
Preface

This book tells a story about education policy, specifically policy implementation. Its intended audience is educational leaders, most commonly at the school level, who need to understand, implement, and evaluate policies in their own settings. Most likely you picked up this book for one of the following reasons: You are an educational leader in search of an understanding of the policy arena; the word *ethical* caught your eye; the term *how to* promises some strategies for practice; you are currently struggling with implementation of mandated policies. Whatever your reason, policy is in some way relevant to your work.

Why has policy become such an important word in education? Google the phrase *educational leadership*, and you will get an astounding 11,800,000 hits. Put in *education policy*, and you will find an even greater 17,400,000 results. Of course, this crude comparison in no way suggests education policy is bigger than the leadership of schools. It is only indicative of the enormous attention given to policy. What is all the fuss over *education policy*? We argue here that education policy—understanding policy, doing policy, critiquing policy—is an essential aspect of educational leadership. In fact, understanding policies can help you to use them to your benefit.

The purpose of this book is to provide a framework for creating and implementing policies that enable educational leaders to further their goals for teaching and learning in schools. Our book, though, is somewhat different from the many other recently published books that discuss education and social policy. Our focus here is less on the technical aspects of policy development, implementation, and evaluation and more on the ethics and moral reasoning of education policy. We have chosen this focus because we believe that all policies are based on moral principles and that considering the moral dimensions of policy encourages more thoughtful leadership of schools. If policies are guided by moral principles that are appropriate, defensible, and well thought out, their effectiveness and impact—as well as their acceptance

by teachers, students, parents, and the local community (see Strike, 1982)—will be much stronger. In short, getting the moral and ethical principles right is crucial to getting the policy itself right. In many ways, this may be among the most difficult tasks of any school leader. As former president Lyndon Johnson once commented about the unbelievably difficult job of being president of the United States, “A president’s hardest task is not to do what is right, but to know what is right” (Telushkin, 2006, p. 11). We believe the same is true for school leaders.

Our approach in this book is also somewhat unusual. While we focus on some of the complex aspects of ethics and ethical theory (Chapter 2), much of the book is based on case studies—stories—that show how individual school leaders incorporate moral reasoning into their policymaking. The use of stories to illustrate moral dilemmas and their resolutions is not particularly new:

Throughout history, morality has generally been taught in two ways, through binding legal rules and principles, and through stories. Both exert a profound effect. For every nineteenth-century American who passionately opposed slavery because of its unjust violation of the principle that “all men are created equal,” there were probably equivalent numbers of Americans who hated it after reading Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. (Telushkin, 2006, p. 2)

Our stories are chosen to capture some of the important dilemmas school leaders confront today. As a school leader dealing with these issues, you face pressures from key stakeholders: community groups, the school board, the state department of education, state and federal agencies, and state and federal lawmakers, to name a few. This book is intended to help you deepen your understanding of policy and to offer ways of responding to policy demands as you go about leading schools that are ethical, socially just, humane, and caring places of learning.

Who Are We?

Before we map out policy and ethical reasoning (Chapters 1 and 2) and move into the stories of five school leaders dealing with policy issues (Chapters 3 through 7), we want to give you an idea of why we wrote this book. We have taught students of educational leadership for many years. Through this experience, we have encountered, time and again, the conceptual muddiness of *policy* and the practical dilemmas that fall under the topics of *policy* and *policy implementation*. We have profound

respect for school leaders who deal with these issues on a daily basis. In response to a need they have articulated, we offer a framework to use in thinking ethically about the implications of policy decisions. We also have many years of experience in evaluating various programs in schools and districts—programs that emerged from policy discussions. Witnessing practitioners turn policy into action has highlighted the moral dimensions and consequences of their work. We have seen leaders who accept the challenge of discovering the right thing to do—and of seeing that it gets done. This book provides ways of thinking and doing in schools that honor these moral considerations. Together, the five of us have been teachers, administrators, evaluators and researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and professors. We bring our experiences to this book.

The phrase *Dynamic Schools* in our title refers to a construct developed for school leaders in two earlier books that we have coauthored. Dynamic schools are those that embrace and celebrate change. In the first book, *Principals of Dynamic Schools: Taking Charge of Change*, Rallis and her coauthor Goldring introduce a principal as a proactive and collaborative leader who scans the environment and uses forces internal and external to the school to shape and support its activities to meet its own goals and purposes. In the second book, *Dynamic Teachers: Leaders of Change*, Rallis and Rossman provide portraits of teachers who create and support classrooms that honor the multiple needs and abilities of children in these dynamic schools. In this third book, we revisit dynamic schools through the policy lens, exploring how principals take charge by using their moral compass.

Overview

The first chapter maps out the many P's of policy, noting some overlap among the terms and some distinctions across them. We address these definitional issues first, because sorting through the many terms, ideas, and assertions that surround a policy discussion is an important first step toward understanding the dynamic role that policy plays within our schools. Our purpose is to create a common language through which to read and understand policy. The term *policy* has become vague and ambiguous; this book attempts to help school leaders sort through the many nuances of the term and offer guides for action.

Although no single book could fully address all of the instances of policy that school leaders encounter, this book uses specific examples—stories—to provide context. Not all of the stories in Chapters 3 through 7 will be directly relevant for school leaders everywhere, but

the discussion of the examples will encourage many to gain a better understanding of the many P's of policy. This critical reflection will assist them in responding in more complex and comprehensive ways to the policy challenges they face in their own professional lives.

Thus Chapter 1 focuses on the nature of education policy, broadly conceived, especially as education policy develops and is implemented. Chapter 2 then provides a framework for taking action—analyzing policy issues through moral reasoning, facilitating community deliberation, choosing ways to respond, and evaluating outcomes—with ethical practice and moral principles as a core litmus test. Taken together, these two chapters provide an organizing framework for the specific cases that make up the remainder of the book.

Chapters 3 through 7 present the policy stories that illustrate the dilemmas and issues confronting school leaders as they reflect individually and facilitate public deliberation on important and controversial policies. In Chapter 3, Rose Culley grapples with the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in her urban middle school. Chapter 4 takes us through the thoughts and actions of Joe Patterson as he figures out how to deal with the thorny issue of educating undocumented immigrant children in a small elementary school. The issue of educating English Language Learners is the challenge facing José Modiano and Jeannie Randolph in Chapter 5. John Winton and Mark Candon, administrators of a rural high school, tackle the relationship of sports to academics in Chapter 6. In Chapter 7, Ana Gomez, principal of a suburban elementary school, works through an approach to building positive school climate. Each of these chapters follows a similar format, introducing the policy dilemma and following the principal through his or her reasoning. We complete each of these case chapters with a reflections sheet for recording your own reasoning on the issue, asking, “What would you do?”

In Chapter 8, we present a dialogue between these school leaders in which they discuss insights they have gained into the importance of ethical reasoning as they have initiated deliberative processes with their wider school communities to foster just, humane, and caring schools. We conclude by reviewing important points and information covered in the earlier chapters. Overall, we hope our framework and stories provide school leaders a useful perspective for building their dynamic schools.