

## THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN EDUCATIONAL POLICYMAKING

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This review highlights the research and literature on the role of teachers in developing and sustaining policies related to educational change. The conceptual framework draws from three bodies of literature: (a) approaches to policymaking, (b) stakeholder engagement, and (c) sustainability and coherence of educational policies. The literature demonstrates that the teachers' role in the educational policy process is diluted and inadequate.

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Education news in 2022 is filled with stories about the impact of COVID-19, learning loss, academic bans, false narratives on curriculum and instruction, and teacher exodus from the profession. According to the 53rd Phi Delta Kappa Poll released in 2021, public perception of education remains optimistic despite the reported challenges (Starr, 2021). However just 2 years prior, the 51st Phi Delta Kappa Poll headline reported frustration in schools focused on teacher pay, school funding, and the feeling that teachers were not valued ("Frustration in the Schools," 2019). Improving educator pay, school funding, and the rules and regulations in the teaching profession overall is subject to policy changes. But there is a problem: teachers are not often invited to the table as policymakers.

Teachers seemingly have little direct input into the policy process. Hacsí (2002) argued that elected officials pay little attention to educational research and instead create policies aligned with their base demands. Policies at the local, state, and national levels are initiated, implemented, revised, and abolished continuously with little or no input from teachers (Kumar & Scuderi, 2000; Malen, 2003; Watkins, 2008; White, 2018), and legislators routinely pass legislation impacting operations, funding, and curriculum in public schools without asking educators about their thoughts or implications of implementation at school (Black, 2020; Strauss, 2018). Teachers have limited political voice in the policymaking process.

Having a political voice means recognizing that one's perspective and ideas have power. The belief that one has a voice and is efficacious is an essential component of deliberative democracy. Teachers have a vehicle for their political voice through teacher organizations like the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, and local affiliates like the California Teachers Association. Still, involvement in policymaking is a different opportunity for voicing educators' opinions. The policy process includes policy creation, implementation, and evaluation, and teacher involvement would allow participation in all phases of the process. Teachers' perceptions of their role in the policy process may show the extent of their political voice and efficacy. For this article, *political voice* is defined as communication with elected officials. Teachers may have opportunities to express their political voice both through

representative agencies and as participants in the educational system, but to what extent are elected officials listening?

Diem and Welton (2021) argued that educational leaders should have the power to frame policy issues in education. Conversations should include superintendents, principals, teachers, and anyone directly connected to education. However, the reality illustrates that different theories guide policy developments, affecting implementation and policy outcomes. Policy development, implementation, and outcomes refer to actions selected from viable alternatives to guide present and future decisions.

Literature and research on the role teachers play in policymaking at several levels explore the role of teachers in developing and sustaining policy. The focus for this literature review relates to two questions: (a) what role do K-12 public school teachers play in developing educational policy? and (b) what do teachers perceive to be the impact of their participation concerning political voice, policy development, policy implementation, and policy outcome?

The conceptual basis for this analysis includes theories on policymaking with a focus on the cultural processes approach (Elmore, 2004; Heck, 2004; Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005; Marshall et al., 2020) in contrast to rational choice theory (Heck, 2004; Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005; Sabatier, 1999). Understanding different approaches to the policy process combined with views on stakeholder involvement in policymaking provides perspective on the sustainability and coherence of educational policies (Elmore, 2004; Fullan, 2005; Goertz, 2006; Ingold & Leifeld, 2016; Lipsky, 2010; Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005; Marshall et al., 2020; Mehta, 2013; Sabatier, 1999). This literature review addresses educational change, policy implementation, and policy sustainability.

## **Literature Review**

The literature related to educational change and policy implementation and sustainability illustrates the issues and problems of creating effective education reform. This review highlights the literature related to the role of teachers in developing and sustaining policies related to educational change. The conceptual framework draws from three bodies of literature: (a) approaches to policymaking, (b) stakeholder engagement, and (c) sustainability and coherence of educational policies. The conceptual framework first establishes operational definitions regarding the public policy process and relates themes to educational policymaking. The cultural process approach to policymaking is explored and applied to educational policy at the state and federal levels. The second section of the conceptual framework addresses stakeholder engagement and summarizes theoretical and empirical works related to interest groups, street-level bureaucracy, and political mobilization to critically examine research on teacher involvement in the public policy process. Finally, a review of implementation theories, teacher perception of education reform, and teacher efficacy addresses the sustainability and coherence of educational policies.

## **The Policymaking Arena**

Government and politics are not the same. Government is the institution that implements policy. The government is often blamed for ineffective policy, but what may be needed is an evaluation of the policy's political process. Understanding the policy process is important in assessing educational policies (Heck, 2004; Marsh & Bowman, 1989; Mitchell & Boyd, 1998). Politics is

the struggle for power in the political arena inherent in the policymaking arena (Heck, 2004; Marshall et al., 2020).

Politics is defined by who gets what, when, and how. The “who” are stakeholders, interest groups, constituents, political parties, and politicians. All vie for power in creating policy, which often makes the policymaking process confusing and frustrating (Marshall et al., 2020). Policymaking occurs after an issue is politically defined. Once the issue is defined, decisions are made to determine the best policy action to bring about the desired change. Policy is driven by historical context, accepted social norms, and assumed notions about the purpose and limits of government (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005; Mitchell & Boyd, 1998). However, political processes are grounded in controversy, disagreement, and conflict as politicians and stakeholders contest the problem’s parameters (Boyd, 1999).

Major national education reform movements in the last 30 years are rooted in a perception that there was an education crisis and that it was the duty of the government to address the problem (Cuban, 1993; Kliebard, 2002; Sarason, 1982; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Calls for change seem to come in cycles with similar themes and little innovation. Tyack and Cuban discussed the difference between “policy talk” and “policy action” (p. 41). Policy talk is the diagnosis of educational problems, and policy action is adopting reform (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). From a linear perspective, moving from policy talk to policy action occurs in stages, and when failure happens at any stage, there is another attempt at reform. The cycle creates the belief that any new policy action is simply a regurgitation of past policy attempts. Tyack and Cuban viewed the cycles of policy talk as an inevitable result of conflicts of values and interests built into our school and political systems. The conflict is possibly due in part to shifting paradigms in policymaking.

