POWER AND POLITICS

Federal Higher Education Policymaking in the 1990s

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PREFACE:
Power and Politics

The study that follows started in the summer of 1990 when Professor Don Hossler of the Indiana University School of Education invited a group of doctoral students to his home to discuss the formation of a research team to track the upcoming reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA). The invitation seemed like an ideal opportunity to develop new research skills, work with a research team and possibly assist team members who wanted to develop a project around some aspect of the reauthorization process. As the team evolved, with different members taking on different tasks, I took on the task of tracking interactions between the White House, the Congress, and the higher education associations. What started as a social and learning experience quickly evolved into a research project as the contradiction between the rather limited power of the higher education associations and the remarkable growth of programs authorized by HEA became too intriguing to ignore. The questions raised by the apparent contradiction between power and policy outcomes moved the project to the center of my research agenda where it has remained during the 1990s.

Conventional measures and assessments of power tell us that the higher education associations are not powerful policy actors. The American Council on Education (ACE) cannot rally the electorate to oust a member of Congress who disagreed with ACE on a key issue or failed to give his/her vote to ACE on an important bill. The National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) does not give large campaign gifts to its friends or finance election eve media blitzes against its opponents. Until recently, no higher education association made campaign contributions and even now contributions are expressions of goodwill far too small to make an impact on today's multimillion dollar election campaigns. The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) cannot deliver

congressional votes on key education issues. Finally none of the associations can create or produce the type of letter writing or call-in campaigns associated with groups such as the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) or the National Rifle Association (NRA). The last two acronyms are well known to Americans who watch the news or read a newspaper but the same people have probably never heard of the higher education associations represented by the acronyms AACJC, AAU, and NAICU.

Despite the lack of power as measured by conventional standards, the higher education associations have apparently succeeded in convincing Congress to dramatically expand the scope and size of federal student aid programs. A College Board (1990) analysis of trends in student aid found that aid grew by 24 percent in the 1980s even though the Reagan administration consistently called for decreases in federal student aid spending. In real dollars, spending in 1989–90 was forty times greater than it had been in 1963–64, the year just prior to the passage of HEA. While the higher education associations cannot take full credit for this remarkable growth, it does raise the question of the meaning of power in the higher education policy arena. How is it that groups that are not powerful by conventional definitions of power still succeed in having their policy agendas adopted and implemented?

The literature on higher education policymaking largely ignores the question of power. This may be due, in part, to the problems surrounding the use of power as a research concept. One of the problems associated with power is the difficulty in defining power in operational terms. Everyone seems to intuitively understand the meaning of power but cannot agree on what power means when it comes time to provide a precise definition. While many have tried, none have been able to offer a definition of power that applies at all times and in all places. A related problem is that definitions and theories of power tend to determine what researchers will discover by telling them what to look for prior to the actual research. Power is not discovered through rigorous, disciplined, objective research but rather is a function of the methodology and theory selected to guide the inquiry. Given that these are but a few of the problems associated with the study of power, it is not surprising that researchers have elected to focus on other higher education policy issues leaving power to the implicit understanding and interpretation of readers.

At the same time, the intractable nature of the problem of power makes it intellectually seductive. The contradiction between conventional notions of power and actual outcomes in the higher education

policy arena makes the question of power irresistible. The problem facing power researchers is one of reconstructing and reclaiming power so that it can be used as an analytical and explanatory concept in policy analysis and research. This ambitious goal is at the heart of the study that follows. In reconstructing and reclaiming power, the apparent contradiction between power and outcomes in the higher education policy arena can also be resolved.

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1 begins the study with a rather detailed discussion of the political philosophy that implicitly frames the way we research, analyze, and think about power. These implicit notions of power play an important role in policy analysis and research but are seldom brought to the forefront for critical analysis and debate. This is especially true in educational policy analysis and research (Slaughter, 1990). As Terence Ball (1992) has suggested, the metaphors of political philosophers "have a way of becoming behavioral scientists' models" (p. 15). Ball (1992) notes "that the rule of metaphor is likely to be most powerful when it is least" (p. 15). To avoid becoming fatally entangled in unspoken metaphors, it is necessary to identify, expose and criticize those metaphors thus preparing the way for the "reconstruction of power" (Ball, 1992, p. 15).

