POLICY MAKING

A Strategy for Involving Teachers and Interested Others in the Process

The Strategy outlined in this booklet is just one way of involving all staff members and/or other interested groups in making decisions which lead to policy statements. In no way is it intended as the 'only' way but rather it can/ should be adapted to suit the needs of the school

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WHY THE POLICY BOOKLET CAME ABOUT:

This booklet is the outcome of a workshop conducted for Priority Schools in the N.E. Metropolitan Region on the issue of POLICY MAKING.

The workshop was designed in response to school requests and is based'upon a strategy frequently used and found to be successful in our schools.

PURPOSE OF THE WORKSHOP:

The purpose of the workshop was as follows:-

i. To provide information to teachers on a process for developing policies relevant to:-

  i)   Class;
  ii)   Subject Areas;
  iii) Administration;
  iv)   School Climate;
  v)   General School Policy

ii. To provide planning time and support in schools to undertake the process of policy making.

iii. To provide time and support for the implementation of the process.

WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

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CONSIDERATIONS AT THE START OF THE PROCESS:

1. ATTITUDES TOWARDS POLICIES.

- Examine through discussion and reading

  a) What are the pros and cons of written policies?

  b) What are functions of a policy ?

  c) Who should be involved/considered in the process?

SUGGESTED READINGS

PROS & CONS. EDUC. NEWS NOV. 1981.

The case for written school policies

Sir,

There is no doubt that all would agree that there must be some form of policy to dictate what a school does or does not do.

If this is accepted then we must agree that this policy should be clearly stated and clearly understood. There is little point in having a policy about anything if this is not the case. If a policy is written there is no doubt about what that policy is.

Anyone, be it pupil, teacher or parent, who wants to know can read it.

Because the policy is to be written it has to be clarified. There has to be agreement. A decision has to be made and there is no doubt about it. All misunderstanding, vagueness and forgetting as to what was said or what decided should disappear.

It is interesting, when visiting a school, to select an aspect of policy and ask each staff member separately what the school policy is on that particular aspect. Where there is no written policy the diversity of answers is quite marked.

Because time is consumed hammering out a policy it does not mean that valuable time is wasted. In fact, it is just the opposite. It is necessary to use that time and the teachers and pupils are the better for it.

Policies need not be lengthy documents. Some schools use the headings Policy, Planning and Procedures. This helps to clarify the statements, reduces policy statements and makes change easier.

Some schools organize a file with each section on a separate page or pages, so that any one section can be reviewed or rewritten without necessitating a major review or a major rewriting. It is then relatively simple to change policy and it remains an ongoing, developing and living reality — in no way restrictive, stultifying or acting as a deterrent to change.

Changes of policy are rarely major or a complete about face. Some policy is long-term and naturally would change little over the years. Other aspects are short term and these are the ones subject to change.

In the interests of pupils and parents there is a need for some stability in schools. A change of principal and/or staff should not throw the whole policy into the melting pot. A written policy helps to avoid this happening.

The wise principal when moving into a school deliberately continues with previous policy while he learns what the school is all about, what is special about it and why it required the aspects of policy with which he may not agree. A written policy helps him and the staff to understand much more quickly the school and the special needs of the pupils and so avoid disrupting their on-going programme of education.

A written document is most valuable when there are staff changes. The new teacher or teachers are often neglected in the pressure of starting a new year. They take longer to settle in because there is little time to tell them about policy and procedures. Often no one bothers to tell them. If there is a written document they can read that and save lots of time, inconvenience and possibly mistakes.

Most arguments against having a written document when analyzed are arguments against having a policy. Whether the policy is written or not is not the issue in statements about it being time-consuming, difficult to hear and consider all views, difficult to come to a consensus, requiring profound and considered thought. This process has to go on to form policy whether you are going to write it down or not. Writing the short statement after all the above has concluded and the decision made is the easy, less time-consuming part.

Whether the Education Department or regional offices have a policy or not is not the issue. The issue is whether policies should be written or not. What policies the Department has are most certainly documented.

