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Situated Identities, Competing Cultural Models: Discourse Analysis of Policymakers' Views on Teaching

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Because policymakers have a direct impact on schools, teachers, and therefore students, this study examined the discourse of policymakers in relation to their views on "quality" teaching. Findings from the study conclude the cultural models and discourses widely varied among policymakers. Their views were based on an idiosyncratic approach to teaching and learning. A fragmented understanding of quality teaching from policymakers as a whole emerged.

Keywords: *cultural models, discourse analysis, education policy, policymakers, quality teaching*

Introduction

The research presented here is part of a larger study involving teachers, administrators, and policymakers' perspectives about "quality" teaching in a state located in the southwestern United States (Lesley, Gee, & Matthews, 2010). From the findings of this earlier investigation, we became curious about the role of policymakers in the state to both identify and support quality teaching in classrooms across the state. From our previous research, we discovered teachers believed they were restricted in the kinds of teaching they could do and administrators believed they were restricted in the kinds of teaching they could support due to a variety of policies in place at the district and/or the state level. With these findings in mind, we decided to investigate further the role of policy in fostering quality teaching.

As part of our research, we interviewed six individuals identified as state policymakers. We were intrigued by the degree to which the policymakers' responses to our questions diverged from one another. As a result, we decided to use discourse analysis (Gee, 2005) to examine the policymakers' answers more in depth. For the purposes of this study, we defined policymakers as those who are in a position to make laws and set policy with regard to education in the state. Some of these individuals were elected to their position, some were appointed, and some were hired as state employees.

Background

With some notable exceptions (e.g., Brown vs. the Board of Education), until recently, the national government has only had a minor impact on educational policy occurring within individual states. The historical outcome of this hands-off nature of the U.S. federal government has been a very "diverse, disparate, decentralized, and dynamic" (Guthrie & Reed, 1991, p. 22) educational system

throughout the states and within local communities. In spite of such decentralization and often disparity, the United States' educational systems are comprehensive and attempt to reach all sectors of society. In fact, one of the goals of public education in the United States is to meet the diverse needs of our society. Guthrie and Reed (1991) explain this philosophy:

> Education is expected to enhance social cohesion as well as ensure cultural diversity, promote academic achievement as well as stimulate vocational relevance, instill moral virtues as well as motivate individual self-enhancement. Schools are expected to be free of politics yet responsive to public clients; sensitive to national needs yet subject to the desires of local citizens; and controlled by laypersons while staffed with professionals. (p. 23)

Despite the diversity and decentralization, classrooms across the country are confronted with similar issues pertaining to staffing, funding, and accountability. One such issue is the need for quality teachers. Concern about quality teachers has received increased attention since the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act mandates for providing "highly qualified" teachers. In the No Child Left Behind descriptions of highly qualified teachers, licensure requirements determined the majority of ways quality teachers were identified. Monitoring the credentials and licensure of teachers is the responsibility of state systems overseeing teacher education. Thus, schools are influenced by policy that is developed at a variety of levels.

Politicians, from the local to the state to the national level, set broad-sweeping policies for schools, which then have to be implemented at the state, school district, school, and eventually the classroom levels. Given our experience as educators in various schools in different states and then at the university level, we have seen a variety of policies articulated at various levels of governance. Some of these policies have had more successful implementation than others. In either event, the strong presence of policies in education and the teaching of children beg for additional study to further the knowledge base in education pertaining to the views, values, and understandings of policymakers.

Theoretical Framework

To inform our thinking in this study, we consulted three strands of research pertaining to educational policy and accountability in the United States: (1) the nature of "impact" from educational research on educational policy, (2) the role of policy in determining accountability mandates at the state and national level, and (3) the nature of control in educational policy.