Chapter 1 begins the process of reconstructing and reclaiming the concept of power for use in policy analysis and research. Reconstructing power means understanding it as the thread that holds collective action together. The precise definition or meaning of power emerges from the study of collective action and is potentially different from one social context to the another. Once power has been reconstructed, it can be reclaimed. That is to say power can become a concept that helps social scientists explicate collective action. Several steps are required to achieve this rather ambitious goal. First it is necessary to review the work of Thomas Hobbes and other early political philosophers in order to understand the origin and lineage of the debates on power. After this, the "faces of power" debates that have dominated discourse on power since the 1950s are considered. Following this discussion, interpretivist theorists are presented as an alternative to positivist conceptions of power. Particular attention is paid to the development of communicative action interpretations of power.

Making explicit what had been implicit is only the first step in reconstructing and reclaiming power. To complete the process, a

research methodology that avoids the shortcomings of earlier approaches is needed to frame and guide the project. The problems associated with the study of power suggests that a combination of cultural, historical, political, and sociological methods be used, with the common thread being interpretation. The starting point for this research design is Michel Callon and Bruno Latour's (1981) sociology of translation. In using this as a starting point one neither accepts or rejects extant theories of power. Instead, one is acknowledging that a theory or concept can reach "the point where it obscures a good deal more than it reveals" (Geertz, 1973, p. 4). Use of the methodological framework suggested by Callon and Latour presents one with a clearer field of vision unimpeded by a priori interpretations or theories of power.

Callon and Latour are not the first to suggest that power must be understood by interpreting it in the historical and social context in which it is situated. What makes their work of particular interest is that they have developed a clearly stated methodological framework that can be understood and followed by other researchers. Use of the sociology of translation means that the definition and meaning of power emerges from an interpretation of the social situation being studied and is limited to that historical and social setting. Such an approach seems simple enough, but it requires methods and rules that prohibit the researcher from prematurely arriving at a definition of power and then forcing that definition on the social setting being studied. Predetermination of the meaning of power has been and is a problem with methodologies commonly selected to guide power research. In order to avoid this problem, the three methodological principles of the sociology of translation-agnosticism, generalized symmetry and free association-require that any interpretation of the meaning of power be delayed until after the historical and social context is fully developed and presented. It is only then that power can be interpreted. Once power is interpreted, as it is in chapter 5, then a new framework emerges to guide the study.

The three chapters that immediately follow chapter 1 provide the historical and social context of federal higher education policy making and define the higher education policy arena. The historical context of federal higher education policy making is discussed in chapter 2. The historical sketch begins with the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 and ends with the initial discussions of the Higher Education Amendments of 1992. An important part of the historical background and context are a series of dynamic tensions and conflicts that have marked the debate over the federal role in higher education. The

resolution of these conflicts and tensions established contested principles that continue to shape and guide the federal interest in higher education today. These principles are identified in chapter 2 and revisited in later chapters.

The task of constructing a new approach to defining and describing the social relations that form policy arenas is undertaken in chapter 3. The intent is to create an approach that captures the dynamic, contingent nature of the higher education policy arena while maintaining the flexibility to adjust to changes in the arena. In addition, the approach will serve as a framework for policy analysis and explanation. The approach is a definition that relies not on conventional geometric shapes or static maps of policy arenas but on the use of subgovernment characteristics and the concept of community. The concept of community, first introduced in chapter 1, is more fully developed in chapter 3 and its development continues through the next two chapters. The resulting definition and framework are not only responsive to change but also can be used to explain change.

The broad outlines of the social context of higher education policy making first presented in chapter 3 are completed in chapter 4. The outline is completed by filling in the details that collectively form the social setting for policy making in the higher education policy arena. Like a pointillist, a whole picture is created from a collection of dots. Once the picture is completed, the historical and social context required by the sociology of translation is also complete and the question of power can be addressed.

In considering the meaning of power in chapter 5, it is clear that any number of extant theories of power can be matched with parts of the historical and social context of the policy arena to make a case for that theory as the defining theory of power. While a case can be made for any number of theories, no one theory matches exactly what was found in the case study of the higher education policy arena. This may be because the developers and proponents of these theories were seeking to develop an overarching theory that explains power at all times and in all places. As such, they lose the ability to explain and define power in specific settings. The interpretation of power offered in chapter 5 emerges from the historical and social context of the higher education policy arena and is applicable only to that policy arena. While it may be applicable to other settings, it must be tested in those arenas before broader claims can be made.

