

Chapter Seven

Theorising Educational Change in Transforming Contexts

7.1 Introduction

When I started this dissertation my goal was to document how stakeholders understood and implemented Whole School Evaluation (WSE) policy in a school context occupied by other competing evaluation policies. I had consciously decided to cancel out the effects of resistance to policy implementation, therefore I selected a school that embraced and was eager to implement the government's WSE policy. My original intention was to produce a framework for policy implementation in contexts where competing policies jostle for attention.

In the course of my research it became apparent that the original plan was not going to be as simple and straightforward as I had anticipated. As I immersed myself in the data analysis, I realised that the series of policy implementation events at *Wagpos* had to be juxtaposed against complex and broader contextual issues. What I also learnt in the course of doing this research was unsettling: change is deeply complex and highly unpredictable even in settings where there appears to be a receptiveness to mandated reforms. But that was only the beginning.

During this long journey of “research learning”, I discovered that several change theorists have launched new theoretical inventions on the policy-practice relationship in general (Sutton & Levinson 2002) and in the specific context of transition states (Jansen 2000, 2002). Having gained these insights I now believe that the rush towards solutions (my original intention to produce a framework for policy implementation) is often unproductive because of the lack of understanding of the complex factors that influence and undermine policy change in the first place. What I seek to provide is deeper insights into policy change in receptive contexts where competing policies reside.

There are two observations about this case study – implementation at *Wagpos* High *did* occur (though incomplete) but not as planned despite the fact that there was a readiness to

implement the policy in the school. The first question then is: Why did the policy get implemented despite the serious controversy surrounding the policy?

There was strong resistance from the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), the largest teacher union in the country to stall implementation, and the teaching force responded positively by barring supervisors from entering their schools. *Wagpos* was, in fact, the only school in the province that obliged and forged ahead with self-evaluation in March 2002. Here I could offer two reasons for why this happened. The first reason is that many teachers at the school did not belong to SADTU but were instead members of the Suid Afrikaanse Onderwyserunie⁴⁹ (SAOU) and hence did not heed the call from SADTU (the general picture of SAOU is one of vigilant union neutrality). The second is that this could be explained by looking at the culture that prevails at *Wagpos* – a culture of strong compliance with authority (see Chapter 4). A culture where there is a strong institutional aversion to conflict. *Wagpos* staff willingly forged ahead without challenging or questioning higher authority. These less powerful actors – learners and their parents, teachers, school governing body and principal – adjusted their actions and expectations to a *fait accompli*.

Yet the other is a puzzling observation that requires explanation in the case study on policy implementation at *Wagpos*. A commonly held view is that if a decision is made in a system to carry out an innovation, then the innovation *ipso facto* would be enacted. Why then did the policy *not* get implemented as planned despite the fact that individuals were willing to implement it? The implementation process unfolded in different ways from those intended by policy. The way in which the policy was implemented depended largely on multiple stakeholders, many of whom were mobilised by government to facilitate the implementation. The trajectory of the WSE policy (which was different from planned expectations) requires an explanation given the readiness to receive and manage change at *Wagpos*.

These observations offer potentially new insights on the subject of policy implementation in schools grappling with transformation.

⁴⁹ This is the teacher union that most white teachers in the apartheid era subscribed to.

7.2 Understanding policy change: insights from *Wagpos High*

In this section I revisit the propositions and provide evidence to validate, refute or extend them in light of the case study data.

Proposition 1

Implementation of competing evaluation policies will be afforded varying degrees of attention depending on the implementers' determination of the immediacy, practicality and knowledge of each policy.

Wagpos High was engaged with implementing DAS when they first heard about having to implement WSE. Owing to logistical problems the school had temporarily ceased with DAS implementation. The problem faced related to the difficulty of constituting a panel for teacher appraisals given the fact that classes would be left unattended if teachers were involved in peer appraisals. If DAS implementation was to be continued then this called for immediate re-orientation of the school timetable so as to ensure that teachers constituting the peer appraisal panels would be available at the same time. Re-orientation of the timetable was seen as a mammoth task – not possible at that time.

