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ABSTRACT
                As exemplified by New Zealand, the nature of
educational policy research is shaped by political and social factors
that impinge upon the research environment. Following a description
of the educational system and research funding methods, this paper
analyzes three areas that affect policy research in New Zealand and
addresses relevant social science research literature on public
policy formation. In regard to the first area, responses from the
central government indicate that the minister and his/her political
party are able to alter the direction of policy research. The second
area concerns the process of agenda setting within the department of
education, which is determined by varying perceptions of priorities.
Institutional arrangements can create a narrow concept of reform,
which has been characteristic of New Zealand's centralized
educational system. Policy researchers have neglected to recognize
that inherent ethnocentrism in the knowledge legitimation process
causes a disjunction among diverse cultural groups. Applied research
in Maori culture should derive its focus and concepts from
indigeneous interpretations of reality rather than from European
academic assumptions. Finally, the operating environment and in
particular the influence of labor organizations representing teachers
affect research in various ways. The challenge for policy research is
to maintain integrity of purpose through an understanding of
influential factors. Appended are 26 references. (CJH)

EDUCATIONAL POLICY RESEARCH IN NEW ZEALAND :

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association

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The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not
necessarily coincide with the department's policy or the beliefs of
officers in the department.

EDUCATIONAL POLICY RESEARCH IN NEW ZEALAND :

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

The belief that research has a significant role to play in the
policy arena has, as noted by several researchers (Eisner, 1984;
Florio, Behrmann and Goltz, 1979; and Hocking, 1984) been
subject to a considerable amount of scepticism. The growing body
of literature which critically examines the relationship between
social science research and the policy formation process,
highlights the disjunction between what has been described by
some analysts as a tension between two cultures (Husen and Kogan
1984). Nevertheless, in a recent paper Eisner (1984), noted that
educational research is predicated on the supposition that
research is vital to the improvement of educational practice. In
the context of an increasing awareness of the need for formal and
systematic evaluation and research in New Zealand, the need to
understand how and under what conditions research may influence
policy is significant.

In addressing some of the issues and challenges associated with
the conduct and funding of educational policy research in a
multi-cultural society, this paper will outline some of the ways
in which the social and political context impacts on the process
of agenda setting and the conduct of policy research.

While the New Zealand education system combines elements of
national and local, lay and professional influence it is a national
system which is centrally funded and to a large extent centrally
directed. The high degree of centralisation is reflected in
almost all aspects of the system, but in particular at the policy
level. Potentially at least, policy research could have a
significant impact on education throughout New Zealand.

Not surprisingly however, the difficulties associated with policy
research that have been commonly identified are also evident in
New Zealand. These include for example, the influence of the
Minister (Hocking, 1984) and differences in perspective on, for
example, time (Husen and Kogan 1985, Smith 1981, Wirt and
Mitchell 1982). In addition some observers (de Groot 1982) have
noted that organisation can have a significant and decisive
influence on the role played by research.

An examination of the nature and funding of policy research
particularly in terms of the wider political and cultural context
may suggest how contextual factors affect the policy research
undertaken in New Zealand and what challenges they present.

New Zealand spends approximately .1 percent of the money (1.7
billion dollars in 1984) allocated to education on research, the
total VOTE (appropriation) for education being the third largest
in terms of Government spending after Social Welfare and Health.

Proportionally, the figure for research (which excludes
university supported educational research) is approximately one
third as much as the United States Department of Education spends
on research through, for example, the National Institute of
Education (NIE).

An analysis of the anatomy of that funding in New Zealand reveals
that the approximately 2 million dollars is used to support the
salaries and activities of both the Department of Educations'
Research and Statistics division as well as the autonomous New
Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER).

The two sections of the departments Research and Statistics
division are concerned with respectively policy research, which
is primarily school and institution based (including the IEA
studies), and the collection of demographic statistical
information used for activities such as school roll projections
and teacher movement analysis. In addition, the department
through the external contact research programme, makes available
at present approximately $300,000 (1986) to fund policy research
and evaluation projects. It is with the latter activity in
particular that this paper will be concerned as the operation of
this programme mirrors many of the issues involved in educational
policy research in New Zealand.