### **Policymaking Frameworks**

Policymakers approach policymaking as a process. Policy development is historically based on defined goals by the policymakers with power. Intending to stay in power until their policy is implemented, politicians often exclude challengers and proceed with policymaking that follows accepted conventions (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005). This policy approach goes through a series of rational steps working towards the goal. Policy analysts’ research and recommendations are often the impetus for educational policy goals. Policy, once created and implemented, is framed as being sound. The apparent difficulty of sustaining educational reform questions the soundness of the policy and this policymaking process. How do teachers judge policy? Is the educator’s perception partly due to the lack of involvement in creating policy?

More active participation by teachers in the political arena supports a cultural process approach to policymaking, but current policy development, as described previously, is dominated by rational choice theory. This traditional approach to educational policymaking does not consider the realities of education from the teacher’s perspective. A rational approach to policymaking in education has not created sustained changes in student academic achievement or school organizational culture (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005).

Analyzing the powers and processes affecting education policy frames the concept of new directions in education reform. The cultural process approach stands in contrast to the rational approach. An introduction to these frameworks makes it possible to evaluate education policy and reform by providing different perspectives on political action. Each theory draws attention differently to policy issues (Marshall et al., 2020). Structural approaches are useful for policy planning, but the rational approach may require recognition of cultural processes for successful

policy implementation especially in education. As policies are implemented, they are greatly influenced by organizational and political cultures (Heck, 2004; Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005; Schlager, 1999). Teachers are part of the organizational culture and play a role as a stakeholder in education. The following analysis presents the cultural process approach as a possible new direction in educational reform while critiquing the traditional rational choice theories currently dominating policymaking.

### **Cultural Process Theory**

Cultural process theory examines politics culturally by identifying the behaviors, norms, and perceptions of people who share and shape events (Heck, 2004; Marshall et al., 2020). The cultural paradigm views policy patterns based on value conflicts, tensions, and coalition building that result in social and political changes. Marshall and Gerstl-Pepin (2005) presented 12 lenses for understanding cultural processes in policy arenas; however, only a few pertaining to schools and educational change are presented for this review.

Marshall and Gerstl-Pepin (2005) detailed the cultural process approach to policymaking by defining the focus of values and value shifts, policy communities, hierarchies of power, policy issue networks, and the arena model. These definitions are critical to understanding the power dynamics and episodic reform in educational policy creation. Analysis of values and value shifts identifies the values of dominant actors in the policymaking process. Values shift when key actors change. Identifying policy communities allows examining how agencies, politicians, political parties, interest groups, policy advocates, and scholars in universities or research institutes develop shared understandings in framing policies. Examining key policy actors and assessing their relative power to influence education policy issues demonstrates the existing hierarchies of power and considers if their power and interests shift over time as the context changes and issues shift. Significant policy change can be observed in debates among networks of policy actors (Ingold & Leifeld, 2016).

The policy issue network lens looks at the network relationships among groups in the policymaking process. The arena model focuses on the decision sites where power is exercised to initiate, formulate, and enact policy. This model suggests that those who dominate the educational policy agendas are not part of the system over which they are legislating (Marshall et al., 2020). For many policymakers, the teacher unions are looked to as advocates for teachers. However, one factor that may undermine teacher unions' influence in educational politics is wealthy and well-connected advocacy organizations that mediate between policymakers and policy implementation systems or intermediary organizations. Studies show, for example, that alternative certification programs have spread rapidly across urban school districts with support from federal grant money and generous private foundation funding (Reckhow & Snyder, 2014). More broadly, recent research reveals the centrality of intermediary organizations in research-use networks that inform educational policymaking (Scott & Jabbar, 2014). Shanks and SoRelle (2021) noted that many advocacy organizations are engaged in grassroots political work to promote change. Researchers have found those decision makers are frequently ill-equipped to interpret complex evidence and rely on intermediary organizations to synthesize and interpret policy-oriented research without fully understanding the goals or values of the advocacy groups.

Rosenberg (2007) discussed how citizen interest in politics has declined and the importance of institutionalizing deliberative practices. Deliberative democracy is a theory that emerged in response to rational choice theorists with an emphasis on citizens freely influencing collective

decisions (Rosenberg, 2007). In the deliberative view, an individual is not only a rational actor who makes choices and acts to satisfy personal interests but also a collaborator in the process with equal opportunity to participate in policymaking efforts (Rosenberg, 2007).

Theories of deliberative democracy highlight the cultural process approach and foster collaborative decision-making capacity. It has been suggested that the chances of successful reform would be greater if the conception and execution of policy were approached as an educational enterprise in which state and national leaders recognized that they had as much to learn as teachers and students (Cohen & Spillane, 1992).

### **Rational Choice Theory**

According to Marshall and Gerstl-Pepin (2005), rational choice theory has three central tenets: (a) humans are rational beings, (b) institutional regulations influence human behavior, and (c) humans seek to change institutional rules to influence others' actions. The rational view establishes order and structure in political action (Johnson, 2002; Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005; Sabatier, 1999). Based traditionally on economic principles and heavily grounded in theories of individual self-interest and the free market, this theory is used in educational policymaking to justify policy choices (Sabatier, 1999). The rational view focuses on organizational and political structures in political systems, a systems model where policies are seen as outputs from the political system, and a stages model that views policy as a hierarchical series of stages. When combined, these concepts create a structural approach to educational policy. The rational view of political activity moves policymakers to pursue interests through a series of rational stages (Heck, 2004; Marshall et al., 2020; Sabatier, 1999; Tilly, 1995). The policy process stages include proposal, examination, implementation, evaluation, and termination (DeLeon, 1999; Marshall et al., 2020). From the rational view, recognizing and evaluating the stages of policymaking makes politics more predictable.

