# Overview of the Policy Cycle in Educational Leadership

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Generally, public policy drives public programmatic actions and in many instances public actions and advocacy influence policy development and formulation. In education, educational policy often drives educational programs and practice and in many instances educational research, program development and practices influence the development and formulation of educational policy. As a critical component of the educational enterprise, educational leadership practice cannot be divorced from educational policy (Arafeh, 2015). It follows then that the study of educational leadership requires, if not demands, a much stronger focus on the inherent symbiotic relationship between policy and practice. Educational leaders at all levels are in some way involved as actors and stakeholders in the policy cycle. During pre-service educational leadership preparation and during in-service educational leadership practice, the policy cycle which includes the planning for, formulation, legitimation, implementation and evaluation of educational policy should be taught, discussed, investigated and should be fully understood. (Bell & Stevenson, 2006). Figure 1 is my revised rendition of the policy cycle.
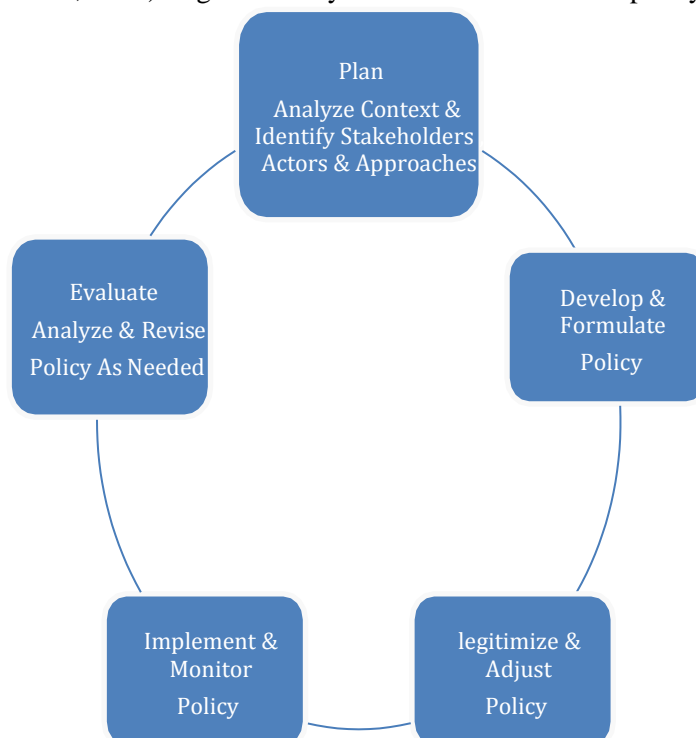
I. Plan

Effective planning is required as an integral aspect of the policy cycle. The first step in the planning process is to analyze the context in which the issues and concerns exist and in which the policy is to be implemented. The specific steps include:

1. Examine conditions, issues, needs.
2. Examine and analyze data.
3. Examine policy options
4. Evaluate Options
5. Select & Make compelling case for the selected policy
6. Get the issue and proposed policy to address it on the agenda. Present arguments for the development of the policy

Planning also includes identifying the key stakeholders and actors affected by the contemplated policy and the approaches that could be used. The types of actors include:

1. Social/Personalistic Actors: individuals & interests groups
2. Organizational/Bureaucratic Actors: Organizational Entities (Hedge and Lester, 2008) The approaches to policy formulation and implementation may be classified as:

- Incremental: gradual and stepwise, building on what already exists
- Synoptic (Comprehensive): wholistic, simultaneous and integrated, based on an assessment what is fully needed to meet the policy demands.

3. Develop Policy

Once the foundational planning work is done and the key planning elements are in place, policy formulation can occur. This includes the following:

- Involve key actors/ representative stakeholders
- Set goals and expectations
- Describe specific actions to be taken, places and time frames
- Determine actors and roles

III. Legitimize Policy

The legitimation of policy is an often overlooked or disregarded step in the policy cycle. No policy should be implemented without some review and vetting by a cross-section of key stakeholders This enhances the viability of a policy, increases the probability of support and the likelihood of successful implementation. This process includes:

- Prepare policy draft
- Circulate draft to representatives of key stake-holding groups
- Invite and receive feedback
- Make necessary adjustments

IV. Implement Policy

Implementation of policy provisions should be done with as much fidelity, replicability and measurability as possible. Very often a policy -- is helpful in identifying policy inputs, processes, outputs, outcomes and impacts. This helps enormously with the policy evaluation that follows and connects back to the context analysis during the planning phase. Policy implementation includes the following:

- Articulate a clear theory of change and develop a related logic model
- Provide clear implementation guidelines
- Establish clear benchmarks
- Identify and provide needed human and material resources
- Monitor implementation

V. Evaluate, Analyze and Revise Policy (as needed)

Policy evaluation, analysis and revision (as needed) are essential to fully completing the policy cycle.

- Review goals & expectations
- Identify relevant outcomes
- Identify/develop data sources
- Collect implementation data to determine implementation fidelity
- Collect outcome data to determine program impact
- Analyze both implementation and outcome data to determine relationship
- Review, organize & understand findings/results
- Draw conclusions on policy effectiveness
- Prepare report(s)
- Disseminate reports
- Make decisions regarding whether policy should be retained, repaired or replaced

In the Policy Briefs that follow, the authors adopt many, if not all of the steps in the revised policy cycle outlined above.

References

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