Finally, it is rather negative not to do something which is worthwhile simply because someone else does not do it or because it is difficult.

KEVAN HAMILTON
Superintendent of education (primary).

- In the November 12 issue of "WA Education News" the principal of the Kelmscott Primary School, Mr Bruce Blyth, argued against written school policies.

Are written policies necessary?

asks BRUCE BLYTH, principal of the Kelmscott Primary School

Since 1965 it has been customary, in fact almost obligatory, for schools to compile a written school policy. Principals and teachers have consumed thousands of valuable hours hammering out all sorts of ponderous documents in which the aims and philosphies of the school are stated.

A change of principal and/or staff — a frequent occurrence in our system — throws the whole project into the melting pot and the process begins all over again, or should do.

Has the time come to re-assess the worth and validity of the written school policy document?

Does it enhance the effectiveness, enrichment and efficiency of the education programme?

A school policy should be an ongoing, developing and living reality, an ideal difficult to maintain in the written form. It should be the result of a consensus arrived at by many people — at least by all the teachers and possibly others including non-teaching staff, parents and students.

Because it is almost impossible to find sufficient time for all teachers and others who should be involved to meet and draw up a meaningful document that really does reflect their considered opinions, the formulation of a written policy usually becomes the responsibility of the principal, with suggestions by the deputies and, at most, tacit agreement by the remainder of the staff.

Staff

It is the experience of many principals that, when attempts are made to involve staff in writing a policy document, few are prepared to make major contributions. This is no reflection on the teachers. They are very busy people, fully occupied in the classroom and often burdened by long hours of study in their spare time. A meeting of 20 or more people trying to contribute to a written statement which, by its very nature, requires profound and considered thought is a daunting situation. In the limited time available it would be a remarkable chairman who could extract from a group of thinking, vocal teachers, all with differing views, a consensus acceptable to all.

"Fossilizes"

What often happends is that a document is produced by the principal, ratified by the staff and it then fossilizes in files and desk drawers. (Although this does not happen in your school, it does happen in nearly every other school.)

To change it requires major surgery and within a year or two many staff members would not have participated in its formulation but would be still expected to ascribe to its dictates. To suggest that teachers should spend hours every year changing written policy is unrealistic — their time is valuable and can be spent far more productively.

However, if the school policy evolves from a continuing discussion at staff meetings, formal or otherwise, and in individual, informal discussion amongst teachers, parents, principal and others, people really will become involved and readily contribute to and discuss school issues.

When it is found that a decision made earlier is not working as expected it can be amended or rejected immediately. In a formal written document this is not always easy.

A policy which is the subject of frequent, on-going discussion by all those involved is far more likely to be real, living and meaningful. A written policy is restrictive and can in fact be dangerous, stultifying and act as a deterrent to change.

Instructions

It must be recognized that a school has a policy, written or not. If, for example, all teachers were encouraged to be rude to parents, then that becomes school policy, although it is doubtful whether it would be mentioned in a written document. A written policy does not necessarily reflect the true policy practised in the school.

Most schools issue a set of administrative instructions to teachers setting out rules and regulations applicable to and necessary at a particular school. All members of the staff may have taken part in compiling them. These instructions, however, do not constitute a full school policy.

It is interesting to reflect that the school is the only institution expected to produce a written policy. The Department itself has no written policy. It has regulations, administrative instructions and recently policy statements from the Director-General but no overall written policy.

If one makes inquiries about a specific point, different replies and reactions will be obtained from different officers. And, as far as I know, no regional office has produced a written policy.

The only Departmental policy statement I remember was the one written by the former Director of Primary Education, Mr Stan Palmer. In the opinion of many teachers it was a perceptive, realistic, forward-looking document which was highly appreciated by teachers.

But it was written a decade ago and no one in the Department has attempted to keep it up to date.

2. <u>FUNCTIONS:</u>   WHAT IS YOUR POLICY TO DO?

- A SCHOOL POLICY ACTS AS A FRAMEWORK OR REFERENCE OR THE SETTING FOR SCHOOL PRACTICE. IT IS A GUIDELINE WHICH AIMS AT CO-ORDINATING PLANNING, PRACTICE AND EVALUATION.