Inherent in the rational approach is a mindset that research and development of innovative and standardized techniques will change. But change often lags behind political rhetoric (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act required education reform based on scientific research, standardized education, and high stakes testing to track and measure school and student performance. These policy examples demonstrate applying the rational approach through the stages model to educational policy. The concept of accountability is attractive and meets the demands of many stakeholders in education. However, NCLB was criticized as unsustainable because results will reach a plateau (Hargreaves & Fink, 2012). In the rational model, the output should respond to the input. In the case of NCLB, the input was accountability measures in the form of high stakes testing for the desired result or output of students performing at the proficient level by 2014. Results to date show schools struggling to meet the federal mandates of yearly growth and the negative impact of high stakes testing on student learning (Horn, 2003; Mathis, 2003).

The reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) demonstrated a shift in accountability to a more holistic approach by encouraging multiple measures of school and student success (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). The new law provided an opportunity for states to create more balanced systems of support and accountability with a focus on college and career readiness (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016). ESSA attempted to give states greater responsibility for their accountability systems but left state leaders responsible for addressing inequalities in student learning opportunities and outcomes. As states

developed plans for assessments and metrics for evaluating new categories of educational outcomes, advocacy groups and idea brokers played a crucial role in shaping state policy agendas that included rising partisan polarization within education policy (Barnum, 2016; Galey-Horn et al., 2020; Obstfeld et al., 2014). An outcome of the shift of accountability from federal to state policymakers was an emergence of school choice initiatives that were often proposed and implemented, first considering the costs, risks, and benefits of the initiatives or the implication for public schools. It could be argued that the public school system was weakened because the long-term effects of state accountability systems and the influence of policy actors were not analyzed before policy implementation.

Systems theory, a component of the rational model, focuses on the rational behavior of the system in response to policy demands (Heck, 2004). The policy process is how a political system responds to demands to handle perceived public problems from the systems perspective. Applied to educational policy, system theory is evident through debates about school failure and student achievement, which are often triggered by a single event (e.g., Sputnik, *A Nation at Risk*) that leads to new policy establishment (DeLeon, 1999; Heck, 2004). Systems theory expects rational behavior at each stage of the policy process. However, looking at policy solely by stage neglects the entire process (DeLeon, 1999). The policy stages approach can be criticized for not identifying causal variables that influence the process across the stages (Heck, 2004; Sabatier, 1999). This approach typically looks at one policy cycle without analyzing long-term trends.

A criticism of the rational choice model applied to education recognizes the difficulty of linking politics and bureaucracy to school effectiveness. Education is very practice-oriented and characterized by applied research (Boyd et al., 1994; Scribner & Layton, 1995). The rational model is limited when explaining how policy activity unfolds and the impact of the change over time (Boyd et al., 1994; Heck, 2004; Johnson, 2002). Focusing only on the rational approach ignores the cultural dynamics that exist when dealing with people in education. For this reason, it is valuable to look at a cultural paradigm to examine educational policy patterns.

People do not always act rationally, and educational policymaking is subject to the combination of individuals who exist at any given time in the decision arenas (Bendor et al., 2001; Padgett, 1980). Rather than portray decision making by politicians as a matter of rational choice, Cohen et al. (1972) described the organizational process as functioning like a garbage can where a mix of problems and possible solutions are dumped. Problems, solutions, participants, and choice opportunities flow in and out of the garbage can, and the issues that get attached to solutions is primarily due to chance (Cohen et al., 1972). Coupling occurs when events force a potential problem solution forward. Policymakers have an interest in addressing the problem and defining a solution. Coupling may lead to new policy alternatives adopted as public policy (Bendor et al., 2001; Cohen et al., 1972). The garbage can model emphasizes the loose coupling of intentions and actions. Individual intentions are not tightly coupled to individual action, collective goals are not tightly coupled to collective action, and organizations are not tightly coupled to their environments (Cohen et al., 1972).

Educational policymaking is subject to loose coupling because the policymaker's definition of the problem and proposed solutions are not based on classroom realities. The relationship between the perceived problems and possible solutions may be ill-defined and not understood because educators with a classroom perspective have a limited role in policymaking. Schools strive to conform to different and, at times, inconsistent rules and regulations (Burch, 2007). In addition, interest groups with their agendas and motivations may block policy to promote their solutions. The garbage can model can be used to illustrate the disconnection between

problems, solutions, and decision makers. In education, policy decisions do not always follow an orderly process but are outcomes of the various perspectives influencing the process. The actions of governing agencies shape what is expected to happen in schools, but how teachers react and what students learn relies on the interactions of governmental and nongovernmental organizations (Burch, 2007).

The role of teachers is loosely identified in both the rational and cultural perspectives. From a sensible standpoint, teachers are involved in the policy process as policy implementers following the top-down dictates from the district, state, or federal government levels. Policy implementation is the stage that involves the teachers. From the cultural perspective, teachers are part of the policy community, actors in the hierarchy of power, and, occasionally, part of the policy issue network as education problems get defined. The role of teachers in the process still needs to be defined: What is, or what can be, the role of teachers in creating and evaluating policy?

### **Stakeholder Engagement**

Democracy, by definition, means citizens have some impact on government and, therefore, participate in the democratic process in some way. But little agreement exists about what happens when people participate (Kweit & Kweit, 2007). The assumption is that more participants with knowledge and understanding will yield better policy decisions (Boyd et al., 1994; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Mitchell & Boyd, 1998; Rosenberg, 2007). The political process for education is a combination of networks of trust and public politics (Johnson, 2002; Tilly, 1995). Evaluating stakeholder engagement in education requires moving beyond the public sector and reviewing interest groups, street-level bureaucrats, and the forces behind political mobilization and political networks.

Stakeholders in education are affected by policy action, but stakeholders are not always empowered to play an active role in policymaking. Stakeholder social class affects the power, legitimacy, and urgency of policy creation and implementation (Marshall et al., 2020). Groups that believe they are outside or on a lower rung of the hierarchy of power may be less inclined to take responsibility for change. According to Schlager (1999), theories must pay careful attention to the collective action of stakeholders concerning the institutions that provide context for the action. The study of educational policy often focuses on problems defined by those in power, and other perspectives are often ignored or declared irrelevant (Elmore, 2004; Heck, 2004).

