

## Book Review

*Educational Policy Studies: A Practical Approach.*

Jerome G. Delaney. Calgary: Detselig, 2002, 130 pages.

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Reading about policy studies as an area of study is never easy. The words *overwhelming*, *specific*, *theoretical*, and even *mundane* could be used at the same time to describe it. Policy studies is a difficult area to know well, and the variety of books written about the topic could be overwhelming for graduate students and administrators. Some are precise and in great theoretical depth; others seem only to skim the surface with vague generalities. Delaney's aptly titled book is a welcome addition to the area because it falls right in the middle. He has written, as his title *Educational Policy Studies: A Practical Approach* suggests, a "holistic overview" (p. 9) of educational policy that is understandable, practical, and informative. Delaney mentions in the preface that the book is written for the two groups of people mentioned above: graduate students and school administrators. He has addressed the needs of his audience well.

Delaney's overview of educational policy studies is largely a synthesis of the work of other researchers in the field. Having extrapolated the most relevant and understandable concepts for each area of study, Delaney fills the chapters with quotes, models, and lists derived from his synthesis. Although some references seem dated such as Pressman and Wildavsky's (1973) description of policy, one can only assume that this is because some things in educational policy remain foundational. Delaney's choice of references suggests that he has paid particular attention to his intended audience: the research is neither too esoterically inclined nor unobvious for those who are not (yet) necessarily immersed in academic reading.

The content of each chapter is shaped using meaningful subtitles that give the reader a sense of organization. Chapter summaries are provided under the heading "Concluding Comment" and give the reader Delaney's intended insights into the chapter's most significant content. This is followed in each chapter by functional "Discussion Questions" that serve as a prompt for further consideration. In total I found these questions open-ended, thought-provoking, and helpful for graduate students or administrators to ponder. Each chapter links easily to the next, providing new information that one might use to build a policy.

Chapter 1 provides a broad overview of educational policy studies, defining policy and explaining the benefits of policies. Chapter 2, "Values and Principles in Educational Policy Studies," introduces the reader to some of the

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researchers they will hear from throughout the book such as Australians Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, and Henry and Pal from Canada. Delaney emphasizes the reader's need to "understand the differences when examining educational policy" in regard to values and principles (p. 22). Chapter 3, "Types of Educational Policy," offers classifications of policies by four researchers. The similarities and differences in these classifications help the reader understand ensuing examples in the text. Chapter 4, "Educational Policy Analysis," allows the reader to gain background information by providing definitions, forms, models, and sensible tips for policy analysis. This chapter appears most useful for administrators looking for a policy analysis guide.

In a straightforward continuation from Chapter 4, Chapter 5, "Policy Development," summarizes First's (1992) Policy Development Cycle in 14 easy steps. Not to insinuate that policy development is that simple, Delaney states, "the best-laid plans of mice and men don't always go the way we would like" and suggests that after one develops a policy, the next step would need to be its implementation: the topic of Chapter 6.

Characteristic of his book, Delaney first finds definitions for implementation and provides research approaches and underlying assumptions to implementation before following these with models and guidelines. Unfortunately, one may feel daunted by reading, "perfect policy implementation is virtually unattainable in practice" (p. 64), so Delaney follows with guidelines that "may facilitate varying degrees of successful or effective implementation" (p. 66). Because policy development eventually needs to be evaluated, Chapter 7 is about "Policy Evaluation." After discussing the significance of evaluation, the author sets out Clemmer's characteristics of good policies and concludes with Koenig's typology of evaluation studies.

Chapter 8 provides a brief but important look at policy dissemination, and Delaney points out, "successful dissemination is key to successful implementation" (p. 78). Chapter 9, "Policy and Regulations," is wonderfully practical for the novice. His reference of choice is Clemmer, who provides questions for consideration for policy regulations and procedures as well as suggestions for writing these regulations. This is followed by general advice from Delaney that we hear through his own words rather than from quotations from others.

Chapter 10, "Role of Research in Policy Making," offers realistic insights into research significance. There is no sugar coating, and two references outline pessimistic views. Unfortunately, Delaney's further use of more optimistic research appears less relevant due to timing. The optimistic view is from 1990 and hints at a forthcoming change that the pessimistic references from later dates fail to discover. In Chapter 11, "Issues and Concerns," Delaney's experience as a school principal comes to the foreground, and his own sentiments about research are displayed. Here the ever-important aspect of equity and the key link between policy and practice are discussed.

One can hardly write a book geared to education graduate students and administrators without discussing educational reform. Delaney follows the trend in Chapter 12, "Policy and Educational Reform." He begins by explaining that educational reform and educational change "could be used interchangeably" (p. 103). He uses the work of Taylor et al. (1997) to present relationships between policy and reform and how societal changes dictate when new poli-

cies are needed or old ones changed. His review of McLaughlin (1998) outlines the challenges that today's teachers face such as unprecedented expectations like multiple job roles. The major changes that schools and districts need to complement these reforms are presented by means of two somewhat pessimistic studies. Not to leave the reader in distress about reform, the author adds Darling-Hammond's (1998) four characteristics of policies that would help achieve the process of change. For example, "Policies should first create extensive learning opportunities" (p. 106).

Chapter 13, "The Future of Educational Policy," ties up the educational component of the book. Delaney cites Coomb's suggestion that more basic research is needed, Cibulka's policy coherence, and Clune's systemic educational policy. Chapter 14, "In Conclusion," contains Delaney's summary and concluding thoughts about the complexity of educational policies. He analyzes the role of the teacher and the school-level administrator, wisely noting that both must be proactive about educational policies.

Perhaps one can evaluate Delaney's book by using the same criteria that Clemmer (1991) offers in Chapter 7 on policy evaluation. Is the work pertinent, timely, functional, and practicable? Judging the book by these four characteristics, I would suggest that Delaney has captured the pertinent material for a policy overview. Although his references may not all be current, the content of the book is timely. The work is functional in that it can be used by administrators, and the models provided seem practicable for anyone involved in educational policies at any level.

Readers of *Educational Policy Studies* will recognize Delaney's belief that practicing educators want practical and applicable information that helps them deal with everyday realities. Delaney's resources emphasize his understanding of educators as an audience. He uses clear explanations and clarifications, and it is easy for readers to relate to the content, the personal school experiences, and his questions. Delaney does not assume that the reader will have read widely when he suggests, "A number of writers on policy use the term 'procedure' instead of regulations" (p. 81). The book is helpful and easy to recommend for graduate students not yet familiar with the area of educational policy studies. It appears that the greatest use of the book would be as an entry to further reading and study. It is probably less helpful for the experienced educator, but that was not Delaney's goal.