- A POLICY IS AIMED AT DEVELOPING A SHARED SET OF INTENTIONS ABOUT HOW TEACHERS MIGHT BEST ASSIST THEIR PUPILS TO LEARN.

- AN EFFECTIVE POLICY IS ONE THAT CLARIFIES
  PRIORITIES AND PROVIDES A DEFINITE SET OF
  INTENTIONS.

- THERE IS AGREEMENT ON COMMON BELIEFS AND
  COURSES OF ACTION.

- DECIDING ON AN ACCEPTED CURRICULUM AND ALL
  THAT IT ENTAILS, WHICH HIGHLIGHTS THE
  SCHOOL'S NEEDS.

- WHATEVER THE PURPOSE THE POLICY NEEDS TO
  BE FUNCTIONAL.

  - GIVES AFFECT FOR THE SCHOOL
  - DEFINES EXPECTATION AND SETS THE
    CONTEXT FOR THE LEARNING PROGRAMME.
  - REVIEWED EASY TO READ. SYSTEMATIC
    TEST IS SEEING IT PRACTICED.

3. <u>INVOLVEMENT</u>:   WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN ITS DESIGN?

    Extracts form "Making a Difference" David
    Pettit, Educ Mag. vol. 38 No. 5 1981.

STUDENTS:

'THE STAGES THAT STUDENTS GO THROUGH - INDIVIDUALLY
AND COLLECTIVELY - ARE INTERESTING'.

" WHEN THE IDEA OF JOINT DEVELOPMENT WAS FIRST
SUGGESTED THE ATTITUDE WAS ONE OF DISBELIEF-

"YOU'RE JOKING!" "AFTER ALL THESE YEARS...,"

AND SO ON. INSTEAD OF BEING BASTARDS, TEACHERS
NOTCHED UP ANOTHER ELEPHANT STAMP TO BECOME
CUNNING BASTARDS."

PARENTS:

LOCO PARENTIS, SIMILARLY CONCLUDES THAT-

"IT IS THE PARENTS WHO REJECT OR ACCEPT SCHOOL VALUES....
DESPITE ALL THIS EXPENDITURE OF EFFORT AND RESOURCES.....
IT IS A MOST CURIOUS PARADOX THAT THE WHOLE ENTERPRISE
APPEARS TO STAND OR FALL ACCORDING TO THE SUPPORT OR
OPPOSITION OF PARENTS - MOST OF WHOM RARELY, IF EVER,
MAKE AN APPEARANCE ON SCHOOL PREMISES OR SHOW ANY
CONCERN OR INTEREST IN SCHOOL HAPPENINGS AND AFFAIRS."

● PARENTS AND SCHOOLING

".......THE HOME AND THE FAMILY PLAY THE MAJOR
PART IN DRAWING OUT AND STRUCTURING HIS ABILITIES,
MOULDING HIS PERSONALITY AND BEHAVIOUR, GIVING
DIRECTIONS TO HIS INTERESTS AND SHAPING HIS
ATTITUDES."

PARENTS
ADMINISTRATION
TEACHERS

Extracts from Smith, William
"Inservice Education in the school
of the Poor" in Rubin, Louis (Ed)

'The Inservice Education of Teachers'

Allyn & Bacon Inc. Boston 1978.

DECISION MAKING.

ARTICLE: "Inservice Education in the school of the poor".
William M. Smith.

SUMMARY: Parity is defined as the deliberate, collaborative sharing of
decision-making AMONG THOSE WHO RENDER AND RECEIVE SERVICES.

1. Parents.

The poor cannot help but feel that their plight is largely
the result of oppressive public policy and they are therefore
anxious to ensure that the schools do not deprive their children
of an education that will enable them to cope, more effectively,
with the social system. It is imperative, consequently, to
work toward a mutual feeling of trust among teachers,
administrators and parents. This, however, is easier said than
done. For such trust involves, first, a belief among all
concerned in the ability to influence decisions; second, a
degree of consensus as to what schools are for; third, a
confidence in the integrity and judgement of the other partners;
and, fourth, a basic faith in the democratic process.