Historically, education interest groups reflected broad interests such as state education departments, administrations, and teachers. Today, education interest groups are growing and have changed the policymaking environment at the state and federal levels. Increased categorical education programs create competing interests between traditional groups such as teacher unions, administrator organizations, business interests, and new groups that support bilingual education, charter schools, and special education advocates.

### **Interest Groups**

A critical dimension of political dynamics and education policy is the role of interest groups. Interest groups are defined as any association of individuals, whether formally organized or not, that attempt to influence public policy (Malen, 2001). Interest groups in a democracy strengthen society and enhance opportunities to work together and participate in politics (Putnam, 1995) and develop skills of communication and collaboration (Finger, 2018; Johnson, 2002; Mawhinney,

2001). The American interest group system is expanding, and the increase occurs at a time of conflicting interest group demands (Finger, 2018; Mawhinney, 2001). Interest groups are created by people with similar policy goals who enter the political process intending to influence the policy agenda. Interest groups with power and influence have an impact on policy. However, measuring power and influence has proven problematic (Mawhinney, 2001).

Many different interest groups such as school sites/districts, unions, businesses, the testing industry, foundations, research organizations, and institutes are involved in educational policy. Business interest groups influence policymaking due to impressive resources and conspicuous efforts (Au, 2008; Malen, 2001). Business interest groups affect policy agendas with their powerful connections to policymakers and their ability to articulate diverse policy needs (McDaniel & Miskel, 2002). Agents greatly influence education with economic control (Au, 2008). For example, Au illustrated the increased influence of the Business Roundtable in federal policymaking by analyzing their role in advocating for high stakes testing and national standards. The California Business Roundtable plays an influential role in educational policymaking because of its interest in economic and educational policy issues at the state level. The testing industry also stands out among business interests because of the profit incentive from new accountability measures. Private foundations (e.g., the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) provide funding for researchers to produce evidence-based suggestions and evaluations of reform (Malen, 2001; Shanks & SoRelle, 2021). In this context, foundations become a salient interest group impacting policy.

Education interest groups cannot be ignored, but they are not the most powerful players in education reform (Elmore, 2004; Finger, 2018; Fuhrman, 1993; Malen, 2001). Waves of state activism have muted the resistance of local educators (Malen, 2001, 2003; Mazzoni, 1995). There has been a shift in intergovernmental relations because of increased state involvement influencing public schools (Malen, 2001, 2003). Activist governors and professionalized legislatures create less reliance on interest groups.

*Iron triangle* is a term that refers to the interaction between groups involved in the policy process. Research on iron triangles shows a symbiotic relationship between politicians, interest groups, and bureaucrats (Mawhinney, 2001). Influence is the key concept to understanding the relationships between these groups. Relationships are not necessarily achieved through lobbying and conflict but rather through close working ties with governmental actors and activity within the policy system. Teachers appear to be excluded from developing these relationships. Teachers are represented by unions and associations that act like interest groups, but mobilization within these organizations is difficult possibly due to a lack of efficacy. Teacher organizations such as the National Education Association or the American Federation of Teachers tend to focus on conditions of employment and not policy reform. However, that role may be shifting (Baldassare et al., 2007; Goertz, 2006).

The political term *pluralist* is given to those who believe that social interest groups can effectively coexist and predict that those with legitimate demands can and will organize and mobilize to secure their demands. For teachers, mobilization is a question of capacity, opportunity, and inclination (Malen, 2001). Lack of mobilization and involvement exists not necessarily because teachers are satisfied with the status quo or have no interest in political activity but because of the complex mobilization process.

Interest groups use strategies like entrepreneurial skill, membership appeal, access to authorities, media relationships, changes in the elected policymakers, and incentives for networking (Mitchell & Boyd, 1998). Technology impacts involvement by quickly dispatching information to mobilize a group. Simply having abundant resources does not always mean an



interest group will successfully control the agenda. Agenda control is critical for pushing towards policy aims. Regarding educational policy, accommodating state priorities and policies seems to be more important than determining local school priorities or policies (Malen, 2003).

State government activism seems persistent in education reform, often mandating reform at district levels. Organizations and individuals who are asked to implement top-down change have various levels of compliance with the state direction. Involvement in agenda setting and policy decisions may empower organizations and individuals to fully implement policy. This form of agenda setting occurs at the federal level as well. With no Constitutional role in education, the federal government has introduced accountability measures that have dramatically changed state and local education (Cohen & Spillane, 1992; Elmore, 2004). For example, the passage of NCLB in 2002 and the reauthorization of ESSA in 2016 increased the federal government's role in education despite a lack of support and resources to help states work towards the policy goals. National activism forces state governments to respond to more general mandates geared towards reform (Black, 2020; Datnow & Stringfield, 2000; Elmore, 2004). Pressure and activism from the state and federal levels create conflicting and confusing policy demands.

### **Street-Level Bureaucrats**

Public service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work are referred to as *street-level bureaucrats* (Lipsky, 2010). These individuals in public services do not make policy decisions but are affected by political action. Street-level bureaucrats work in situations that often require responses to the human dimension of situations (Hill, 2003; Lipsky, 2010). Lipsky proposed that the decisions of street-level bureaucrats that include routines, coping with work pressure, and levels of compliance effectively become the public policy they carry out. Street-level bureaucrats may have a relatively high level of discretion and autonomy and a high degree of expertise in their policy areas. Street-level bureaucrats typically absorb new demands, such as a change in policy, into the established routines of the organization (Honig, 2006). This phenomenon demonstrates that attempts at reform may not change organizational outcomes.