The research programme twice a year receives and reviews both
solicited and unsolicited applications for research contracts
from social scientists (primarily, but not universally university
based) who are interested in policy research. This process is
analagous to the National Institute of Education (NIE) request
for proposal system (RFP). Applications are reviewed both
internally and externally and, in addition, directors cf the
relevant major policy divisions within the department are
requested to assess the proposal in terms of its policy priority.
Reviewers comments, together with priority assessments, are
submitted with he applications to the Head Office Research
Committee (HORC) which consists of senior members from each
division and which attempts to assess projects in terms of
Departmental priorities.

It should be noted too, that where public funds are used
authority for expenditure at a certain level is delegated to
officers within the department. However, where the level of
support exceeds $40,000 for a project Ministerial approval must
be sought and where projects exceed $100,000 both the Minister of
Education and Minister of Finance must approve the Director-
General entering into a contract with re ..archers. The link
between the government and policy research is thus very direct
and very strong.

For all projects that receive final support, contracts with the
researcher are established with the requirement that an advisory
group be established for the duration of the research. Advisory
group. which are required to meet approximately every six months
typically include representatives from the department's research
and statistics division, teachers unions and community groups
where appropriate. For example, research in secondary schools,
irrespective of whether focus was on students or teachers, wou
include a representative from the New Zealand Post Primary Teachers
Association (NZPPTA).

In answering the central question of how contextual factors
affect policy research, three sources of influence may be
identified in the process of solicitation to funding which are
critical in determining the nature of the relationship between
research and policy. These include in a parliamentary system,
the Minister and his government, the actors in the department,
and the research advisory groups including the researcher.

In one sense the fundamental analysis must be in terms of
relationships of power and influence. It is not so much simply a
matter of whether or not research can impact policy but rather
how that impact might be shaped.

We may begin by examining what is perhaps the point where the
exercise of power or influence is most obvious. Hocking (1984:9)
in the Australian context noting that while a range of pressure

groups constitute the political element in policy research,
singled out the role of Minister as being particularly
significant.

As the person responsible for ensuring that party policy is
implemented, the Minister may have significant influence not only
on the impact of research on policy but also on the nature of
educational policy debate as defined by current policy research
activities.

In the New Zealand context there are a number of examples of the
different ways in which the Minister has the capability of
significantly influencing the policy research process.

A number of researchers (Hocking; 1981; Husen and Kogan, 1985
and others) have pointed out the difficulties associated in
gaining acceptance for research which conflicts with or has
implications which are contrary to party political policy. A
comparatively recent example in New Zealand of such a case
concerned a study on teacher stress (Galloway 1982) which
concluded with a number of suggested remedial stra egies
(including a reduction in class size) which were contrary to the
declared positions of the Minister. In a radio interview
subsequent to the release of the report the researcher commented
on the political inactivity at the policy level which drew sharp
rebuke (both verbal and written) from the Minister in the form of

a promise that the researcher would not be likely to obtain
funding through the contract research programme again!

Undoubtedly the Minister's reaction had adverse consequences for
the researcher, making it extremely difficult for him to pursue
his research interests. However, repercussions were also felt in
the department. These included a demand that the Minister be
provided with full vitaes for all research applications which
required his approval, but more importantly perhaps, it affected
the nature of the relationship between departmental policy makers
and researchers. Scepticism in some cases turned to distrust.

It is clear that in such instances where the Minister was
antagonised, the possibility of research having any significant
impact on policy would seem to be minimal.

Partly as a consequence of this experience the Minister, in
speaking to a gathering of educational researchers, made the
following comment:

> Research can often be of much less help to ministers of
> education than is popularly believed. It is, I suggest,
> less with the formulation of policy and more with the
> practice of education that educational researchers should
> primarily be concerned. After all, it is in schools and
> other places where people learn that the real work of
> education takes place. Indeed, we often hear it as a

criticism that the actual business of learning is much less

influenced by changes at the national level than those who

make policies would like to believe! (Wellington 1984)

While to some extent the criticism (both explicit and implicit)

may be justified, particularly in cases of research of dubious

quality, it is the overall message which is significant.

Specifically, the belief at that level that policy research is of

limited value (and consequently low priority?) and the imperative

that reseach efforts should be confined to issues on the

classroom level has the potential to impact significantly on the

conduct of policy research.

The cited ministerial proclamation might not orly have

implications for the funding of educational policy research but

may also be indicative of an attidude which seeks to shape and

delineate the bounds of legitimate policy debate and research.