The concept of "parity" can be viewed as a potential vehicle
for achieving these requirements. In this context, *parity is
defined as the deliberate, collaborative sharing of decision-
making among those who render and receive services.* It's
effect is to increase power equalization and reciprocal
involvement. The underlying assumption is that parents -
given greater opportunity to influence the course of their
children's education - will

a)   become more effective collaborators;
b)   help reinforce designated learning objectives in the
         home;
c)   cooperate more intelligently with school personnel; and
d)   develop greater confidence in the schools' procedures.

A second assumption, moreover, is that principals and teachers
will function more effectively if both play a   hand in policy
determination.

When all is said and done, the communities do not want to
run the schools. What most parents seek is an educational
programme that seems sensible and effective.

2. Administration.

The administrator's role is critical because principals alone
can create a work environment that lends itself to decision-
making parity. The professional preparation of most
administrators is not geared toward shared authority in
decision-making, the fine-lines distinguishing leadership from
management are blurred, and, as a result, some retraining will
be mandatory.

2)

3. Teachers.

The morale of teachers, at present, is at low ebb.
Dispirited by sustained criticism, teachers in poverty areas
feel torn between parental critics who do not comprehend the
essence of good education, and administrators who are
insensitive to the impediments and constraints inherent in
the teaching environment. Not uncommonly, therefore, many
teachers avoid participation in decision-making, preferring
to allow administrators to establish policy and assume
responsibility. So, much of the in-service education activity
aimed at decision-making parity will need to deal with the
teacher's presumed sense of powerlessness. That is, teachers
must be induced to accept a larger role in the decision-making
process; they must be given greater freedom in achieving
their educational objectives; and, correspondingly, they must
be held accountable for the net results.

4. Points to Consider for Developing Parity.

Unfortunately, little exists in the way of operational theory
for promoting parity. A large number of clues, however,
probably can be derived from conventional constructs on
organisational systems, community organisation and managerial
process. Each of these, to a greater or lesser degree, touches
upon some aspect of the five principal tasks:

   i) restructuring decision-making procedures for determining
      educational policy;

   ii) achieving a rational distribution of power in curriculum
       planning among parents, teachers and administrators;

   iii) developing greater consensus regarding educational purpose
        among different community groups;

   iv) reorienting teachers, through programmes of professional
       development, to function in a parity-based system;

   v) enabling administrators, through programmes of staff
      development, to assume leadership responsibility for
      accomplishing the above.

5. Conclusion.

Parity in decision-making will remain ineffectual as long
as teachers and parents misunderstand one another, question
each other's motives, and work at cross-purposes.

Finally, something should be said about the necessary readjust-
ments in the internal relationships among teachers, principals,
supervisors, district administrators, and central office
specialists. If parity is to flourish, the ancient pecking-
order must be abandoned so that "subordinates and superordinates"
respond to one another as colleagues rather than as superiors
and inferiors.

4. POLICY FORMAT

- Make decisions about the format the policy is going to take.

- The one used throughout this process is designed under the following headings:-

  - CONTEXT: What are the special needs of our school?

  - RATIONALE: School beliefs/philosophy.

  - GENERAL AIMS: What the school is realistically to achieve.

  - METHOD: Classroom strategies teachers employ in working towards aims.

  - RESOURCES: Both human and material aids to support teaching & learning.

  - ORGANISATION: How the school organises for the above.

  - EVALUATION: How the school monitors how well it is achieving its aims in terms of

    a) chn. performance.

    b) tch. programmes.

N.B. It is important to remember that there must be a relationship between all these areas.

e.g. If maths syllabus is subscribed to then methodology should be activity & experienced based; resources should be concrete and evaluation more than pencil & paper testing.

The Process

<u>STEP1</u>: CONTEXT

   i.e. WHAT ARE THE PARTICULAR NEEDS AND
      CIRCUMSTANCES OF OUR SCHOOL:

- Information needs to be gathered and shared in relation to the school context so that everyone has a shared framework in which to examine school practice.