Levin stated, "[Education] is a value-laden activity, inextricably connected to our broadest aspirations for society" (p. 2). The National Education Research Forum (2000) similarly pointed out that policymakers often do not make use of research unless it "is congruent with and justifies their current convictions … Even when evidence contradicts a strongly held belief—the latter often wins out, not only in education but also in science and medicine" (p. 3). The Forum also pointed out that information about educational research can be mediated by what both mass and the professional media have to say about it:

> The media sometimes gives broad coverage to research of "poor quality" because it addresses a "newsworthy" area. Many research findings derive from a single study with inevitable restrictions on generalizability. Research, which has such a limited base, can easily be applied prematurely, with potentially dangerous consequences. There is currently a lack of discussion

and debate among researchers, as well as with policymakers and
practitioners, about the criteria that might influence the judgment of
whether particular research evidence is sufficiently compelling to justify
application. (National Education Research Forum, 2000, p. 5)

Thus, many outside forces appear to contribute to policymakers' understanding and acceptance of research findings.

In addition to the media, politicians and other policymakers are informed about research "from lobbyists and interest groups who use it to advance their political views. A variety of other bodies—think tanks, foundations, professional organizations—are also involved in research dissemination" (Levin, 2004, p. 5). Levin pointed out that all these organizations have their own agendas for sharing particular research and such agendas are not always benign.

Recent actions of the U.S. government have indicated that it is making the "assumption that there [is] a direct line between research and subsequent policy and practice such that research findings point unambiguously to what governments, educators, or learners should do" (Levin, 2004, p. 4). The No Child Left Behind Act and especially the Reading First portion of the bill have demonstrated this thinking most radically. On the U.S. Department of Education website is this statement about the teaching of reading:

Research has consistently identified the critical skills that young students
need to become good readers. Teachers across different states and districts
have demonstrated that sound, scientifically based reading instruction can
and does work with all children. The critical missing piece lies in helping able
teachers benefit from the relevant research in each and every classroom.
Real, nationwide progress can be made when we bring together proven
methods with significant new federal resources to make sure that every child
becomes a successful reader, and that each child moves forward well-
prepared for a rich and rewarding academic experience. (U.S. Department of
Education, 2007)

Despite research findings to the contrary, criticism of the research of the National Reading Panel, and information about funding irregularities in Reading First grants from the Office of the Inspector General, the website presents the idea that we can teach all children to read through what they describe as "sound, scientifically based reading instruction" as fact. This stance has influenced the actions of state and local education agencies.

State governments have the responsibility for licensure of teachers and accreditation of schools and teacher-education departments. Thus, much of the authority over school policy resides with the state, despite efforts of local control. Historically, this local control was created in order to separate public schooling from partisan political maneuvering. Local school boards were to be composed of laypersons who represented the entire city in order to provide visibility and, if elected, elected at a time separate from other municipal officials so as to seem nonpartisan. These local boards had their own taxing authority in order to be fiscally independent of local political machines. State boards of education and state school officials were also selected in an apolitical fashion (Guthrie & Reed, 1991).

Despite this supposed nonpartisan history of public education, a great deal of criticism has been levied at the political nature of policy (e.g., Allington, 2002; Altwerger, 2005; Bracey, 2003; Garan,

2004; Smith, 2003). Public education is greatly impacted by federal and state policy and mandates. Becker (2010) opined federal education policy has had the most impact on students. This included how students are to act and learn. Cook (2006) explained the ways schools have been caught in the middle of state and federal mandates, disagreements regarding school choice, and the influence of national organizations, referring to schools' predicament in such "political and culture wars" (p. 6). Noting the political mappings of educational policy, Guthrie and Reed (1991) stated,

> An undertaking which commands approximately seven percent of gross national product, touches the lives of more than sixty million students, employs approximately five million individuals, and is looked upon as a major institution responsible for inculcating societal values, can hardly expect to go unnoticed by the political system. (Guthrie & Reed, p. 54)

Members of local school boards have decried the top-down control prevented them from serving their communities and schools adequately. They no longer have "the last word on curriculum, funding, staffing, and policy in the district schools" because of the underfunded or unfunded mandates from above (Cook, 2006, p. 6). Cook elaborated,

> "Everybody is an expert when it comes to education," Lopez says. "Whether it's legislators or the business community, everyone wants to tell us how to do our job. At the federal and state level, they say they want local control." Then, they say, "We're going to tell you how you have to do it, and you have to do it our way." That's not local control, that's a power grab. (Cook, 2006, p. 7)

Local and state government officials have gotten even more involved in some of these "power grabs" over education in their areas. Examples of this phenomenon exist at every level of government. For instance, mayors, such as Eddie Perez, in Hartford, Connecticut (2009), have appointed themselves as heads of the local school boards. In New Mexico, the former governor, Bill Richardson, eliminated the state school board and the chief state school officer immediately after he was elected in 2003 and renamed the state department of education the Public Education Department. At the national level was the intrusion into how schools are run, through the No Child Left Behind bill and the impact that bill has had on what teachers do in their classrooms.