It could be argued that it was no coincidence that, during the

tenure of the Minister in question, the conduct of the research

programme was marked by a period of difficulty and a reduction in

funding.

It is also apparent that under these conditions a change of

government can signal significant changes in the fortunes of the

research programme. For example, whereas a recently funded

project which had its intellectual origins in the neo-marxist

theories of reproduction and which challenged the egalitarian myth of a classless society in New Zealand, would not have received funding prior to 1982, it was approved after a change to a more liberal government.

Power and influence at the ministerial or governmental level can be seen to operate in a slightly different manner to shape the policy research process in the following example. In 1985 the government introduced amendments to the Education Act which included provision for the inclusion of what is colloquially called "sex education" in the health syllabus. In keeping with what has been described as the political model (Husen and Kogan 1985) the enabling legislation which approved a trial introduction of that component of the syllabus in selected schools included the requirement that a report of an independent evaluation commissioned by the department should be tabled in parliament early in the new year (1986). Because of the contentious nature of the issue the enabling legislation was passed at the end of the second rm of the academic year, allowing the last term for the trial and evaluation. Given that schools were to consult with and gain approval of their communities to teach parts or all of the unit, it is not surprising that the conduct of the evaluation was adversely affected. As significant as the lack of appreciation of the requirements of the research process is the implicit belief that research which focused on such things as parental, teacher and student attitudes (and knowledge) would provide answers to what

is essentially a question of values - should we teach sex
education in schools? Normative questions which involve implicit
value systems, can not be answered solely on empirical grounds.
The political requirement (legislated) f r the evaluation clearly
has an impact on the nature of educational policy research and,
in this case, the subsequent debate. Furthermore, not only did
the legislature demonstrate little understanding of the
requirements of sound research but also, as the final decision
has been delayed, they could be accused of using the research as
a means of delaying the process of decison making.

The impact of political prophylaxis may also be seen at the
departmental level. The influence of contextual factors in
the process of shaping the nature of policy debate operates in a
slightly different manner within the Department of Education. In
circumstances where the applications for funding typically exceed
the financial resources available, the process of selecting
projects which are to be funded is critical in understanding how
the way in which research impacts on policy may be shaped by
organisational elements.

Husen and Kogan (1985) speculate that a high degree of
centralisation might strengthen efforts to mobilise research for
decision m king and may ensure that the nature of the research
undertaken is tailored to the needs of decision makers.
Both assumptions are correct to a certain extent in the New
Zealand context and it is precisley for that reason that there is

a need to understand the factors which operate in the context of the department which affect the research undertaken.

The process of agenda setting (for both internal and external projects) is undoubtedly influenced in broad terms by pressure groups and party (governmental) policy. However, it is also influenced by the professional concerns of the officers in each division and is shaped by their perceptions of what the current issues are and by their understanding of the nature of social science research.

In part the funding of projects is determined by the degree of success divisions have in getting approval for new policies submissions to government which include the provision of a specified amount for research or evaluation. What is apparent is that during the process of agenda setting where by definition certain issues will be excluded, there is a need to be aware of the process of legitimation (which may be unconscious) that operates. That is, it is clearly more comfortable to select and support those issues which do not challenge in a fundamental way the policies and practices (the ideology) of an organisation. This fundamental dilemma arises from a belief held by some that the department should not be seen to be sponsoring research which has the potential to be embarrassing to the Minister and yet it is those issues which perhaps should have the highest priority. Reform is unlikely to flourish in an environment where it is

difficult to question in a fundamental way the existence and operation of current policies and practice.

In practice this was recently reflected in the reluctance to continue with a research project in the area of learning disabilities because the LD label was no longer 'officially' recognised.

The question of policy makers advancing research in one area rather than another raises the question of legitimation in the process of social science knowledge production. Stanfield (1985) in a paper on the ethnocentric basis of social science knowledge production, argues for the need to recognise ethnocultural diversity in the knowledge legitimation process. This dimension of the issue is nowhere more relevant than with respect to research with minority groups in general, and with respect to Maori groups in particular in New Zealand.