In the interim period the principal continued with what he viewed as practical, that is, his own format of teacher appraisal until *Wagpos* was informed of the date for WSE. The principal's gesture to continue with his own style of appraisal can be interpreted in two ways. First, that teacher appraisal is seen as an important and valuable component, which is aimed at improvement in the life of the school. Second, that the school did not want to be seen as being overtly defiant of the department's policy and hence replaced the DAS policy with their own type of appraisal system.

A dilemma that the school had to deal with when the WSE policy was announced was which policy should take precedence at the time. Should *Wagpos* continue with teacher appraisal or WSE policy? Evidence indicates that WSE became the important policy for the moment and took precedence over all else. This is captured subtly by an abstract taken from a teacher's diary:

...The principal's control system had also stopped before external evaluation. I did not have to send my files in every week to the HOD. Suddenly the principal and HODs also stopped walking into my classroom to see if the classroom was neat, and clean and that my files were on my desk (Chaart 2002).

Evidently, the principal was instrumental in determining what was immediate and such a decision was sanctioned by his loyal SMT. Teachers were, however, excluded from “high level” decision making and were informed of decisions at staff meetings. Initially the decision to implement WSE was not graciously accepted, as is reflected by this quotation, but with time teachers resigned themselves to their fate.

There was a negative reaction amongst teachers when WSE was first announced. They asked a lot of questions to the principal but no answers were given... Teachers were very angry and blamed the principal because they actually thought it was his idea and that he invited the WSE team (Chaart 2002).

Evidence indicates that practical conditions continued to dictate implementation decisions. Partly due to the time constraints the principal, did not conduct self-evaluation as required by the policy. He expressed the following sentiments for the stance taken:

It is the basic right of each child to be educated and if I take that privilege or basic right away from children, I am the problem. ...I don't intend to interrupt a school programme and take away the basic right of the children if I am not convinced that that is in favour of the child and I was not convinced that this WSE was of such importance so as to interrupt a whole school programme (Principal 15/05/2002).

Furthermore, the timing for implementation also interfered with planning for examinations; hence teachers indicated that they could not do more in preparation for the WSE. The transition to school development planning could also not be made partly due to time constraints – the school was in the wake of the matriculation examinations and had also been declared a marking centre⁵⁰ hence organisational arrangements needed to be effected.

As regards implementers' knowledge of the policies – the principal's and teachers' understanding of the WSE policy, as has already been shown, differed greatly from each other, other stakeholders and from a literal analysis of the policies (see Chapter 5; also proposition 3). The data indicates that some teachers were unaware of the DAS policy even

⁵⁰ Specific schools are identified at centres for the marking of matriculation examination papers. Examiners selected from around the country converge at the site to mark and finalise matriculation results.

though it was being implemented at the school. Others were unaware of the mechanics of the WSE policy, that is, self-evaluation was to be conducted by the school prior to external evaluation. Teachers at *Wagpos* were also totally oblivious of the self-evaluation having occurred at the school as this was an activity confined to the principal and SMT. This is reflected by a teacher's comments:

No self-evaluation took place. The headmaster did visit some teachers in March and that does always cause tension in the staff room, as we never know, who is next on his list. No report of any teacher was mentioned or discussed (Marilene 22/04/2002).

Apart from opting to do what he felt was practical and immediate, the principal pursued activities that were known to him, for example, preparation of documents as stipulated in the letter that he received from the evaluation team leader. In instances where he was unaware of requirements, for example, the need to elect a co-ordinator whose role it would have been to serve as liaison between the school and the evaluation team, he simply did what he found practical and acceptable to his standards. In this case the principal served the role as evaluation co-ordinator – which is contradictory to policy expectations. Teachers were no different – they prepared themselves according to what they had known and experienced in the past (see proposition 4).

Basically, the principal took the lead in juggling with this continually evolving profile of policies imposed from the outside, through implementation (or temporary abandonment as in the case of DAS?) alongside other changes and the rest of ongoing work. Interestingly, even after the WSE, the principal did not continue with his routine class inspections and DAS implementation was not revived at *Wagpos*.

There is overwhelming evidence validating the proposition that the implementation stance of the school practitioners was determined by what was considered immediate, practical and known in the case where competing policies reside. On close scrutiny of the proposition I argue that what was known by the practitioners did not always coincide with policy expectations as has been shown.