Street-level bureaucrats are often viewed as ineffective, but public support for street-level bureaucrats such as teachers shows that street-level bureaucrats are necessary for a healthy society (Hill, 2003; Lipsky, 2010; Turnbull, 1984). Control over work environments has increased significantly due to support organizations like unions and associations. This, in turn, provides opportunities for street-level bureaucrats to be more involved in decision making in their local arena and become more effective (Honig, 2006; Turnbull, 1984). Bureaucratic involvement in the policymaking process helps tailor reform to the reality and priorities for successful implementation (Marsh & Bowman, 1989; McDermott, 2004). Policy changes dictated from the upper echelons of government outside the arena of the street-level bureaucrats are more challenging to implement. When policy changes, street-level bureaucrats must cope with immediate reactions to their decisions and decide on a level of compliance. For a teacher, the reactions come from the administration, students, and parents, and the level of compliance can come from the district, the site administration, or the individual teacher.

Teachers are street-level bureaucrats and considerably impact human—primarily students'—lives. Teachers are known to depart from statutory rules to make work manageable. Implementation research has shown that street-level bureaucrats such as teachers have an enormous capacity for changing the shape of a centrally conceived program. Teachers are likely

to change procedures to incorporate what they think will be most educationally effective for students (Kirst, 1995; Malen, 2003; Turnbull, 1984).

Effective implementation of education reform requires a connection with classroom instruction, the commitment of local resources, and the integration of initiative into regular activities (Kirst, 1995; Turnbull, 1984). Teachers and policymakers often have the same goals, but research shows that implementation of new policy fails to work out as planned (Elmore, 2004; Heck, 2004; Lipsky, 2010; Malen, 2003; Turnbull, 1984). Centralized policy initiatives are often disconnected from the reality of local educational practice. As street-level bureaucrats, teachers may need to involve themselves in the political arena to help establish connections between policy and the reality of classroom education.

### **Mobilization**

Mobilization is how a group goes from a passive collection of individuals to active participants (Kaasc, 1984; Tilly, 1995). Mobilization relates to the capacity to act and the ability to control resources. Access to policymakers from the street-level perspective requires recognition of a group as a social unit, professionalism of the group, and motivation from the group to help develop useful knowledge for those who make decisions (Hill, 2003; Tilly, 1995). There is a free-rider problem with the mobilization of a group. Individuals may not be inclined to join groups that serve their interests if they obtain the benefits without incurring participation costs (Arrow, 1962; Mawhinney, 2001).

Participation in the policymaking process may seem theoretically important, but some challenges exist in getting groups and individuals to participate. Research on group mobilization and participation demonstrated that actual civic participation had no impact or a slight negative impact on the satisfaction and legitimacy of government (Kweit & Kweit, 2007). Research shows that individual efficacy and attempts to involve more people in civic action were positively related to satisfaction and legitimacy (Kweit & Kweit, 2007); however, one conclusion from Kweit and Kweit's study on participation was that the symbolic role of participation might be more important than its instrumental role.

A realignment of power in educational policymaking is evident. Decision making is redirected into specialized, privatized arenas of experts (Goertz, 2006; Kweit & Kweit, 2007; Skok, 1995). These experts are becoming advisors and innovators for new policy recommendations, leading to new policy implementation. Current policies regarding accountability and school performance measures are examples of the state's well-defined objectives. However, state educational policy implementation is often characterized by low enforcement and imprecise policy directives in curriculum and instruction. The sustainability and coherence of educational policy may require new directions for implementation. Teachers appear to be left out of the process. Teacher context and the ability to implement reform are different in reality from how policymakers view classroom practice (Kirst, 1995).

### **Sustainability and Coherence of Educational Policies**

The sustainability and coherence of educational policies rely on clear expectations and guidance from policymakers. Educational policy can become fragmented and ineffective without clear direction. Policymakers mandate reform without understanding the limitations of implementation. The debate over educational policy is ongoing, but student achievement goals remain relatively

stable (Clune, 1993; National Council on Teacher Quality, n.d.). This may mean that education reform must move beyond the rational approach and look for different ways to create consistent and effective policies for schools.

### ***Policy Implementation***

Reform initiatives appear to be easy to create and difficult to implement as evidenced by the type and number of reforms in the last two decades (Elmore, 2004; Hargreaves & Fink, 2012; Heck, 2004). Specifically related to reform implementation, the existing literature distinguishes three factors that challenge successful policy implementation. Organizational factors, stakeholder dynamics, and level of commitment have emerged in the findings of a variety of studies on the success of education reform (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Datnow & Stringfield, 2000; Elmore, 2004; Hargreaves & Fink, 2012; McDonnell & Weatherford, 2016).

Organizational factors play a significant role in the implementation of policy. A distinction exists between institutionalism and compliance. Institutionalism refers to policy or practice that the organization accepts. The core idea is that rules and conventions are built into the existing structure. Compliance is more superficial. The acquiescence of reform—compliance—does not mean that it will be institutionalized. For example, teaching practice changes very little even when schools seem to be constantly evolving (Elmore, 2004). Suggested reasons for these phenomena include the belief that educational reform has less to do with structural change and more to do with the individual beliefs expected to implement the reform (Patterson, 2002). A dilemma for policymakers and education officials is that educational reform affects schools, and it has a clear structure and sanctioning power to break stakeholders from institutionalized behaviors and patterns (Conley & Goldman, 2000). Behaviors and patterns that are institutionalized can conflict with attempts to reform education. The demands on teachers to implement change effectively do not allow for teacher learning, the necessary cycle of change (Cohen, 1988), and the cognitive perspective of teachers that includes the learning necessary for the change.

Stakeholder dynamics include the interaction between students, teachers, school leadership, and policymakers. A natural rivalry exists between groups with different ideas about what works best (Johnson & Friedman, 2006), yet it is also believed that teachers have a role to play in reform implementation (Patterson, 2002). These concepts are components of the cultural process approach to policymaking that continually examines the interaction between the policy networks, policy communities, and values that guide changes in education.

Another factor that influences implementation is internal commitment. The literature shows that external political power can mandate compliance but recognizes the need for internal commitment from those who would educate and those who would be educated, leading to the institutionalization of reforms (DeBard & Kubow, 2002). This demonstrates that teacher perception plays a role in commitment to a new policy. Negative perceptions or the belief that the policy will be changed in the next reform cycle, inhibit education policy implementation, and demonstrate superficial compliance.