The nature of this challenge for policy research in New Zealand is articulated in a paper by Stokes (1985' The issue which is rooted in a search for self determina'.on is expressed by Stokes in terms of the Maori attitude to knowledge and a social science which imperfectly recognises a differentiation of experience and priorities. To be explicit, Stokes (1985) notes for example that the detached 'academic' stance typical of much of the research with the constraints and methodology of existing university disciplines is unlikely to be well received and is unlikely to

have much chance to succeed in the current social climate. In
addition to requiring individuals who are comfortable in both
cultures and the expectation that the researcher is already well
versed in Maori protocol, it is assumed that contact and
credibility will have been established through participation in
community affairs (*he kanohi* - face that is seen).

In a recently funded study which is examining the role of pre-
school socialisation of Pakeha (children of European descent)
Maori and Samoan children in the acquisition of literacy,
recognition of these concerns involved a formal ceremony where
'elders' from the various community groups who were on the
advisory group ceremonially 'blessed' the project. More
importantly perhaps 'ownership' of the project was shared by
according co-principal investigator status to a Maori researcher
and including an additional set of research objectives which were
derived from Maori concerns.

Clearly these expectations have practical implication for the way
in which policy research is conducted. More fundamental perhaps
is the difference between euro-dominant and Maori attitudes
towards knowledge. In addition to the fact that cognisance needs
to be given to such concepts as *wairua* and *tapu* (public and
private knowledge) and the obvious implication that has for those
who seek information, as importantly, it must also be recognised
that interpretation of Maori data must be perceived in Maori

terms, not forced into preconceived Pakeha methodologies or systems of categorising knowledge. (Stokes 1985:8)

In other words, it is Maori perceptions of reality rather than internalised or imposed euro-cultural perceptions that need to take precedence in the knowledge legitimation process. This implies that the terms of reference and the focus of research need to originate with the people who have knowledge and experience of the Maori.

The extent to which these concerns have implications for policy research are even more clearly reflected in a recently completed evaluation of an innovative programme of direct community funding directed at 'Youth at Risk'.

The Community Education Initiatives Schemes (CEIS) were established as a result of a government report on gangs which resulted in the government making available block grants for a period of two years to three communities. The distribution of money so provided was to be the responsibility of self appointed management groups in the three communities and was intended to be used to provide training and educational programmes for youth at risk. As part of the scheme it was intended that all aspects of the programme should be evaluated.

Goals and objectives for the evaluation were determined by an inter-departmental committee and following a request for proposals two university groups of researchers were selected to conduct the evaluation which involved communities in two parts of the country.

The two communities in Auckland (which had a majority of Maori and Pacific Islanders) refused to work with one of the teams because of the assistance they had previously provided to the Police in the conduct of a survey. While another base for the research was found in Auckland the principal research team resided in a community some 327 miles distant. While distance per se was undoubtedly a factor in some of the subsequent difficulties that arose with the evaluation (including at one stage a threatened refusal to continue in any way to co-operate with the evaluators) it was also evident that the community perceptions of the nature and purpose of the evaluation and the role of the researchers (field workers) was quite different from that held by the academics. This disjunction had an impact on the evaluation in several ways. One of the local field workers operated in effect as a community advocate, the terms of the evaluation were in effect re-negotiated and at the point where the project was about to collapse it was in large part the intervention of a person who was acceptable as being aware of Maori and Island needs who rescued the project. As the researchers noted:

- It soon became apparent that the evaluation process itself
  was going to be contentious. Explanation lies to quite a
  degree in the different expectations held by the different
  parties - the communities, the interdepartmental committee,
  the MCSS and Massey University - and in the misconceptions
  of each others' roles from time to time. The Massey team's
  'academic research' orientation contrasted (or was though to
  contrast) with the 'community development' orientation of
  MCSS and the 'practical concerns and interests' of the
  Auckland communities. As well, there was some difference
  over the extent and nature of field-worker roles and whether
  field-workers were agents of the research team or catalysts
  helping to develop community capabilities in formative self-
  evaluation. For their parts some of the communities were
  understandably unsure whether the evaluators would presume
  to play judge and jury.

- Furthermore, there was real concern in the communities over
  possible loss of control over information, over access to
  the power holders and over ultimately having a place at the
  decision-making table. If safeguards were not erected the
  CEIS committee thought the evaluators might insert
  themselves into the relationship between the communities and
  government and usurp their position.