Proposition 2

Policies only have desired impacts if there is a high degree of “coherence” among different policies

The data shows that there is no “joined up thinking” between the policies, that is, WSE; DAS and SE. Each policy has been treated as a separate entity (two policies were developed by the Quality Assurance Directorate and one by the Teacher Development Directorate). Close interrogation of the policies indicates that there is evidence of commonalities and differences between the policies but attention is not drawn to these aspects in the individual policy texts. As a result of this, officials saw the policies as “quite separate entities” (Lebo 22/05/2002). This viewpoint is succinctly captured in the following two quotations:

No, I don't think it is quite the same thing. This thing you were talking about (DAS) this is on the individual. What we are going through now, its on the whole school, so it's different. I see it as two different things (Sartie 24/05/2002).

Our teachers find it very difficult to buy the idea that there are three instruments on the table. Many ask why three instruments, what is the difference? And the difference and the aims are not clear to them (CM 24/05/2002).

How then are stakeholders expected to implement these policies simultaneously in the school context if they lack coherence with similar policies?

The data also show that the problem does not only rest with a lack of coherence with similar policies but also with incoherence within the policy frameworks. There were several tensions in the overall coherence of each of the policies analysed. In the WSE policy, one of the tensions is between school autonomy and state control. It appears that schools are being granted greater autonomy to conduct self-evaluation and decide on their progress and plans for school improvement but are excluded from external evaluation. Even in cases where they have a complaint about “unfair treatment or unjustified action” the Minister of Education will be the final arbiter in any complaint. Another glaring tension is between development and accountability. Schools will receive district support and development assistance (including financial gain) to implement their improvement plans but tensions arise if these schools do not attain the levels of performance expected. Would schools that

do not achieve the expected levels of performance then be exposed to public blacklisting as was the case previously?

There are gaps with regard to who will ensure that schools have effective well-developed internal self-evaluation processes before external evaluations are allowed and what measures would be put in place to monitor quality control so that quality is the same across provinces and districts. Other gaps relate to who evaluates the support given by the districts to the schools? The roles and responsibilities identified in the WSE policy for district support teams are also contradictory. The DAS policy is also based on several assumptions about the abilities of teachers. Some of these are that teachers are able to engage in reflective practice and thereafter conduct self-appraisal; that peers are “informed and capable” and that the process will be done in a “fair and transparent manner”; that the criteria are understood and applied uniformly and that the members of the panels will work collectively to assist the appraisee to identify needs, formulate objectives, select professional development activities etc.

There is a silence in the WSE policy with regard to how the supervisory units are to be capacitated. Furthermore, there is no clarity as to whether the full-time team of evaluators would be permanently employed personnel in the department of education or consultants contracted full-time for the purpose. The DAS policy, on the other hand, is based on the assumption that the support services of the department are functional enough to provide assistance and the policy may be seen to be overly optimistic by stating that the staff development team will initiate and monitor appraisals in terms of the management plan. Again the assumption here is that each institution will elect a staff development team.

A further confusion arises in the WSE policy when mention is made of training and modular courses for both supervisors and district-based support teams and the subsequent registering of these individuals on the database once they have received training. District officials are not involved in the self-evaluation or the external evaluation at all – why then have them competent to perform evaluations but restrict them from playing the role of evaluators?

Whilst both the WSE and DAS policies outline a theory of action, the Assessment Policy for Grade R to 9, in which SE is mentioned, is completely silent on the implementation

process. A supporting implementation action plan is currently being developed by the National Ministry.

The WSE policy statements are vague and superficial. For example, they state that district support teams must render services to supervisory units but do not spell out the exact nature of such services. The WSE policy is further riddled with terms that are used inconsistently. All these gaps, glaring ambiguities, contradictions, inconsistencies, vague and superficial statements reflect that there is limited coherence within the WSE policy framework as it exists.

Is a high degree of “coherence” among different policies and within policy frameworks adequate for policies to have the desired impacts? The evidence indicates that these alone will not guarantee the desired policy impact. The data foregrounds another important related aspect for careful consideration when dealing with the implementation of multiple policies. What has emerged is that there is also a need for a combined and well-coordinated approach to policy implementation. The present fragmented approach of implementing the individual evaluation policies is unmanageable, as schools do not have the capacity to do this properly.

