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ABSTRACT

The relationship between policymaking and implementation and its impact on educational change is explored in this descriptive study of a proposed doctoral research project. Attention is given to how the theory-practice relationship is conceptualized by key participants in the formation of a particular reform. Methodology will involve interviews with state and local policymakers, principals, teachers, and parents in schools engaged in restructuring; content analysis of documents; and historiographic research. Each participant will be asked to identify educational theorists, reform documents, and other influential educational writings that they consider to be both valuable and/or present in their schools. Findings from pilot interviews conducted with three Colorado policymakers about the meaning of restructuring and observation of a grassroots parents' group in the Boulder area are described. An assumption of the study is that the gap between policy and practice helps to explain why change is so problematic. (Contains 13 references.) (LMI)

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**School Restructuring and the Gap Between Policy and Practice**

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**Introduction**

An incredible amount of attention has been focused on school reform in recent years. The late 1970s and 1980s reforms have been characterized as initiating two principle 'waves' both of which seem located within the larger movement towards excellence in the United States (Peters and Waterman, 1982). Further, given the sheer volume of documents produced, the 1980s might be described as the decade of the commissioned report. From the well publicized and reviled *A Nation At Risk*, and cascading through a continuous series up to the present, and the most recent and ballyhooed *America 2000*, enormous attention and expense has gone into the publication and deification of these reform tomes. Many reports played on *A Nation At Risk's* nautical theme; assessments of American schools were distinguished by their rising tides, crashing waves, charted courses, and sinking vessels. The reports also seemed to carry their message for the future within their own titles: *the Paideia Proposal, Tomorrow's Teachers, A Nation Prepared, Action for Excellence, Time for Results* to name but a few. Each seemed to suggest that if we were to accept their analysis and follow their lead, then the changes our country's schools are looking for (be it excellence and/or equity; in teacher education, in student achievement, in organization and governance) are close at hand. And still, some 8 years after *A Nation At Risk's* call to educational arms and three years closer to *America 2000*, we continue to hear of declining standards, a widening population of at-risk students, and the familiar litany of educational shortcomings and failures.

Why so much attention and so little change? How can it be, that so with many experts producing reports and plans and proposals in the past ten years, claiming to have the

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necessary insight into the problems of and solutions for public education, that our schools' problems persist, or perhaps even mount? The search for some sort of an answer led me to question how much does educational change, and hence the problems with change, have to do with the relationship between the making of policy and its implementation? Exploring how that relationship is conceptualized, as well as what are the shared terms and perceptions of the key participants in the making of a particular reform is the focus of my doctoral research. This part is a small part of that research.

### The Emergence of the Restructuring Paradigm

The key word these days in terms of school reform seems to be restructuring. And yet educational research is far from clear in pinpointing just where this term originated. It seems to be used by all people to mean all things. It has been described as doing little more than offering a metaphoric platitude for talking about school reform (Goodlad, 1990). It has been anchored to organizational efficiency (Kearns and Doyle, 1988). The President's Educational Summit (1988), which produced *American 2000*, used it to advance the concept of parental choice, while others have characterized it as "giving teachers a greater voice in decisions that affect schools" (Carnegie Forum, 1986, p. 57). The National Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools (Newmann, 1991), implies that restructuring departs from conventional practices in the areas of student experiences, professional lives of teachers, school governance, management and leadership, and the coordination of community resources with school. David Florio (Lewis, 1989) of the National Science Foundation has described restructuring as fundamental change in four basic categories: how we view and use people, content, place, and time. It for these meanings and others why I choose to call it a 'garage' policy, extending the 'garbage can' label first offered by political and organizational theorists Cohen et al (1972). Seemingly you can put anything you want into it, not unlike one's garage. In looking at the relationship between policy and implementation, my rationale for choosing to focus on the meaning of restructuring, beyond this kind of

malleability, is that because of its status as the most current of reform language it is also holds the title of the 'most promising.' Elmore and McLaughlin (1988) remind us, however, that this may be so precisely because it has not as yet failed.