- Such tensions not only made the process of evaluation itself
  a regular focus of concern but also liable for
  reconsideration and re-clarification from time to time as
  issues of formative versus summative evaluation were raised.
  It is fair to say that the desire expressed by some for
  formative evaluations (to help projects as they developed)
  was never quite reconciled with (i) the time available,
  (ii) methodological difficulties of 'cause-effect' studies
  and (iii) the regular pressure for a summative-type report
  that would facilitate political decision making.
  (CEIS 1986 pp 55-58)

Clearly a number of factors associated with good (or ideal)
research practice were violated, and I believe that to a
large extent the difficulties associated with the project can be
attributed to the policy reseach context in which the project
had its origins (eg government sponsored, short time lines).
However, it is arguable that many of the difficulties associated
with this project were due to differences in perspective which
may be attributable to the ethnocultural, ethnocentric basis of
this evaluation.

It is clear that despite an increased cultural sensitivity as
reflected in major policy developments such as the recognition of
Maori culture and language in the curriculum (taha Maori) there
is a need, in an institution which is an artifact of European

culture, to be aware of the unconscious institutional ways of operating which may exclude the concerns of minority groups.

Undoubtedly, the project cited above also serves as an example of the final dimension of context that I wish to discuss, the community. For the purposes of this paper I would wish to include and focus on the advisory groups in this context as they typically represented 'community' in terms of many of the vested interest groups.

Smith (1981) and others have made the observation that policy matters are ultimately political and that the potential impact of research may be tempered by decisions which have little to do with research findings and more to do with politics. While clearly there are examples of this in New Zealand, I would wish to argue that the advisory groups are a context where 'politics' in another sense has the power to shape and influence the nature and eventual impact of policy research.

Advisory groups are established to assist the researcher in the execution of the research project and typically include individuals who represent teacher unions (kindergarten, primary and secondary), regional representatives of the Department of Education. a departmental representative from the 'host' division and a member of the research and statistics division.

Because of a fairly strong tradition of unionism in New Zealand
and the fact that the education system is highly centralised, it
should not be surprising that teacher professional concerns do
not always coincide with departmental priorities and objectives.
The challenge for policy research is to maintain its focus while
being sensitive to the professional concerns of teachers.

The potential for a union political agenda to influence the
nature of policy research was reflected in a project which was to
examine the impact of intermediate schools on Maori children.

Intermediate schools cater for children in the last two years of
primary schooling up to age 12 and were established to take
advantage of the enhanced resources which accrue to larger
schools. Half of the intermediate school population moves on to
high school each year and it was argued by a local community
group that this process was detrimental to Maori groups in
particular as it violated their extended family concept (siblings
would be separated). When an advisory group was established to
discuss at a very early stage the nature of any research that
might be undertaken, a vigorous protest arose from the relevant
teachers association. The intermediate school system contains
positions at the top of the career structure for primary trained
teachers! It was clear that research which in any way might have
implications for the continuation (or modification) of the
intermediate school system would be unlikely to receive the

support and co-operation of the professional organisations and by implication its membership.

While in fact most of the interaction with teacher professional organisations is co-operative, it is clear that this dimension can also have a significant impact on policy research. The success of many policy projects depends on representatives from the various teacher organisations embracing a project. This usually means compromise but, on the other hand, aids in securing commitment.

In this paper an attempt has been made to explore some of the contextual factors which in New Zealand have a role in shaping the nature and impact of educational policy research. In the first instance it was argued that the nature, scope and impact of policy research is not immune to the vagaries of political influence at the governmental level. Similarly organisational features including in particular the high degree of centralisation may structure the programme of research in such a way as to limit the way in which reform is conceived. Rather than suggesting that there is a deliberate process of shaping perceptions, it is argued that through the institutional arrangments which includes the process of funding, conducting and dissemination of policy research, the possibilities for reform may be more narrowly conceived.

The challenge in recognising the way in which institutional arrangements shape the policy research process is to avoid what Lukes (1974:24) has described as the most invidious exercise of power:

> to prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it.

Finally, it was pointed out that the operating environment and in particular the influence of labour organisations representing teachers may also have an impact on research. The challenge for policy research with any commitment to reform is to maintain its integrity of purpose in an environment where political and cultural contextual factors may play a significant role in execution and outcome. It is an understanding of these factors which may help recognise the conditions under which reform is possible.

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