The school that tries to employ all three (evaluation policies) is going to work themselves to death trying to do them by deadlines and then they (the school staff) will question the spirit in which they are being used and this is usually under stress. So I don't think they can be implemented. Today we're being developmentally appraised and when you've barely recovered from this ...we now have WSE and while you still reeling under this shock you get some kind of systemic evaluation where you have to fill in questionnaires...This is all time-consuming (NAPTOSA official 29/03/2002).

The data indicates that teachers were “suffocating” with all these engagements and that new policies should be “woven into experiences” at the school (DDM 29/05/2002). An approach to be adopted in coping with the diverse evaluation policies is suggested in this district official's remark:

...these three systems should be combined and yes one can have your overall focus like WSE, but I would say that the evaluation of a teacher individually should form part of WSE and with that we would need to get all the subject advisors involved. Why can the teachers within their subjects not be evaluated at the very same time and make this report a comprehensive report (CM 24/05/2002).

Another official also hinted at the need for coherent management across all the policies.

...that there has to be some coherent management across all the evaluation policies that will aim to bring them together so as to obtain a holistic picture. Therefore we propose that there be one policy, that is, quality management policy that begins from the teacher in the context of the school and context of the district (NAPTOSA official 29/03/2002).

Although this proposition is valid as stated, the data has provided further strong support for the need to have a high degree of coherence within each policy framework as well as a combined and well-coordinated approach to policy implementation if policies are to have the desired impacts.

Proposition 3

Policies only have desired impacts if there is a high degree of “coherence” within the minds/understanding of practitioners.

There were marked differences in the understanding of the WSE policy among stakeholders in the same category and across different categories of stakeholders as reflected by the data (see Chapter 5). Why is it then that there was such a low degree of coherence within the minds/understanding of practitioners?

The study finds that there is a lack of coherence in the WSE framework and across the policies (already described in proposition 2). Second, there was minimal involvement of stakeholders from the different levels in the policy development process. Only one national official was directly involved in the development of the WSE policy because the other officials had been recruited after the promulgation of the policy. Provincial officials were not involved in the policy development; the only exception was the provincial co-ordinator. Whilst there remains a debate as to whether there was sufficient union participation in the process, one thing is for certain and that is: classroom teachers were left out of the process completely.

Third, the policies were developed in silos – each directorate taking care of their “own affairs”. Complaints of individuals working in isolation as well as the existence of serious flaws in the communication channels are candidly acknowledged by this official:

...my problem has always been that you never see to the finish of these things, as if Department Directorates are now working in silos. One is not aware of the other, the bottom line is that the same people on the ground are the people who must carry these policies forward (DDM 29/05/2002).

Fourth, the quality, duration and nature of training varied for individuals at the different levels. Evaluators received prolonged and intensive training whilst district officials received minimal training, that is, two days training on the WSE policy. According to the district manager the approach adopted was also not very beneficial.

...we are being trained in piece meals, that is, the subject advisor will be taken alone to be trained, and then the auxiliary services will be taken alone to be trained and when they meet we have got different views about our training, and when implementing this is why we differ in implementing (DM 03/06/2002).

Furthermore, training appeared to have fizzled out by the time it hit the school level – only the principal received training at *Wagpos*. He had attended a one-and-a-half day workshop which was also attended by 50 other principals of the Brits district. SMTs were not taken on board with the training (DM 03/06/2002).

Fifth, the intensity of advocacy varied in the provinces especially at the initial unveiling of the policy when advocacy was on the agenda of the National Ministry of Education. With time this responsibility was conferred to provinces. Attempts by the individual provinces to educate the masses varied with some being more rigorous and dedicated to the cause than others.

Sixth, stakeholder understandings of policies were also influenced by the number of policies they were expected to implement (see proposition 2). Often the policy overload resulted in confusion in the minds of implementers as is reflected by this provincial official's remark:

That's a big problem. There is confusion. DAS itself takes a lot of time and then even when we say they can run parallel, it's going to be a lot of paperwork. I don't know how they are going to cope. There has always been a complaint of exactly what is expected to be done (Lebo 22/05/2002).