My decision to examine restructuring policy is also linked to a suspicion that, given the current rhetoric in political circles, the responsibility and/or burden for change within schools, not unlike in other areas of society, will reside more and more on local levels with fewer expectations that federal or perhaps even state intervention will resolve questions of school improvement (e.g. funding). Restructuring as a policy and as a practice may actually entail a more literal approach to reform; that is, one that attempts to connect changes in the school curriculum and instructional practices to changes in the organizational and structural relations of schools. Given the variety of reform slogans in the recent past which have done little to redress the inadequacies--real and perceived--of American public education (e.g. back to basics, cultural literacy, choice, community control, effective schools), restructuring may be a means of making genuine and substantive changes in how schools are organized and operated, and in the quality of teaching and learning within them. Again this may simply carry such promise because as the newest policy/buzzword, restructuring has yet to run its course and be (also) found wanting. In keeping with the focus on individual districts and schools to provide more reform leadership, it does seem that much talk concerning restructuring as a policy and as a practice identifies the term site-based management (another elastic phrase) as some means of achieving it. And this shift seems to put the onus for change more squarely on the shoulders of teachers and building personnel than as in the 1960s and 1970s, on the Federal government, or as was the case in 1980s on the individual states.

### Research Questions

With the presence of restructuring as a policy and as a label for school reform both in Colorado and in the district where I am collecting data, my research questions focused on the following: What does restructuring mean? Why do schools need to be restructured? What

are some of the obstacles to and benefits from restructuring? And undergirding these and other questions is my primary assumption that there is a significant gap between the making of policy and its implementation. What I want to learn from the participants in my study is whether they think this assumption is true, and if so, how would they characterize the gap and what, if any, purpose(s) it serves?

#### **Caveat:**

Much of this paper is relatively conceptual and speculative. I am in the early process of collecting data and analyzing my findings. Having only interviewed a few key policymakers, this paper is able to report only on their views, not practitioners. This being the case I am afraid that I may be guilty of reproducing the very gap I purport to investigate. However, in the district I am studying, in the past several months, a grassroots parents' group has surfaced and directed opposition at the district's middle school philosophy. Unbeknownst to them they have dropped into my lap what I think is a direct example of the gap between policy and practice. The story of their efforts will also be touched upon.

#### **Methodology**

This is a descriptive study. Through the use of extensive interviews, content analysis of actual restructuring and referenced documents, and historiographic research, I plan to describe the meaning of school restructuring, as well as provide an analysis of the relationship between and the opinions, reference groups, and practices of selected state and local policymakers, local principals, teachers and parents in identified 'restructured' schools.

To identify participants I have employed a reputational sampling plan. Obviously such a plan carries with it built-in problems and flaws with respect to selection bias. My defense is that although conceptually the picture of restructuring is vague it is also rather in vogue (Tyack, 1990, p. 170). Being considered in vogue or on the 'cutting edge' of any new innovation is frequently a measure of professional stature and a means of acquiring a

reputation for expertise. Because restructuring is both a new policy and a new practice, and because there is a broad spectrum with respect to what it actually entails, employing a reputational sampling procedure will help to identify what State and local officials and educators consider are important baseline variables in order to engage in this type of reform. By selecting individuals who have a reputation in the design and/or execution of restructuring plans, my study attempts to draw upon persons who are identified as doing some of the 'best' work currently in Colorado and locally in terms of this reform strategy. And because it still lacks any solid consensus, using this type of sampling plan, I think, taps effectively into what is currently being accepted as far as how restructuring looks in action, by giving names and locations to the work being done.