Guiding Research Questions

To understand the perspectives of different sectors of policymakers from the same state with respect to fostering quality" teaching, we developed the following research questions to guide our inquiry:

(1) How do the discourses of state policymakers representing appointed, elected, and employed positions and three sectors of decision-making responsibilities reveal the ways policymakers view their role in fostering quality teaching?
(2) What are the policymakers' cultural models of schooling (Gee, 2005)?
(3) What are the policymakers' situated identities?
(4) What are the social goods policymakers believe support quality teaching?

Methodology

The overarching methodology guiding this study in data collection and analysis is one of qualitative research. Because we are interested in research that seeks to understand the dynamics of power and

representation in data, our epistemology as researchers is shaped by feminist research (Hooks, 1989; Jipson, Munro, Victor, Jones, & Freed-Rowland, 1995; Luke & Gore, 1992) and discourse analysis (Gee, 2005; Rogers, 2004). Both of these epistemological frameworks inform the basis for the methods of qualitative data analysis utilized in this study.

To complete this study, we gathered data with three tiers of policymakers. The first tier included three individuals elected to the state legislature. The three we interviewed were serving or had served on the state Legislative Education Study Committee. This permanent committee of the state legislature was created to

> Conduct a continuing study of all education in [the state], the laws governing such education and the policies and costs of the [state] educational system … recommend changes in laws relating to education … and make a full report of its findings and recommendations [to the Legislature]. ([State] Legislative Education Study Committee, 2007)

The second tier included two individuals who were appointed to serve on the Professional Standards Commission. This group held an advisory role in such areas as accreditation of teacher preparation programs and licensure rules for educators. The third tier included an individual who had been hired to serve in the State Department of Education. In particular, she was instrumental in helping teachers and schools implement policy relating to the Reading First portion of the No Child Left Behind bill.

We selected participants from these three tiers to triangulate data sources. We then conducted semistructured (Seidman, 1998) interviews with all of the policymakers in this study. The transcripts from these interviews formed the basis of the data we examined.

We analyzed the interviews through discourse analysis based on Gee's (2005) seven building tasks of language. These seven building tasks include (1) significance, (2) activities, (3) identities, (4) relationships, (5) politics, (6) connections, and (7) sign systems and knowledge. With these seven building tasks serving as a framework for analysis, we were able to examine the sociocultural underpinnings and discourse models (Gee, 2005) of the policymakers' use of language when responding to three areas of inquiry pertaining to the (1) greatest problems facing education in the state, (2) supports for quality teaching in the state, and (3) hindrances to the development of quality teachers in the state. To foster analytic balance in conducting discourse analysis, we compared the analysis of each interview with one another around Gee's seven building tasks. From this comparative analysis, we were able to develop assertions that put the interviews "in dialogue" with one another. With this comparison across the interviews, we looked at the role of policymakers' identities, cultural models of schooling, and views of the "social goods" of teaching.

We selected discourse analysis as a primary mode of analysis in order to investigate further hypotheses garnered from the initial study. In the larger study, we noted the disparate perspectives presented among and between the three sectors of policymakers. In an effort to add clarity to these perspectives, we decided to analyze the transcripts from a sociocultural theoretical model of language (Heath, 2004), because we believe that language is inextricable from the contexts within which it is used. Additionally, we view language as a form of "social action, social identities, and human affiliation within cultures, social groups, and institutions" (Gee, 2005, p. 1). Gee summarized, "Language has meaning only in and through social practices" (p. 8). Thus, language provides insight into beliefs, actions, and cultures of individuals and discourse communities.