Implementation of school reforms suffers from conflicting motivations between teachers, school administrators, and policymakers. Educators are a diverse group and are likely to respond in different ways to an initiative (Cohen, 1988; Leithwood et al., 2002). To better understand the responses of teachers and school administrators to government-mandated policies, Leithwood et al. conducted a study in five secondary schools and found largely negative motivation to implement government accountability policies. The negative judgment stemmed from the

perception that policymaker intentions were unrelated to classroom realities (Leithwood et al., 2002). Evidence from the study suggested that even under conditions of strong agreement with the policymaker intentions and a strong sense of efficacy, resistance to policy implementation still exists.

In their study on the implementation of testing policy, Debard and Kubow (2002) identified high stakes testing as an example of reform that has created compliance on states, teachers, and students but not commitment or institutionalized reform. Debard and Kubow reviewed past reform movements and claimed that while external political power can mandate compliance, the challenge of learning and achievement rests on the internal commitment of those who teach and those who will learn. Their mixed-methods study focused on the effect of high-stakes testing on constituencies, specifically administrative staff, teachers, and students, and found that high-stakes testing had an overall negative impact on teachers and students.

Debard and Kubow (2002) questioned who should assume responsibility for reform and its implementation. Their study stayed within the rational framework, examined policy through the stages model, and offered additional discourse solutions. Focus groups and the survey instrument used in this study successfully demonstrated how the high-stakes testing policy was unsuccessful and created negative impacts at the implementation stage. Still, the study did not consider the hierarchies of power and the policy communities that demonstrated the level of cultural processes involved in creating and implementing the high-stakes testing policy. For this reason, Debard and Kubow's study fell short of describing part of the problem of reform implementation.

NCLB and ESSA are examples of education reform created in the rational model but viewed as unsuccessful through the cultural process lens. Rationally, it seems that evidence generated from accountability measures like standards-based education and high-stakes testing should show schools and programs experiencing various levels of success. However, if students are not showing increased academic achievement despite passing the tests, the results suggest that the measures are not realistic (Carnoy & Garcia, 2017; Noddings, 2004). What accounts for policy failure in the rational approach? Testing for accountability is not a new concept. Still, in the case of NCLB and ESSA, a breakdown in the implementation stage and poor policy design demonstrates why these types of policies cycle out through a change in political leadership or through demands for once again redefining goals and objectives of education (Elmore, 2004; Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006; Hess & Eden, 2017).

### ***Sustainability of Reform***

Implementation may be complex, but why is it not sustained once a policy has been implemented? Reform seems to be episodic, and education sees reforms recycled and repackaged as the "latest greatest reform" for education. This cyclical nature of reform indicates a lack of deep commitment to the reform from the beginning (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000; McLaughlin, 1987; Toll, 2002). For reform to be meaningful, the literature suggests that it must become part of the fabric of the school (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000). There must be teacher commitment to make necessary accommodations beyond simple compliance (Conley & Goldman, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 1997; DeBard & Kubow, 2002). However, reforms will remain longer if teachers are motivated to make necessary accommodations and embrace the change (Conley & Goldman, 2000). Policymakers mandate broad, inconsistent reform programs without seeking input from school-based educators while establishing unrealistic timelines (Conley & Goldman, 2000; Marshall et al., 2020). Without institutionalized reform, the inconsistent reform cycles continue. Interestingly,

this perspective is not a shared perception with policymakers. When reform is not sustained, negative views of teachers and schools proliferate. Teachers are viewed as lazy or resistant to change when they ignore or subvert curricular innovations (McLaughlin, 1987).

Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) examined educational change over time by reviewing 5 years of data collected from 200 interviews, supplementary observations, and extensive archival data. They examined perceptions and experiences of educational change in eight high schools in the United States and Canada from teachers and administrators who worked in the schools over the last 30 years. Their findings suggested that five forces affect the sustainability of change: waves of reform, leadership succession, student and community demographics, teacher generation, and school interrelations (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006). Waves of reform are periodic attempts of change that teachers embrace or resist. Reactions to the waves of reform are often based on years of teaching experience, the inventiveness of the reform, and the energy required for implementation (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006).

A shift in leadership can also derail or inspire change. Leadership can often bring short-term change but fall short in its capacity for sustainable reform (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006). Communities change, and educators respond to increased diversity. When innovations do not appear to work, reform may be viewed as problematic and unsuccessful with changing demographics. This applies to teacher demographics as well. Generational factors affect a teacher's response to change while some of the most politically active teachers from one generation become the most resistant to change later in their careers (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006). Finally, schools affect each other and are often competitive and compared. Changes in one school may be viewed as a challenge to another school attempting similar innovations. These forces all touch on the cultural process approach to policymaking and demonstrate the importance of the historical perspective on educational change. This perspective is critical if change efforts are sustainable achievements (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006; Sarason, 1982). The strengths of the Hargreaves and Goodson study are the extensive data and the time dedicated to data analysis. Their study goes beyond a snapshot view of change efforts. It encompasses diverse school sites, various levels of teaching experience, and a range of perceptions that can be applied to the current study of the sustainability of standards-based reform and NCLB mandates (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006). Hargreaves and Goodson identified five change forces and provided insight into the compliant nature of teachers when it comes to reforming (“I’m just trying to ignore it”; “I just want it to pass me by”; p. 17) and the institutional forces that impact the implementation of change.

Institutionalist forces create adherence to established beliefs about reform and seem persistent in schools. Compliance refers to educator reactions to change. A minimal effort is made to implement change as teachers are compliant but not committed to reform (Conley & Goldman, 2000). Slow reform implementation reduces the chances of sustainable change. This reaction demonstrates a policy drift or a move away from the original intent of the policy (Conley & Goldman, 1998; Elmore, 2004; Marshall et al., 2020). Critical to the sustainability of education reform is how policy is created and implemented. Evaluating and changing the policy process requires understanding stakeholder perceptions of education policy, policy implementation, and concerns over sustainability. Mehta (2013) noted that the way policy actors define policy problems can change the very nature of a policy debate. Other scholars also attribute policy changes to ideological shifts and new coalitions of interest groups (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009; McDonnell & Weatherford, 2016).