#### Sampling Strategies

To locate State policymakers I began speaking with people I knew involved in educational policy, a former doctoral student now working in the governor's office, a policy analyst with Education Commission of the States, the Dean of my School of Education, and a former member of the state school board who is also on the University of Colorado's School of Education faculty. From these persons I obtained names of other public officials, policy analysts, lobbyists, and members of the research and business communities to consider at both the State and local levels. Subsequent phone conversations with calls helped to further narrow the list of potential participants. Persons identified repeatedly were considered to have more of a 'reputation' than those mentioned only once. Sociograms were drawn to plot the influences and to identify which individuals ought to be contacted sooner--by virtue of their continued appearance. Self selection and availability figured also into the process, and the logistics of scheduling interviews with public officials has also proved to be somewhat problematic. Local policymakers (e.g. the district Superintendent, members of the school board, the Dean of the School of Education, and members of the Chamber of Commerce education advisory committee) are being asked to in turn identify principals whom they

consider to have reputations for some expertise in restructuring their schools. These principals will be asked to identify teachers and parents, and the teachers will also be asked to identify particular parents who seem to have some expertise and/or insight in the restructuring process.

#### Other Data Sources

I am asking each participant to identify educational theorists, reform documents, and other influential educational writings that they consider as both valuable and/or present in their restructuring work. An analysis of such data is useful to begin characterizing the culture and ideology of these groups. Despite its appeal as a new paradigm in educational reform, restructuring does not occur in a vacuum; it shares qualities, perspectives, histories, and authors from previous reforms. A content analysis will provide some descriptive evidence of the relationship between current--in use--documents and those which have been used before. Historiographic analysis will allow me to locate the referred documents within an historical continuum of reform, for example in terms of how the purpose of education, the work of teachers, and the meaning of change are described.

#### Meanings of Restructuring: Some cursory Findings

What follows is just a brief look at what three policymakers have had to say about the meaning of restructuring, the obstacles to it and why schools need this type of reform. Jeff Shoemaker is the State Representative who chairs the House Education Committee and who, the day before our interview, announced that he was not seeking re-election. Interestingly, he is also the only member of the committee to have a teaching background (4 years as a Jr. High band teacher). Dr. Cal Frazier is currently on the faculty of Denver University's School of Education, but from 1974-1988 he was the State commissioner of Education. Dr. Dean Damon is the current Superintendent of the Boulder Valley School District. None of these individuals requested anonymity.

When I asked these three what restructuring meant, acknowledging that it seemed to have different meaning for different people, they interestingly had a number of things in common in their own perceptions of restructuring.

It is a reallocation of your resources, a different use of time, a different use of staff, and a different use of money. This makes it different than curriculum review or changing the curriculum. If you change to include more geography and cut back on other subjects, maybe the social studies program looks all together different but that's not restructuring to me. I'm looking at, is time different? Are those periods three periods instead of one? Are the teachers doing things differently? So it's the time, and the money, and the staff that are major changes.

These were the initial comments of Cal Frazier. But he conceded that he rarely found consensus for such a picture when thinking about his own experiences talking with principals or parents.

People say, 'oh you're for choice.' Well, no that's not restructuring. Or principals will say 'oh you're for site-based management.' Well if some of those other things come about from site-based management well then, yes. But site-based management is not synonymous in any way. Without shared meaning there'll not be much change. No real dynamic for change unless you manipulate the resources at the State level. There has to be something there, some incentive for how we look at time, resources, and money; there has to be some kind of incentive to leave what you're doing now.. Absent that, I think that we'll continue to make changes but always within the square.

Dr. Frazier had a rather long term view with respect to what it would take to enact this type of restructuring. he sees it as 10-12 year project that could only be speeded up were the State to somehow tie its funding to how well schools were able to institute new designs for change that met the agreed upon outcomes.