Findings

Throughout the transcripts, we noted a variety of identities in action between the policymakers with respect to their professional roles. Because of the wide array of identities presented, taken together we came to see their collective identities as policymakers as largely idiosyncratic. As we examined the policymakers' language, we found several key reasons for this phenomenon that included the following themes: (1) dehumanization of the educational process, (2) beliefs of helplessness to enact change, (3) divergent views of the social goods of schooling, and (4) divergent cultural models of schooling.

Dehumanization of the Educational Process

Our primary research question focused on how the discourses of the policymakers revealed how they viewed their role in supporting quality teaching. In our analysis, we found as policymakers discussed concerns and issues in education, they often distanced themselves from schools, classrooms, teachers, and students. Collectively, they positioned themselves as being extremely disconnected from classroom practice. This distance from classrooms and children was primarily demonstrated through policymakers' focus in their comments on addressing concerns of either their voting constituents or the demands of their jobs as opposed to the needs of individual children. The resulting distance served to dehumanize the educational process. For instance, the following excerpt from a female appointed policymaker demonstrated her own concerns about the phenomenon of distancing and dehumanization:

> You know, you still hope that the state department would be concerned about
> the welfare of the kids. But it kinda does get lost in all of the paperwork and
> all the federal government stuff that goes on.

This policymaker's comments provided insight into the emphasis at the state department level that gets placed on the paperwork rather than on the education of children. The focus becomes the paperwork and appeasing constituents. The distance from the education process would, thus, make it easier for policymakers to make decisions and set policy based on a collective overview of information (e.g., low test scores) or philosophical belief rather than dealing with children on a personal level.

In tandem to the dehumanization of educational processes, children, students, and learning were commodified. The larger narrative of doing business is predicated on profit margins and the "bottom line." One legislator made a specific reference to the business sector as a model for quality education:

> From the business community they, they often tell us that, "if we ran their
> business like we did education, they'd be broke in the first year." You know,
> and so, um, there's just an intense, intense pressure to be much more
> accountable that our children are, are, um, succeeding.

In stating, "if we ran their business like we did education, they'd be broke in the first year," the legislator engaged in ventriloquism as she paraphrased those in the business community. This policymaker used ventriloquism to ultimately exonerate her from further culpability. Juxtaposed against the emphasized notion of "intense pressure" for accountability, the legislator was able to rationalize her role in the dehumanizing nature of education. Such juxtaposition defined the legislator's relationship with both schools and the public. When questioned about how quality teaching is supported, she omitted her own work from this discussion and focused on how school- and district-level policies affect teachers and teaching. Like dehumanization of the educational process,

this sense of helplessness to affect change was prevalent in the comments of most of the policymakers we interviewed.

Helplessness

Throughout the interviews, policymakers positioned themselves as helpless to enact positive change in public education. We found that these feelings of helplessness stemmed largely from references to the barriers that layers of educational bureaucracy created. We also found statements of policymakers describing themselves as extremely disconnected from classroom practice. In sum, we discovered that the policymakers possessed feelings of powerlessness to enact change. The reasons why the policymakers felt helpless varied; however, each policymaker voiced the view of their identities as a policymaker as someone whose hands were tied due to educational bureaucracy and physical distance from classrooms. The following excerpt from a transcript with a female appointed policymaker exemplifies this finding:

> And, and at the department level, [laughs] you know there is a bigger distance between the children and, and the people in the department so their concerns are, are more paper oriented. What shows up on paper and what shows up on the assessment results. Can we get the students reading at grade level by grade three, in the grade three, for example? And uh, and of course having to deal with the federal government mandates that the state has to carry out.

In the above response, the policymaker explained her feelings of helplessness based on the fact that state department personnel are distanced from real teaching. This policymaker also mimicked the words of state department personnel when stating, "Can we get the students reading at grade level by grade three" engaging in both ventriloquism and intertextuality between her identity as a policymaker and state department personnel. She presented the state department as a paper-oriented bureaucracy primarily concerned with test scores as opposed to real teaching and children.