- To gather such information the following areas may be useful to consider:-

  - Teacher perceptions
  - School profile information
  - Parental Support
  - Parental opportunities in school
  - Student performance scores
  - Student attitude inventories

- Information from these sources can be summarised and copies be distributed to all participating members.

- Decisions, therefore, have to be made about;

  - i. What we need to know
  - ii. How we will get the information
  - iii. How we will present it
  - iv. Resources we can use

STEP 2:   DIAGNOSIS

i.e.   WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW?

● A policy should both reflect practice and the ideal and
therefore it is important that there is shared knowledge
of the state in which the school currently finds itself
in relation to:-

> Rationale
> General Aims
> Methods
> Resources
> Organisation
> Evaluation

● To gather information about this the following questionnaire
has been used successfully by our schools. This questionnaire
can be distributed to each staff member OR be used as the
focus of small group discussions.

The school will be embarking upon formulating a new policy.
All members of staff will be given the opportunity to be
involved in this process.

A policy acts as a framework of reference or the setting for
school practice. It is a guideline which aims at co-ordinating
planning, practice and evaluation.

As such it generally contains information related to the
following:-

● How we believe language learning occurs (Rationale)

● What we aim to teach (General Aims)

● How we aim to teach (Method)

● How we organise for the above (Organisation)

● How we know how well the children and programming
are doing (Evaluation).

Should there, however, be other areas that you consider
important for inclusion, please note these in the space
provided in the questionnaire.

In formulating our new policy, we will be using a strategy
that allows us to reflect upon our present practice in relation
to some standard or framework i.e. syllabuses & needs of our
school.
In order to streamline the process the following questionnaire
has been designed to gather information about a practice that
will be used as the starting point in formulating our policy.

We would be grateful, therefore, if you could complete the
following and return to the office by_____

	QUESTIONNAIRE:
RATIONALE	1. How do you believe the subject is learned?
AIMS	2. Generally, what do you think our children should be able to do?

METHOD	3. How do you teach for the subject development i.e. What are the basic elements of your lessons?
	
	   e.g. Are materials a focus ?
	      Is experience or activity a basic element?
	      How much of the lesson is discussion orientated?
	      How do you cater for language differences?

RESOURCES	4a. What access do you feel you have to resources? 4b. Do you have any support e.g. Teacher Aide, Parents, Remedial teacher etc.?
ORGANISATION	5a. Is group work a part of your organisation? On what basis do you group? 5b. Is the subject integrated across the curriculum?
EVALUATION	6. What techniques of evaluation do you use? What do you evaluate? When do you evaluate? What do you use the evaluation for? How well do you think you and your students are achieving the aims/objectives you set?

● Collated information is then recorded in the first column of
  a sheet outlined below:

COLUMN I	COLUMN II	COLUMN III
WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW	WHAT OTHERS ARE DOING	DECISIONS
RATIONALE		
AIMS		
METHOD		
RESOURCES		
ORGANISATION		
EVALUATION		

STEP 3:   ALTERNATIVES

          i.e. WHAT ARE OTHERS DOING

● Before deciding on policy it is important that schools are aware
  of alternative approaches so that they make the 'best' decisions
  for their pupils.