Dean Damon also saw restructuring as linked to changes in how we view the education profession as well as how professionals act on that vision. Restructuring, in his mind:

has to include a couple of different major categories: number one is the role of the teacher which has to be of primary consideration. Then I think the governance and organization of school systems and schools (has to be changed). The goal of restructuring has to clearly be on teaching and learning when I think about teachers, who, in my perfect world are the primary

curriculum decision makers. But part of what restructuring holds up for us as part of that is a re-professionalization of education. That includes commitments on the part of those of us in the profession to ongoing, lifelong learning for ourselves and the ability and willingness to be involved in some self governance of our profession. We're still at a threshold in that area. I think that the implications of that for policy decisions have to do with the kinds of environments that school systems and schools and, conversely, state governments ought to be supporting, and are very different than what we currently find.

Jeff Shoemaker also felt that schools had to move away from existing patterns and locate better ways of including all the educational stakeholders. But, perhaps, as a member of the state legislature, his description took a more politically pragmatic approach. His own picture almost sounds as if restructuring were a vehicle for choice.

Everybody is saying education needs to be restructured; so now Big Brother (i.e. the legislature) is going to tell all the school districts to a certain extent what to do. My involvement is going to try to be--okay, let's set some basic minimum guidelines, each school will have a set of basic criteria they will have to meet to be accredited, and then beyond that whether they become a math school, a reading/writing/arithmetic school, an arts school, a writing skills school, I think you'll find different schools. I'm a believer that competition is good. I'm one of those "quote" radicals that feels merit pay in some form is a good idea. I'm a believer that competition breeds quality and success, and there are those who feel that is not the case and feel everything needs to be the same to provide equal opportunities for all. I think all that does is provides equal mediocrity. So I think that's what you'll see, is a site-based future. I think that...it'll force more family involvement, more community buy-in.

### The Need For Restructuring

Sounding a little like E. F. Schumacher, Representative Shoemaker's reasons why schools need to be restructured were in keeping with his belief in decentralization, and his concerns that old methods of reform have done little if anything to address glaring needs of the school.

We're a society that has felt many times that bigger can be better, and you're looking at an individual who thought consolidation was a plus up until a year ago. I questioned why we had 176 school districts, 63 counties; I mean why? Isn't that, you know duplicitous? Isn't that a waste of money? I'm finding out that the larger you get the more waste there is...

He went on to cite the example of the Denver Public Schools commissioner's salary and her call for a similarly high priced assistant in light of teacher shortages and he argued how that money might be spent more directly in schools.

You don't find that at the smaller school level. What I found is that there is nothing lost by getting smaller, there are definitely things lost by getting bigger, and the number one thing is community involvement. ...Schools are being told that their role is not just to educate but to raise the child. And if there's any adverse conditions to the home life then the school's role is multiplied proportionately. Well we're finding that doesn't work. All we've done is expanded the scope and size and the demand and cost of schools but we're not staying even, we're declining.

Superintendent Damon also recognizes the value of smaller units of decision making in making necessary changes, but he is aware of how such a change strains existing relations in the process. He commented on the kind such a stance puts into place:

In terms of the organization and structures of the systems and the schools, I think that the movement towards decentralization, greater decision making at the building level, is clearly consistent and appropriate with the notion that teachers ought to be primary curriculum decision makers, and I think it's interesting when you see a state like Colorado struggling with what it means to reform. On the one hand you have people pushing for site-based management, and on the other hand they're pushing for State testing and taking authority away from local school districts for curriculum and graduation requirements.

Despite such tensions, Dr. Damon returned to his focus upon experiences of prime stakeholders--teachers and students--when outlining his reasons why restructuring ought to take place.

I have a number of pat answers but I think they're true. Number one, I think schools are not currently places that create satisfaction for those who work in them and for those who are supposed to be learning in them; and I think that there are a number of ways you can sense that. Fundamentally, because kids aren't, by and large, benefitting from the opportunities of schooling. Not only is that evidenced through kids, even in a district like this one, where there's too high a dropout rate, and they're saying that school isn't relevant for any number of reasons. But I think a lot of kids who have, you know, it's the kind of compromise part of *Horace's Compromise* (Sizer, 1984). They've agreed to accept the system as it is in order to get where they want to go. But in the process it seems that we are not helping them to become people who love learning, want to contribute to society, and are prepared to be participants in a democratic society. And that whole notion of passivity, I think

those are the major reasons for me. It's the effect of the system as is on non-learning and on non-enjoyment of teaching--a couple of double negatives...