In tandem to feelings of helplessness to enact change, policymakers collectively presented professional identities that rarely took responsibility for addressing "greatest concerns" facing education in the state. Rather, the policymakers tended to blame other entities and phenomena for the educational problems they identified as confronting the state. These references included incompetent administrators, the general public's negative views of education, the terrible way colleges of education prepare new teachers, and overwhelming sociological factors such as increases in ethnically diverse student populations, inadequate classroom technology and curricular materials, and lack of parental involvement in the schools.

For instance, the following excerpt from a policymaker offered an example of the ways policymakers placed blame for educational failings on other entities. In this case, the policymaker blamed children's ethnicities and socioeconomic status:

> Native Americans are, they ss–, they dif–, they learn different, they have different uh, their whole family set-up is structured with different sets of goals and uh, math isn't as important as Mother Earth. And, uh, and I think you ca–, I don't think you can change, you know, hundreds of years of, of that belief overnight.

In this response, a male elected policymaker explained that school problems in the state are largely the result of incompatible and intractable cultural norms. Native Americans, he explained, do not share the same sense of social goods or values with respect to learning school-sanctioned forms of knowledge. He also explained that such mindsets cannot be changed in one generation of learners. These statements placed this policymaker in a helpless position to enact change through legislation when, in his perspective, the problem is endemic to ethnic differences occurring in the larger sphere of society and very much beyond the control of legislative mandates for education. This policymaker's views of cultural disparity of students provided a way for him to exonerate himself from taking responsibility for educational concerns.

Another policymaker decried what he called the "educatocracy's" control over education in the country. He defined the term as "people who control education." This policymaker then explained why he thought things cannot change because of this control:

> Uh, is a stultifying, um, organization that hangs like a pall over all of [the state's] education. I think there very, very, there's very little creativity, very little thinking outside the box. There's a tremendous amount of effort placed in terms of protecting turf and of continuing the status quo.

This policymaker indicated that until schools of education are abolished, no reform can occur. In fact, he specifically indicted teacher preparation programs and stated that they are in opposition to reform:

> They fiercely oppose anything that is an actual reform of any kind, or an attempt to reform. School choice being one of those things. Not because, uh, they know for sure that the ulti…the beneficiary is, that is the child, is going to receive a fuller education or a better education, simply because they oppose it because they simply don't want control away from the educatocracy. And they really can't manifest any meaningful argumentation against it.

This policymaker believed that schools of education and traditional educators have a stranglehold over education in the country and resist any meaningful efforts at reform. He asserted that nothing will change unless schools of education and administrator certification are abolished. In requiring those aspects be abolished before change can occur, he also relieved himself of any blame and positioned himself, therefore, as helpless to impact change.

All of the policymakers situated their identities as professionals around beliefs of helplessness and blame for educational problems. The beliefs conveyed by policymakers addressed our main research question of how they view their impact on quality teaching. Even with their unique positionalities and situated identities in their roles as policymakers, which addressed one of our secondary research questions, all of the respondents confidently expressed educational cultural models (Gee, 2005) or subconscious theories that supported their reasons for feeling helpless and relieved them of any culpability in addressing the very issues they identified as plaguing public education in the state. As they discussed those issues, they provided insight into their views of the social goods of quality teaching.

Social Goods of Quality Teaching

A secondary research question considered the social goods policymakers believe support quality teaching. The policymakers we interviewed expressed very divergent views of what constituted the

social goods of quality teaching. One male elected legislator strongly believed that the most important goods were textbooks and technology. He described the technology that he observed at a college he visited:

> To see their interactive classrooms and, and the way in which those
> classrooms are designed for maximum usage of technology in a modern
> equipment is, is a way to answer your question. Those kinds of things are
> invaluable to teaching the modern student.

In this passage, the policymaker positioned technology as a panacea for all of the problems troubling education, placing emphasis on the problem of motivating students to learn in school. Modern students need modern equipment. Classrooms need to become interactive in order to foster maximum usage, and learning and technology is the medium through which to foster such interactive learning.

In the following response taken from his interview, the same policymaker described what constituted an appropriate textbook:

> So you have to have a textbook that is objectively, um, competent,
> competently written. And that is that it doesn't contain ideology. It's not
> putting forth some view of a … racism or feminism or all kinds of other *-isms*
> that are coming through but simply reflect a … what happens, what
> happened in history or those kinds of things. So that people can have a grasp
> of their own, their nation's, uh, past.

