Policy & Values

No education is value-free, and many believe schools should play an important role in cultivating values. Education policies across Canada have varied over time in the stated purposes for promoting values, the specific values to be cultivated, and the approaches to be taken in promoting them. Citizenship education provides an illustrative example of this variance.

Between the 1890s and 1920s citizenship education focused on assimilation and Canadianization (Osborne, 1996). At this time “[s]chools were meant to be a homogenizing force that would work with immigrant and native-born children and their families to create ‘good Canadian citizens’ in the image of British loyalists” (Joshee, 2004, p. 135). This was of particular concern in areas with large numbers of non-English speaking immigrants such as Ontario and the West. Canadianization was promoted through the use of English (except in Quebec), celebration of holidays, rituals, flags, and symbols, and throughout the curriculum.

Citizenship education in the 1920s through to 1960s may be characterized as education as socialization and social living (Osborne, 1996). Although citizenship was given less emphasis in education policies during this time, when it was discussed citizenship was described as a matter of personal character in addition to national identity and pride. Those with good character were also good citizens and were those who served others in ways beyond what they did for themselves.

Citizenship education in the 1960s to the 1980s began to reflect the broader and more inclusive notions of citizenship becoming evident in Canadian society at large (Osborne, 1996). New Canadian Studies courses emphasized pan-Canadian understanding and promoted local and regional priorities instead of a coherent vision of Canada. Material in texts reflecting assimilationist goals were replaced with material focused on multiculturalism. Texts were also examined for racial, gender, class and other biases. Teachers began to emphasize world affairs, and by 1980s there was growing recognition that citizenship education had to be both national and global in scope (Sears & Hughes, 1996).

Another important change was the rising acceptance of a more active notion of citizenship and citizenship education by practitioners and policy-makers (Osborne, 1996; Sears & Hughes, 1996). Sears and Hughes (1996) examined policy documents from the 1980s and early 1990s from all the provinces and territories, with the exception of Quebec, in order to discover their intended purposes and practices. The authors found that the policies emphasized citizen action, participation, and use of knowledge. The acquisition of decision-making and conflict resolution skills was stressed, and students were encouraged to develop altruistic dispositions or values.

Osborne (1996) declared the 1990s as the beginning of the disappearance of citizenship education in Canada. He attributed this mainly to politicians’ and policy-
makers’ prioritizing of the needs of the labour market and schools’ role in preparing students to fill these needs. In fact, despite the continuing devotion of schools to meet market demands, a reemergence of citizenship education in policies is evident in Canada and education systems around the world (Joshee, 2004; Kerr, 1999; Torney-Purta, Schwille, & Amadeo, 1999).

These policies do not necessarily reflect a continued commitment to active notions of citizenship, however. Giroux (1989) argues that since the 1980s there has been a restructuring of the discourse around citizenship education rather than a flight from it. In Canada, federal policies have restructured the discourse into a social cohesion framework (Joshee, 2004). This framework recognizes diversity but positions it as a possible threat to the development of national unity. Policies are instead more concerned with promoting a sense of shared values as a means of achieving social solidarity.

Henderson and McEwan (2005) examined the relative importance of shared values in the development of national identity. They conclude that the presence of shared values is not a sufficient basis upon which to build national unity. However, they argue that a belief in shared values is as important in the strengthening social cohesion, if not more important, than actually having a set of values in common.

Policy & Diversity

Policy responses to issues of diversity in schools are part of on-going debate about education policy and practice (Levin & Riffel, 1994). Some differences receive more attention than others in the policy arena; variation often depends on the ability of constituencies to mobilize and exert pressure on politicians (Levin & Riffel, 1994). Policies addressing diversity in schools are connected in policy webs (Joshee & Johnson, 2005) of federal, provincial, and local school board policies. For example, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and First Nations, multiculturalism, and immigration policies at the federal level affect policy and activity in provinces and schools. The Ministry of Education in Ontario has a variety of policies that address different aspects of diversity and provide direction to schools. For example, Policy/Program Memorandum 119 requires that school boards have policies on antiracism and ethnocultural equity, and Policy/Program Memorandum 112 provides direction about education about religion in public schools. Individual school boards develop policies that apply to schools within their jurisdiction; these policies are developed in response to Ministry direction or in response to local circumstances.