Perhaps because of his long tenure as commissioner of education for the state and even longer involvement with educational issues in Colorado, Dr. Frazier's views reflect an historical perspective and his belief in restructuring speaks to a need to solve new problems in new ways. He doesn't call it a paradigm shift but seems to imply that, in practical way, such a change has to happen if restructuring is to occur.

Schools need to be restructured because there's a psychology that you get into where you keep trying to solve the problem in the same parameters that you have before. Now when you change the problems you've got to back and say it's going to make it easier to solve those problems if I leave the current parameters. If I start by not by not assuming that this is the way the day operates. Some of the changes around the state, the country really, that have really turned around the learning problems of minority kids. They suddenly looked at this thing and said well our school could take place from any time between 8 and 8 at night. What size is the class and why is the teacher always transferring from one grade to the next? Why don't they take 'em them like a family. It was when those parameters were breached that you really got some great movement in here.

Although these three policy makers come into restructuring from different entry points and with very different constituencies to answer to, they seem to concur with respect to the change in school organization becoming less less driven by top-down management. In their own ways they seem to support moves that re-personalize the experiences of education professionals. And all three struck me as individuals who cared deeply about the experiences of students as well as the value of education that we being communicated.

#### Explanations for the Gap Between Policy and Practice

Central to my study is an assumption that there is a gap between policy and practice, and that that gap somehow helps to explain why change is so problematic. For the purposes of this paper I choose only to report on the comments from Dean Damon. As superintendent, his remarks dovetail more neatly into the grassroots movement in his district than would those by Dr. Frazier or Representative Shoemaker.

From Dean Damon's perspective such a gap between policy and practice seems to come with the territory. Visions of a restructured school system, at least his case, grew out of his own years of professional opportunities and experiences that were not really the privilege of those persons more place-bound, such as principals, teachers, and community members.

As he sees it, (his) leadership:

has to try to create opportunities for stakeholders to be a part of that vision more quickly; to create the same kinds of learning opportunities, the same kinds of opportunities in five-to-ten years for learning and understanding that I have had over the past twenty years.

As far as characterizing the gap between policy and implementation, Dr. Damon sees it as absolutely unintentional but to be expected.

People's sights are set on different things depending on what their role is, what they've been exposed to, what they read, what they're told their job is. And the types of networks that teachers, administrators, and boards tend to be in very rarely ever cross paths. There is an environment of policymaking that could be very ethereal. You have to really work at for it not to be. Historically, the way people have tried to bridge the gap has been through top-down, hierarchical, bureaucratic, mandatory things. I think that any of us who've been around the school as a teacher or principal knows that everybody in that type of environment, in today's world knows full well that they can shut it out whenever they want to. So this whole notion of restructuring from a governance and organizational perspective is to me, as Goodlad said, 'you're trying to legitimize reality.' There are a number of ways you can do that but probably the best is through collaboration and shared decision-making. That's a difficult transition for policymakers to make because so many of them are elected and so they think, 'well I was elected to make those decisions, why shouldn't I?' And they glare at you. In our society, I don't think you can very easily govern those who don't want to be governed."

#### Scenes from a Restructuring District

Dr. Damon's final words seem to be taken to heart in his district. Despite his vision and interest in finding ways of including the community in its co-construction, there is a movement at work to, seemingly, reject it wholesale. The immediate target, however, is the district's planned move from Junior highs to middle schools. This grassroots effort of concerned

parents who are lobbying for greater political control over the schools seems to be illustrating the gap between policy and practice.

A group calling themselves "Parents and Schools," has organized around objections to the district's plans for middle school reconfiguration. In particular their rallying call is for a commitment to academic excellence, and this is most clearly found in their concern for the preservation of honors courses, gifted and talented programs, and the use of ability grouping to pedagogically push for a return to high standards of achievement as the district's central vision.