Implicit in his definition of appropriate textbooks are claims that some textbooks are completely objective. As such, social goods in teaching involve texts that are "objectively competent" and apolitical and that "simply reflect what happens." According to this policymaker, technology and textbooks in the hands of a teacher who has content knowledge is what is needed as the social goods to create quality teaching.

Another policymaker, a female in an appointed position, described the social goods that foster quality teaching as a community that supports autonomy on the part of the teacher. She described this kind of community in the following response:

> Autonomy. If you've got a school, if you've got a community, if you've got a
> school, if you've got an administrator, if you've got a board that allows for
> autonomy in the classroom, um, I think sometimes that supports a teacher.

People in the teachers' community are the most powerful social goods for this policymaker. She provided further explanation by indicating within this community, teachers support each other and are also supported by administrators, students, and parents. This viewpoint is different from that of the previous policymaker. Whereas he saw textbooks and technology as important and never mentioned people in his interview, this policymaker saw people and the community as most important and never mentioned the importance of materials such as textbooks for teaching. She indicated that teachers draw strength from each other, administrators, parents, and students and that they also need their freedom and autonomy to teach the way they think is best to meet the needs of students.

This policymaker also stated that teacher-education programs provide support and expertise and thus are a social good for quality teaching. This belief was also held by another appointed female policymaker, as indicated in the following response: "Well, I think, first of all, you've got to have quality teacher-education programs, obviously." Later in the interview, she very closely defined what constitutes a quality teacher-education program as follows:

> I, we have, um, very high standards for our teachers. We, um, when we assess them in their student teaching we have various rubrics and tracking sheets for what they're supposed to have achieved at certain times, um, at certain levels or certain, um, points in their experience. And, um, we have, um, requirements for them too. They have to pass the basic skills before they can get into the methods courses to begin with. Um, and in the methods courses we have um, exams, we have papers, we have, um, they really have to know the material before they get out of that course. And we have point systems and rubrics.

This policymaker identified high standards, tracking of progress, periodic assessments of university students in order for them to progress in the program, and frequent exams and papers so that supervisors know that university students are knowledgeable as critical to a good teacher-education program. A good teacher-education program is the key social good for quality teaching, in her view.

This view is in direct opposition to the legislator mentioned earlier who indicated teacher-education programs are a major hindrance to educational excellence and should be abolished. For him, they are not a social good, as seen in his comments below:

> So there's no there's no creativity. Everybody has pretty much the same degrees. They come from the same locations. Um … They are products of the schools of education, which I believe in abolishing.

Such divergent views on the social goods for quality teaching provide insight into why policymakers have trouble making cohesive policy that aids teachers. They came to their positions with certain views or positions on education and how it best functions. These views are informed by experiences as students, as parents, as teachers, or other positions in education, and other life experiences. These lead to certain belief systems or cultural models of schooling. Each of the policymakers had a diversity of experiences in their educational backgrounds that led to the variety of views they held.

Divergent Cultural Models of Excellence in Schooling

We examined the discourse of policymakers to address the secondary research question of what are policymakers' cultural models of schooling. All of the policymakers interviewed for this study presented unique cultural models of education as demonstrated by their divergent views on the social goods for teaching. All six had experiences with education as students and parents of students. Five of them had been classroom teachers. Four of them had taught in the public schools as certified teachers. Two of them had significant experiences teaching in bilingual contexts and were themselves bilingual. Two of the policymakers worked in teacher-education programs. One had held almost every educational position possible (i.e., teachers' aide, teacher, principal, curriculum supervisor, assistant superintendent, superintendent). One had taught in military schools in a variety of locations but had never received a teaching certificate. One had only experience as a student and a parent of a student. These experiences certainly informed their views on education. Thus, their cultural models varied greatly.