## **Teacher Perception of Education Reform**

Research on teacher perceptions of education reform shows a lack of involvement in policy decision making, frustration, confusion from teachers about education reform, and a desire of teachers to do their job well and as prescribed (Conley & Goldman, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Datnow et al., 2002; Fullan, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2012). Multicase perception studies supported researchers' claims that teachers are often skeptical or dissatisfied with reform but feel powerless and unimportant in the creation of policy and reform (Conley & Goldman, 1998, 2000; DeBard & Kubow, 2002; Goodson et al., 2006; McGrevin & Spidell-Rusher, 1992; Watkins, 2008).

### ***Lack of Involvement***

Several authors documented the lack of involvement teachers have in the policymaking and implementation processes. Teachers are not asked to participate as codesigners of ideas in the first place (Elmore, 2004) and often are not involved in district-level decisions (Johnson & Friedman, 2006). Part of the problem identified for this lack of involvement is the belief that teachers are rarely seen as a resource (Johnson, 2002; Johnson & Friedman, 2006). Teachers are most likely to comply with district, state, and federal mandates without fully accepting the reform. However, teachers are also the least likely to protest reform and research other schools and education systems to learn about reform programs (Conley & Goldman, 2000). One interesting speculation about reasons for lack of involvement includes the idea that teaching is a gendered profession and policymakers are predominately male (Toll, 2002). Engaging and caring for children is commonly viewed as a feminine value, and the world of politics is perceived as harsh and competitive. Policy often reflects who has the power. The power is given to those with evidence-based information and clear objectives. At the same time, decisions in the classroom, particularly at the elementary school level, reflect teachers' affective, caring nature to connect with their students (Toll, 2002).

### ***Frustration and Confusion***

Teachers and other education stakeholder perceptions showed confusion, tension, miscommunication, and division throughout multicase perception studies and challenges establishing a congenial working relationship between groups (Johnson & Friedman, 2006). Confusion exists over reform and changes. Rapidly imposed educational change has created instability, and several studies show very negative teacher responses to the current policy emphasis on high-stakes testing (Conley & Goldman, 2000; DeBard & Kubow, 2002; Kosar, 2003). Veteran teachers and secondary school teachers appear to be more resistant to reform, and many teachers mourn the loss of professional independence (Goodson et al., 2006). Teachers anticipate that reform will increase workload, change curriculum, increase accountability for schools, increase curriculum integration, and increase teacher collaboration. For many teachers, these changes are stressful (Conley & Goldman, 2000), which was a common sentiment among teachers (Conley & Goldman, 2000; DeBard & Kubow, 2002; McGrevin & Spidell-Rusher, 1992; Patterson, 2002).

### ***Desire to do a Good Job***

Teachers may be more likely to accept reforms they perceive as fitting with their preexisting beliefs and do not require them to significantly change what they do in their classroom (Patterson, 2002). The fear of negative evaluations and repercussions makes teachers resistant to change. Teachers are nostalgic about their schooling, and veterans remember greater autonomy and less accountability. Teachers feel insulted by standardized reform (Goodson et al., 2006). Teachers are not opposed to accepting reform, but they have doubts about the efficacy of the reform to meet the stated state and federal goals (Conley & Goldman, 2000; DeBard & Kubow, 2002; Watkins, 2008). The culture of compliance without commitment demonstrates that teachers are wary of policy changes but continue to put forth their best efforts to do their job (McLaughlin, 1987).

Studies rarely go beyond the “compliance without commitment” observation and do not offer solutions. Many researchers call for increased discourse between stakeholders and policymakers (Conley & Goldman, 1998, 2000; DeBard & Kubow, 2002; Finn, 2002; Goertz, 2006; Goertz et al., 1995; Hargreaves & Fink, 2012; Kosar, 2003; Sloane & Kelly, 2003; Watkins, 2008); however, this suggestion falls short of the main idea presented here that teachers should have a more active role in creating and sustaining policy.

### **Role of Teachers in Education Reform**

Many individuals believe they do not have the capacities or orientation required to participate in policymaking or be part of the democratic deliberation (Marshall et al., 2020; Rosenberg, 2007). Willingness on the part of an individual to participate in the process must be separated from the opportunities to be involved. Teacher willingness to be involved in educational policymaking relates to the concept of teacher efficacy. Opportunities to become involved in the process rely on the systemic creation of advisory groups that consciously seek out the teacher's perspective. These groups and their impact are occasionally overshadowed by perceived or actual tokenism.

### ***Teacher Efficacy***

Teacher efficacy is the term for a teacher's belief in affecting educational outcomes and promoting educational reform (Wheatley, 2002, 2005). Developed from Bandura's (1977) theories on behavioral change, the concept of efficacy recognizes that people strive to control what happens around them. People's motivation and actions are based more on what they believe than on what may be the reality (Bandura, 1977; Henson, 2001; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Wheatley (2002) analyzed data assessing teacher self-reported efficacy and commented that results typically identify teachers as having high or low levels of confidence in the areas of outcome expectancies and efficacy experiences but noted the limitations of that measure. The impact of teacher efficacy during intense reform is an area that needs more exploration (Scott & Bagaka, 2004; Siciliano et al., 2017). Wheatley (2005) argued that teacher efficacy research needs to be reconceptualized with more contextual data and emphasized that it is important to study teachers who exercise indirect influence more and direct control less to understand why teachers come to feel a sense of efficacy.

Teacher efficacy can be strengthened by greater teacher involvement when opportunities to participate in the process are available. Increased opportunities for participation and collaboration in the education policy process would expand the social influence of teachers and

lead to a greater sense of efficacy (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Several studies yield results that link increased teacher efficacy to a successful implementation of reform (Collier, 2005; Scott & Bagaka, 2004). However, many educational researchers and theorists have noted that teachers work with standards and curricula they did not devise and with materials they do not like often mandated by local practice or state policy (Cohen, 1988; Cuban, 1993; Darling-Hammond, 1997). Cohen (1988) indicated that while teacher opportunities to do things differently are restricted, there is still a heavy responsibility to be innovative and effective, which illustrates the limited exchange of knowledge about classroom realities and educational reform.