This is a group of largely professionals with a small—at least publicly—cadre of disgruntled teachers in jr and senior high school. They appear to be organized and led by some members of the University of Colorado community, and seem to be ready, willing, and able to exercise their rights to assembly and free speech. And even though they have not articulated an alternative, their wish is for the school board to immediately cease and desist from middle school reconfiguration. Only after that do they suggest talking about the future.

Galvanized by evidence of a decline in SAT and CAT scores, and belief (some might say unfounded rumor) that honors and AP classes will be eliminated and/or scaled back in this move to middle schools, and a perception of the district as shifting from an emphasis on academic instruction to one of socialization, this group began a campaign of public letters and open meetings to generate interest in their desire to stop (this type of) restructuring in the district.

Openly critical of the philosophy of middle school, their initial meeting (held, interestingly, at the National Bureau of Standards) have directed antagonism towards the work of Jeannie Oakes, John Goodlad, and Ted Sizer whom this group identifies as the 'gurus' of Dean Damon (with the exception of Oakes, this is largely true). "We want to take back education from the experts. The education professionals are not the ed schools or the ed theorists but the teachers," was the claim by one of their spokespeople and was met with enthusiastic applause. Interesting to me is the apparent, and unrecognized, irony of

university and other professionals calling for academic excellence while at the same time appearing to be almost anti-intellectual in their condemnation of the school district's philosophy and pedagogical references. Curiously, in all their circulation of self-generated publications, and there have been many, only two educational authors (i.e. theorists) , influential to their own vision of a commitment to excellence for all students, have been cited; Diane Ravitch and E. D. Hirsch Jr.. Perhaps that should not be a surprise even in a community such as Boulder Colorado.

This group has been able to generate enormous (by Boulder standards) media attention to their group. In the past six weeks there have been nine Front Page, headline (large font) stories alone following their challenge to the superintendent and school board. "DISTRICT IS UNDER SEIGE," "PARENTS HIT NEW DISTRICT PHILOSOPHY," "PETITION LAUNCHED ON SCHOOLS." That is roughly one every five days, not to mention other stories and editorials. Clearly the local newspaper has assumed a role in the community dialogue concerning this gap between policy and implementation. It is my intention to include interviews with the newspaper to further explore the role they play.

A petition drive is underway (including a copy of it printed on one quarter of page three of the Sunday paper) with the goal of gathering 8000 signatures; a figure based on the number of votes cast in the last school board election. Such a show of numbers, they believe, will force the school board to respond to their wishes. On April 23rd this petition was handed over to the the school board with the demand that they cease immediately mandatory district-wide middle school implementation, hold a public hearing in no less than 10 days and, within 20 days, provide the details of what they plan to do about the demands of this group.

I am sorry to say that while the story doesn't end here, my reporting of it must. While Dr. Damon appears ready to further expand on sharing his vision of the school district and in creating opportunities to bridge the gap between policy and implementation, it is less clear whether "Parents and Schools" has anything similar to offer. I suspect that they were possibly

overwhelmed by the degree of support and media attention they have received. Likewise with less than two months left in the school year, one wonders what the half-life of such a movement will be once school is no longer in session. The school board is not waiting for the receipt of the petition to hold an open meeting on middle school philosophy, but have convened one prior to it. Clearly policymakers and the public feel there is something to talk about and gaps to attend to, if not bridge.

And yet it strikes me as somewhat ironic that, once again, experts and professionals lined up across from one another claiming to have the necessary insights into what ails the schools and what changes need to be made. Whether these groups are poised on the threshold of a new understanding, whether they are interested in restructuring their own relationship between themselves and policy and practice remains to be seen. Will change be something completely different or will, instead, we wind up with new explanations for why the more things change the more they remain the same? It is my hope that my dissertation research will provide more substantial answers to these questions.

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