As a part of their interviews, these policymakers often spoke of their personal experiences to support their positions as seen in the following responses. The first example is in response to the question about what supports quality teachers and teaching:

> Well, I think a quality professional development experience would be something that, that the teachers, um, see as relevant to what they're doing. Uh, for example, in [a school], we initiated a side-by-side, uh, model for special education, um, and I was in the first school to have that model. And when we did, when we started that development that these professional staff had many, many sessions of professional development on special education and various um various disabilities and various, uh, issues related to special ed.

As exemplified by this quote, ideas of what supports quality teachers and teaching was based on past personal experiences as an educator at a school.

In an additional example of referenced personal experience, in response to the question about what hinders quality teaching, another policymaker described contexts of too much testing. He said that students instead should be given experiences in potential careers, which he was not provided:

> And, uh, the, the part I think what you need to have more and more of in, in as far as what is given children an experience about what they can grow up to be. Uh, when I was growing up, I'm very good in mathematics, can't read worth a hoot, and uh, but I didn't know what to do with it. So I ended up in politics, which, by all rights, I should have been an engineer. If I'd known what an engineer did, I would be an engineer.

These responses exemplify ways two different experiences of policymakers with two different ideas of what is needed to support quality teachers and teaching.

Even when policymakers shared common educational experiences, they provided differing ideas and beliefs. For example, two of our respondents voiced almost opposite views of bilingual education, even though both were bilingual, became bilingual as adults, and taught in their nonnative language. One was a legislator and his cultural model of schooling, as he repeated throughout the interview, was his belief that education is too focused on the *-isms* or ideology when it should be focused on the facts. He also was very supportive of the whole testing movement, including tests for students and for teachers, as seen below:

> Well, the first thing that inhibits anybody from doing his or her job well is a, is a lack of ability. And there should be a much, that's why the test, which is only a starting point and I, and I, I emphasize that it that it's only a starting point. Um, the test should be rigorous, more rigorous, and simply not let people in the, in the classroom with students who, uh, simply don't have basic education themselves …
>
> **…** Um, and there is a great deal of ideology in [the state] education and very little science and very little empiricism. And, as a matter of fact, that's not even respected. What's respected is ideological-based, ideologically-based goals and objectives, which is, "We should have such and such because we

> believe it's good, and we believe it's right." But bilingual education has its
> roots in ideology as opposed to empiricism.

His cultural model emphasized testing and empiricism, which he believed did not support such aspects as bilingual education. The other bilingual educator held an appointed position. She did not support the testing movement and did support dual language bilingual education, as seen in the following response:

> The, the testing issue, which I'm very much opposed to, the idea that a
> standardized assessment can actually measure quality teaching … Yeah I
> think that maybe the one school that I have visited where it seems like the
> whole school seems to be a very happy and positive place of learning, where,
> where there's high, uh, where there's excitement not just on the part of the
> students but on the part of the faculty and the staff and the administration
> as well, and everybody is happy, and no one is griping in [names a particular
> school].

This policymaker's cultural model—which is in direct conflict with that of the other policymaker who had bilingual teaching experience—was influenced by her experiences with a particular school and dual-language education. These two policymakers also disagreed on the need for and purpose of schools of education. The legislator had strong negative feelings about schools of education, in that he felt they kept educators from thinking creatively about education, as illustrated when he stated, "They are products of the schools of education, which I believe in abolishing." The other policymaker was more positive about schools of education, as indicated with the response, "Well, certainly um, you know, colleges and, you know, teacher-education programs are designed to support quality teaching." Only one of the policymakers we interviewed believed that schools of education should be abolished. All of the others believed schools of education and teacher-education programs supported quality teaching, especially when they integrated theory and practice and maintained high standards. Four of the policymakers had been or were currently certified educators themselves. Of the two policymakers who did not have any certification in education, one supported schools of education while the other was not supportive.

Discussion

Our research supports the extant literature on the topic of educational policy. Educational policies are value-laden, and our respondents demonstrated their values through their discourse. Policymakers are not immune to what they read and hear in the media, nor to how their personal experiences and deeply ingrained personal values color their views. Despite their influence, they demonstrate personal feelings of helplessness to enact the positive change they believe they need to see in education. It appears that they don't believe they can act alone, and they may feel that they do not have the support of their colleagues to be able to move in the ways they believe needed. They demonstrate the widely diverging views that seem so prevalent in today's polarized political climate.