### ***Teacher Leadership***

Teacher leadership is a concept that goes beyond the administrative or managerial aspects of school leadership. Successful teacher leaders work in a shared decision-making, collaborative environment (Wynne, 2001). However, many teachers need encouragement to remove themselves from their classrooms and become more active contributors in a larger context (Wynne, 2001). The current organizational structure of the education system does not easily allow teacher leaders to become more involved. At the same time, teacher leadership is an essential element for creating sustainable policy (Cohen & Spillane, 1992; Patterson & Marshall, 2001; Wynne, 2001).

A common theme discussed in the literature is the need for discourse to affect change in schools (Conley & Goldman, 2000; Datnow & Stringfield, 2000; Elmore, 2004; Johnson & Friedman, 2006; McGrevin & Spidell-Rusher, 1992; Patterson, 2002; Siciliano et al., 2017; Sloane & Kelly, 2003; Toll, 2002). This assumes that teachers can be change agents in their institutions as well as at the state and federal levels (Fullan, 2003, 2005; Wagner, 1997). Efforts to implement diverse reforms are more effective when educators at various levels share goals and work together to construct reform (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Datnow & Stringfield, 2000). If teachers are asked to judge curricula, evaluate student learning, and add to the dialogue in formulating and improving policy, the speculation is that more effective policy implementation and policy sustainability will result (Conley & Goldman, 1998; Datnow & Stringfield, 2000; DeBard & Kubow, 2002; Elmore, 2004; Toll, 2002). All stakeholders may benefit from an open acknowledgment of the competing discourses that frame their work (Toll, 2002). Admittedly, a need for dialogue to improve policy rather than simply accept it would affect stakeholder engagement.

Several suggestions are made throughout the literature to improve policy implementation and sustainability. Practitioner commitment and cooperation are critical for change. Practitioner cooperation is necessary for policy development, implementation, and assessment of impacts (Wagner, 1997). This would require a stronger, more integrated professional culture within education at the site level and rising through the ranks through the district, state, and federal levels (Johnson & Friedman, 2006). This culture would need to support honest evaluations of reform and practices and be open to change.

The concept of teacher empowerment is related to the cultural process approach to policymaking but is primarily limited to site-based decision making. Research has shown that at the school-site level, teacher involvement in decision making can have a positive impact on teaching and learning (Marks & Seashore-Louis, 1999). Interestingly, Marks and Seashore-Louis found that the capacity for organizational change was more significant in elementary and middle schools than in high schools. This may reflect a substantial difference in the culture of schools, the hierarchies of power, and the application of arena models to policymaking. Marks and Seashore-Louis provided a multilevel analysis to demonstrate the relationship between organizational



learning and teacher empowerment. The strengths of their study were the broad sample, the diversity of schools represented, the high rate of return on the surveys, and the significant statistical correlations between variables such as shared power relations and teacher work life (Marks & Seashore-Louis, 1999). Their results concluded that facilitating school change requires considering how school change relates to school structure, culture, and leadership. This concept can be extrapolated to state and national levels to evaluate the teacher's role in educational change and reform.

Teachers want clear and consistent policies to know expectations and the consequences (Sloane & Kelly, 2003; Sunderman, 2006). A powerful way to ensure that goal is fulfilled is to involve teachers in policymaking dialogue. An intriguing concept is Conley and Goldman's (2000) suggestion to invest in a network of *policy translators* who are educators with the ability to operationalize reforms in ways teachers can understand (Conley & Goldman, 2000).

Much of the current literature stops short of introducing ways to involve teachers in policymaking. Several conceptual articles discuss pluralistic views of power within schools but focus on site-based decision making and not the higher levels of policy (Fuhrman, 1993; Malen, 2001). Keeping teacher involvement at this level maintains the traditional hierarchies of power where principals and district administrators control school policy and teachers control what happens in their classroom.

### Summary

This literature review highlights the critical components framing teacher involvement in the educational policy process. Educational policy is a complex field with competing actors, new sources of data and analysis, and ideological perspectives (Galey-Horn et al., 2020). Creating policies without input from educators often results in ill-conceived and nearly impossible to implement policies. Offering teachers more direct input into the policy process could improve innovative, sustainable educational policy.

Deliberative democracy is a theory that emerged in response to rational choice theorists with an emphasis on citizens freely influencing collective decisions (Marshall et al., 2020; Rosenberg, 2007). Fused into the tenets of the cultural process approach to policymaking, theories of deliberative democracy highlight the cultural process approach and foster capacity for collaborative decision making. The cultural process approach is woven throughout this article's examples of teacher involvement at the state level. Evidence of deliberative democracy and the cultural process approach to policymaking include the selection of teachers from respected organizations to participate on committees, the level of teacher involvement during committee proceedings, contributions from teachers to committee work and reports, and increased social networking between elected officials and diverse education stakeholders. Encouraging the participation of teachers in educational policymaking reduces an ineffective organizational flow that can exist where problems and solutions are dumped and rarely addressed. Since policymakers are interested in addressing issues and defining solutions, participation on state-level education committees moves teachers away from the simple role of being a policy implementer to being an agent for policy creation and change.

### Conclusion

Opportunities to participate in educational policymaking are in the best interest of teachers and elected officials. The literature on this topic informs teachers and elected officials to lead policymaking in education based on the evidence of benefits of involvement regardless of ideology and political pressures. If the true interest is to do what is best for students and make sound, sustainable educational policy, securing a way for teachers to have their voices heard in the political arena is vital. The literature demonstrates that teachers' role in the educational policy process is diluted and inadequate. Many teachers are motivated to play an essential role in the educational policy process; thus, the needed step is ensuring opportunity and support for those teachers to take on the challenge.

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