● Ways that schools have organised for this to take place are as
  follows:-

        1.   Using abstracts of Departmental syllabus & notes

        2.   Visiting speakers to address staff at staff meetings

        3.   Films, videos etc.

        4.   Readings

● Information gathered from this step can be recorded in
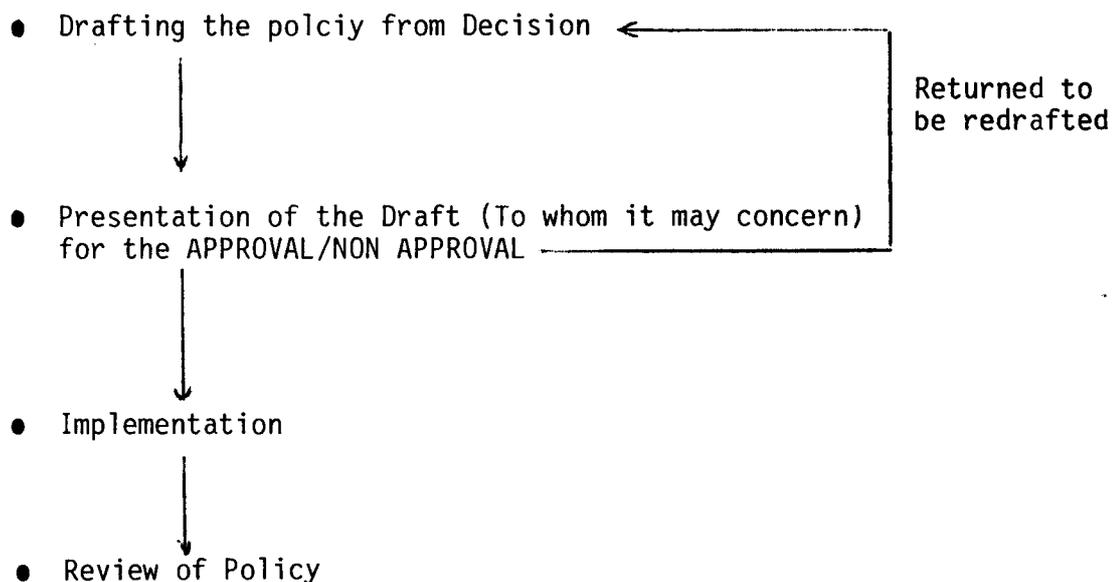 COLUMN II on the sheet above.

STEP 4:   DECISIONS

        i.e. WHAT SHALL WE INCORPORATE IN
            OUR POLICY ?

● Decisions to be made consider all the issues
  of:-

      Context
      Diagnosis
      Alternatives

● Participants together decide upon items for inclusion
  into their policy. These are recorded in COLUMN III
  of the sheet outlined on previous page.

STEP 5:   POLICY DRAFT ⟶ POLICY
           STATEMENT & PRACTICE.

● The diagram below illustrates this process.

    ● Drafting the polciy from Decision ⟵──────────┐
         │   Returned to
         ↓   be redrafted

    ● Presentation of the Draft (To whom it may concern)
      for the APPROVAL/NON APPROVAL ──────────────┘
         │
         ↓

    ● Implementation
         │
         ↓

    ● Review of Policy

● Implementation and review of the policy are vital to the process
  for without evidence of the policy being put into effect there is
  no purpose in the exercise.

- Yearly reviews are being undertaken by some of our schools. Staff meetings are set up to read the document and discuss the question

      "DOES THIS STILL APPLY?"

- Modifications or a repeat of the process may then occur.

STEP 1:

> Finding out what is happening now.
>
> PROCESS: Sending out a questionnaire
> to all members of staff &
> others considered relevant.
>
> SEE SAMPLE

STEP 2:

> Collate information under headings
> nominated in questionnaire on a sheet of
> paper divided and headed as such
> Fill in column 1.

WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW	II WHAT SYLLABUS/DEPT SAYS	III WHAT SHALL WE INCORPORATE -- POLICY
Beliefs about how language is learned		
• General Aims		
• methods		
• Resources		
• Organization		
• Evaluation		

STEP 3:

> What the syllabus/Dept has to say and how does
> it suit the needs of our school?
>
> PROCESS: * 1½ staff meeting in conjunction with
> subject advisory.
>
> * Use Dept. extracts (see samples) to
> discuss and record factors that are
> important to your school.

STEP 4:

> Collate information in the second column of
> the divided proforma.

STEP 5:

> What do we want to happen for our school?
>
> PROCESS: * 1½ staff meeting with facilitator
> to discuss and make decisions
> about what will feature as policy
> for the school

STEP 6:

> Presentation of draft policy.
>
> PROCESS: * Hand out to staff prior to an
> extended recess or lunch time
> meeting.
>
> * Clarify and make alterations based
> on staff reaction.

STEP 7:

> Final policy to be implemented.