The interpretation of power presented in chapter 5 follows from earlier concepts of power in communication communities but goes beyond the work of Hannah Arendt, John Dewey, and Jürgen Habermas

to search for the foundations of power. Power, defined in terms of the ability of policy actors to address problems, rests on three broad foundations. These foundations interact to give form, shape, and meaning to power. One foundation of power is formed by society's defining institutions and structures. These visible structures of power are the products of decisions made in earlier policy arenas. A second foundation is formed by the personal and social relationships of the community. This includes the explicit rules that govern relationships among policy actors and programs, as well as, the personal relationships that develop between policy actors. The third foundation of power consists of the beliefs and values that policy actors draw on for guidance in making policy decisions and choices. The interaction between foundations generates power, regulates power, and provides the channels and boundaries of power in the communication community that is the higher education policy arena.

Lest the idea of foundations of power present an overly neat or static view, it is important to recognize that problem solving in the policy arena is often a messy business. Structural and institutional foundations crumble, fall, shift and are replaced as policy actors build new institutions and renovate existing ones to meet changing societal needs. Personal and social relationships change as new actors enter the community and new rules are created to govern the relationships of the community. Time and a changing world undermine some beliefs and values, renew others, and generate entirely new community beliefs and values as policy actors seek to make sense of a dynamic world. Always there are interactions as ideas, institutions, and individuals bump, clash, conflict, and mesh creating the need for problem solving.

By historical standards, chapter 5 would have marked the end of the study. After most HEA reauthorizations, Congress and the administration have been content to tinker with HEA's making technical changes and adjustments to bring programs and practices in line with the intent of the legislation. Using history as a guide, one would not expect any major changes to the occur until at least 1997 and possibly as late as 1999. Post-1992 events did not conform to historical trends or expectations. The newly elected Clinton administration arrived in Washington with plans to enact direct lending, national service, and student aid reform. While the Clinton administration was successful in achieving much of its student aid agenda, the 1994 midterm elections carried the Republican Party to power in both the House and the Senate. With victory came plans to repeal the Clinton student aid agenda and to reopen the contested principles and assumptions that

had guided the higher education policy arena in the post-World War II era. The definition of the higher education policy arena and the interpretation of power that had been so recently reached were already crumbling.

Chapter 6 brings the higher education policy arena into the mid--1990s. The first part of the chapter examines the Clinton administration's efforts to enact direct lending and a national service program. This is followed by a discussion of the self-proclaimed "Republican revolution" and its impact on the policy arena. The chapter provides a social context for the reinterpretation of power.

Chapter 7 assesses changes in the policy arena as it moves towards the next century. Given the rapid changes in the arena, does it still function as a communication community characterized by common practices, shared memory, discourse, and emotional and intellectual bonds? The last two years have seen changes in the higher education arena that bring into question its ability to survive as a communication community and forces a reconsideration of the type of community, if any, that exists. Without ties to bind the community and a basis for communication, the community unravels. It may continue as some type of community, but it is no longer a communication community. The foundations of power framework are used to analyze changes in the arena. Part of this assessment includes an examination of the beliefs of the arena in action. Earlier chapters looked at the espoused beliefs of the arena but did not fully examine whether the beliefs were reflected in the policy actions and decisions of the arena. In advancing some interests while punishing others, has the arena been true to its beliefs? Finally, the meaning of power in the late 1990s is considered.

A NOTE ON METHODS

The use of the sociology of translation brings with it the requirement that collective action be studied within the boundaries of its social and historical setting. The historical setting can be analyzed through documents but the social setting demands that the researcher be present in the arena. One must go to the policy actors to interview, listen, observe, and study where they work and interact. In the case of the higher education policy arena, this meant traveling to Washington, D.C., to interview congressional staff members, higher education association representatives, higher education lobbyists, university representatives, and other members of the higher education policy arena.

All of the interviews were semistructured starting with a set of questions that the team wanted each respondent or category of respondents to answer and then moving to questions suggested by their responses. The respondents' demanding schedules meant that most had no more than one hour to share with the researcher for the interview. Fortunately, key respondents agreed to repeat interviews and telephone interviews. The majority of the respondents agreed to have the interview audiotaped, but several objected, and no effort was made to convince them to allow taping. The feeling was that this would only inhibit the respondent, probably would not produce an agreement to tape the interview and might even bring the interview to a premature end. In those interviews, extensive notes were taken and interviewers attempted to reconstruct the interview from the notes and debriefings. The taped interviews were transcribed and shared among team members.