Policy Implementation

The existence of policy texts in no way ensures policies are implemented as intended. This review is a brief attempt to explain why this is so often the case. It draws on work from a number of Canadian researchers who have had vast research careers internationally and whose findings are relevant to Canada and elsewhere.

One simple explanation is that for any type of policy to have a sweeping effect, there must be some understanding of what Michael Fullan (2004) calls change knowledge. Fullan describes this change knowledge as “understanding and insight about the process of change and the key drivers that make for successful change in practice”. There has been a rather naive assumption that because a policy has been created it will automatically be implemented. While this school of thought has long been disproved,
remnants of it can still be found in many policy initiatives. Barber & Fullan (2005), writing from a systems perspective, further state that mere change knowledge is not enough to guarantee that policy intentions will be met but rather suggests a number of general guidelines (such as moral purpose, getting the basics right, communicating the big picture, intellectual accountability, incentivize collaboration and lateral capacity building, long lever of leadership, design policy to build capacity and financial investment) must be in place to promote successful implementation.

These guidelines recklessl y and haphazardly followed will once again not ensure policy implementation unless the policy addresses, and the guidelines are applied to, all levels of the education system in what Barber and Fullan (2005) call “tri-level development”. Tri-level development essentially means focusing on “what has to happen at the school and community level; at the district level; and at the state level” (p.2).

Another component of policy implementation, mentioned only once explicitly in Barber and Fullan’s (2005) guidelines, but definitely present throughout each guideline, is leadership. Many policy initiatives fail because of the lack of appropriate leadership and support. While there are numerous ways to conceive leadership, the focus here is on distributed leadership and transformational practices found within distributed leadership. In particular, findings of a four-year study of Strategic leadership for large-scale reform of England’s National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy conducted by Kenneth Leithwood, Doris Jantzi, Lorna Earl, Nancy Watson, Benjamin Levin, and Michael Fullan (2004) informs the complexity of leadership in policy implementation. Distributed leadership assumes a set of practices that ‘are enacted by people at all levels rather than a set of personal characteristics and attributes located in people at the top’ (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003, p. 22). It should also be noted that distributed leadership overlaps with other forms of leadership such as: shared leadership (Pearce & Conger, 2003); collaborative leadership (Wallace, 1988); democratic leadership (Gastil, 1997); and participative leadership (Vroom & Jago, 1998). Again, enabling the development of distributed leadership to lead in policy implementation will only have limited impact if transformational practices of setting directions, developing people and redesigning the organization, are not integral parts of the leadership practices.

As stated above, there is currently much research concentrating on policy implementation locally, individually, systematically, from different perspectives. However, irregardless of the policy and implementation process, the question of whether the policy and its intended outcomes were met or should be asked of all initiatives. Steven Katz, Stephanie Sutherland, and Lorna Earl (2005) have written extensively on how policies, policy initiatives, and the programs that arise from policy must be created with a mindset of evaluation or in their terms “an evaluation habit of mind”. Particularly, it is important for there to be some mechanism in place for on-going evaluation of policy implementation, rather then waiting for unintended outcomes to arise. Policies are often implemented with no way of determining their impact or lack thereof.

Some recent scholarship in Canada, is examining policy through the lens of discourse. Taking their lead from scholars elsewhere (e.g. Ball, 1993, Fairclough, Maclure, 2004) these scholars are looking at policy texts and practices to determine how language and the logic associated with it limit the possibilities of what can be thought and done in the name of policies related to diversity (e.g. Goldberg, 2006, Joshee, forthcoming, Joshee and Johnson, 2005, Corson, 2000).
Lastly, successful policy implementation can also be limited as the intended policy interacts with other existing policies to provide unintended outcomes that are counter productive to the expected change (Hogwood & Gunn, 1990). Bascia (2001) writes, “… a variety of forces at all levels of the educational system challenge any attempts to reform practice by remote control policy” (p. 248). These forces may be social, political, and economic nature. In addition, as seen through discourse analysis, in a post-positivist era, there are multiple ways of knowing with each possessing its own interpretation of policy and attempting to influence it.
References


