommon in Washington, in this