While the interviews produced a wealth of information, their use in the study is problematic. The principal problem is that while nearly all of the policy actors who were approached about participating in the study agreed to an interview, and many agreed to being audiotaped, several actors did not want to be identified by name. This was a reasonable request given the sensitive positions many of the respondents hold and the potential for damaging social relations that have been carefully developed over the years. When these research respondents are quoted, they are identified by type of organization or position as well as by date of the interview, but not by name. This may be objectionable to some but it gives a sense of who is making the comment and as well as when it was made. Finally, publicly available quotes have been used with the attributed and unattributed interview quotes to add to the context and texture of the project.

CONTENTS

1

The Problem of Power

The continuing debate over the problem of power highlights the fact that power remains an essentially contested concept (Lukes, 1974). This is not surprising given that "social science is essentially contestable" with "every conclusion open to argument" (Alexander, 1987, p. 25). Social science concepts such as power are often "inchoate, tacit and imperfectly articulated, they require interpretation to make them manifest. And because they are made manifest by interpretation, any particular interpretation is contestable" (Gibbons, 1987, p. 2). The contest over the meaning of power is a relatively recent event, with students of power apparently having operated with an implicit understanding of the concept until the post-World War II era (Riker, 1964). In the social sciences, the concept of power did not gain wide currency until the 1930s and 1940s (Gillam, 1971). As power's use as an analytical concept increased, social scientists undertook a search for an explicit, universal definition of power. The quest for a universal, operational definition of power touched off a debate that still rages across the social sciences. It is a problem that social scientists have been unable to solve.

While the debate continues, power has lost considerable appeal as an explanatory concept within academic circles. John R. Champlin (1971) suggests that "the term has fallen into comparative disfavor" (p. 2) because of the difficulty associated with defining power. The project of producing a universal definition of power has attracted researcher after researcher, but none has been equal to the task (McClelland, 1971). Not even Hans J. Morgenthau (1971), who claimed that "the distinctive, unifying element of politics is the struggle for power" (p. 30) was able to solve this puzzle. The failure to resolve this problem means that while power has remained "an arousing and poetic symbol," it has been "diminished from a commanding theoretical resource to a very modest abstraction for which an occasional legitimate use can be found in theory and research" (McClelland, 1971, p. 60).

The timing of power's entry into the social science lexicon may explain its rise and fall as an explanatory concept. When the modern concept of power was adopted from the mechanical sciences, the orientation of the social sciences was firmly positivistic (Joseph, 1988). The language of positivism and the logic of scientific discovery required that concepts be operationally defined and objectively measured. Herbert Simon (1957), one of the first to revive the Hobbesian concept of power in the 1950s, found that he was "unable . . . to arrive at a satisfactory solution" (p. 5) to the task of giving power an operational definition. Robert Dahl (1957, 1958, 1961, 1968) took up the challenge and sparked the lively "faces of power" debates but was no more successful than Simon had been in producing an uncontested, unproblematic definition of power. Power could not meet the demands of a positivist social science.

The purpose of this chapter is to begin the process of reconstructing and reclaiming the concept of power for use in policy analysis and research. Reconstructing power means understanding it as the thread that holds collective action together. The precise definition or meaning of power emerges from the study of collective action and is potentially different from one social context to the another. Once power has been reconstructed, it can be reclaimed. That is to say that power can become an explanatory concept that helps social scientists explicate collective action.

Several steps are required to achieve this rather ambitious goal. First, it is necessary to review the work of Thomas Hobbes and other early political philosophers in order to understand the origin and lineage of the debates on power. After this, the "faces of power" debates that have dominated much of the discourse on power since the 1950s are considered. Following this discussion, interpretivist theorists are presented as an alternative to positivistic conceptions of power. Finally, the sociology of translation is offered as a methodology that can solve the problem of power while avoiding the pitfalls of earlier approaches. It is through the use of this methodology that power can be reconstructed and reclaimed as a research concept.

LEGISLATORS AND INTERPRETERS

Drawing on the work of Zygmunt Bauman (1987), Stewart Clegg (1989) has classified power theorists as legislators and interpreters. Legislators discuss, debate, theorize, and research the question of "What is power?" Regardless of the exact answer, power is always legislated by