Despite the need for clear-cut answers in this black-and-white climate, educational research is not always direct in its implications and thus may not assist in providing the guidance and consensus for policymakers to rally around and to draw on in order to inform their policy decisions. With this lack of consensus, the experiences of educators captured through more qualitative research are often discredited and downplayed, as we saw with one of the respondents, despite the fact that this kind of research can be more helpful to teachers in the field.

Rather, the objectified "science" of research is deified, and it is believed that this science ultimately can show us the truth; however, this research has to be organized and presented in such a way that it can be digested by policymakers, such as was done with the reading panel research that led to the No Child Left Behind legislation. Despite the multiple challenges to the findings of this panel, the legislation that affected every public school, teacher, and child in this country was enacted. Research can affect policy and has with ramifications that we do not often understand in advance. Further research has shown that many negative consequences have occurred as a result of this legislation but it seems that little has changed in the political climate that could influence this federal policy in a positive way. Generalized research findings do not always have immediate effects on policy, as we have seen.

With our findings, which all point to the lack of cohesiveness in the cultural models and discourses of policymakers, we were struck by the fact that policymakers emphasize standardization efforts with curriculum and educational policy, and yet their opinions reflect widely varying points of view. Maybe the reason for this is because they desire certainty and consistency, things that can be lacking in classrooms as a result of the varying personalities and philosophies of teachers and the students with whom they interact.

The policymakers we interviewed provided rationales for their responses based on their personal experiences (as do most people), as opposed to any study they might have done on the issues facing educators today. Therefore, a disparate and fragmented philosophy of education and understanding of quality teaching emerged from them as a whole. These findings indicate a need for policymakers to be better informed regarding issues in education in order for their decisions to be grounded in good educational research. In order for them to be better informed, it appears that we must provide a more digestible model of educational research for them. We cannot depend on others to do our work for us, and we cannot be divorced from the political sphere—it is our duty to make our information public. We have long known this about the work that we do with teachers and educators in the field. Now we have to include those who make the policies that affect teachers most directly.

Government-appointed panels—as was shown with the reading panel—are not necessarily objective, nor is the research considered more scientifically based. Politics and philosophy will determine who is appointed to the panels, and panel members will determine what studies are appropriate to be included within their purview. Educators must engage more in the political sphere to make sure that all kinds of research can be included to inform these kinds of far-reaching policies.

Interestingly, none of the policymakers we interviewed indicated that they lacked knowledge or information about issues in education. None spoke of their own research into education issues. In fact, our policymakers' responses demonstrated few, if any, references to a knowledge base about teaching and learning predicated on research. The findings indicate the policymakers do not use research to make decisions but rather rely on their own personal experiences and philosophies, which could lead to inappropriate or damaging policy mandates. Perhaps we should have asked them how they learned about the issues facing educators today. Perhaps we constantly need to be questioning our policymakers about what they think they know. It is evident today that even the most convincing research can be discarded, however, that does not eliminate the requirement that we must keep them better informed. We have seen what great influence policymakers have on what happens at the school-district level, in schools, and in classrooms.

Further research is needed to provide additional information on the ideas and understandings of policymakers in relation to educational policy and research. The findings reported in this study

demonstrate the need for policymakers to be self-aware and reflective of their ideas and beliefs about education and to engage in research that will further their understanding regarding the needs of learners and quality teaching. Perhaps one way to make them more self-aware is to question them more, engaging them in the kind of research discussed here. We found little information in the field regarding research with policymakers themselves. Much research is available on policy but not policymakers.

The policymakers we interviewed indicated they were not in the schools on a regular basis, despite the fact that most of them were parents. We could invite policymakers into the schools more often, inviting teachers and students to take their work public. Teachers who take their work public often view their work more as professionals and are less likely to be swayed in their view of what they need to be doing with their students. In addition, if we engage with policymakers more ourselves, we possibly could further their understanding of the complexities, diversities, and intricacies involved in the education of children and adolescents. These types of efforts could provide policymakers with understandings of how to better support and influence educators and teaching that will ultimately enhance students' learning in positive and productive ways.

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