Seventh, the understanding of the stakeholders also depended on how, by whom and in what way the information was communicated to them (see proposition 5).

Owing to differences in understanding of the various stakeholders the policy was implemented in a way that varied to some extent from the original vision. Adaptation of the policy occurred especially during the school self-evaluation phase. Other factors over and above stakeholder understandings influenced the outcome of policy implementation (see proposition 7). There was thus a lack of a high degree of “coherence” within the minds/understanding of practitioners and therefore the original proposition cannot be supported.

Proposition 4

When stakeholders have negative experiences of a particular policy issue (i.e. evaluation) they remain sceptical about the value of other similar accountability/evaluation policies no matter how noble the intentions of these policies might be.

Stakeholders brought with them “baggage from the past” and drew heavily on these past experiences. To recapitulate, the majority of teachers at *Wagpos* are experienced teachers (over 10 years of teaching experience) who have been through several inspections in the past. Many recounted vividly the negative experiences of inspections and the profound influence this had on their understanding of the new WSE policy.

What this amounted to was that teachers, in the absence of a hard copy of the policy, rigorous training or workshop presentations on the policy, relied on their past experiences to guide them with their preparations for WSE implementation. Although *Wagpos* has effective subject committees, which meet regularly, the WSE policy content was also not discussed at any of these meetings. Simply put, the teachers at *Wagpos* resorted to basing their expectations of WSE on their past experiences of inspections and thus ultimately prepared themselves accordingly. Inspections of the past were characterised by a hive of activity – key to this was the idea of “window dressing” so as to impress the inspectors. The following excerpt from a teacher’s diary confirms that teachers resorted to similar kinds of activities:

Files were changed even if there was nothing wrong with them. Files were checked by the HOD. Changes were made and more preparations were done than before. I had to write each lesson out – I do not normally do this. I gave homework, and also wrote down the answers to the homework. We were also asked by the principal to write everything down on transparencies. If one looked at my preparations on paper

and the preparations on transparencies, it was exactly the same. The principal did not understand that it was the same and so I had to repeat the work. I got the feeling that nothing was good enough. I use my blackboard a lot and suddenly I have to do everything on transparencies. The weekly planning forms were suddenly changed as well as the preparation forms. The way that I marked my books, wasn't good enough and that had to change as well at the request of my superior (Chaat 2002).

Although the evaluation team leader and the principal had briefed staff, many continued to view WSE as inspections as reflected by the following quotations:

Sort of an inspection but not that you have to fear the inspection (Sartie 24/05/2002).

WSE is an inspection of everything that's going on in school, that is, files, preparations etc (Focus group 1 16/05/2002).

Data obtained from the questionnaire administered to *Wagpos* staff provides further evidence that attitudes and perceptions about WSE being similar to inspections persist. A total of 44,1 percent of the respondents to the item agreed that WSE is the same as inspection while 48,1 percent disagreed. A total of 7,4 percent of the individuals registered that they were unsure. The overwhelmingly strong negative *experiential forces* of inspection continued to dominate teacher thinking about implementation and the inherent value of WSE.

The data provides evidence that some bureaucrats did not want to be associated with the WSE policy as they viewed it as being similar to inspections of the past. This was cited as a factor that seriously hindered implementation in certain provinces. A national official drew on his own past experiences of inspections in an attempt to explain why teachers remain sceptical about WSE:

You were kind of nervous when they came because you knew after the visit that they were going to sit with the principal and discuss your shortcomings, thereafter the subsequent report wouldn't always reflect well on you. That's one fear that teachers have – that this may become an inspection (Petrus 18/03/2002).

The study also finds that previous negative experiences with DAS have left many teachers despondent and somewhat sceptical about whether any good will now emerge from the WSE experience. This is reflected in the following remarks:

We chose some colleagues to evaluate us (and) we filled in some forms. We did it but there it stops. There was no feedback, we never heard anything really (Sartie 24/05/2002).

...the Department has failed to monitor and evaluate the implementation of DAS – that is what is making this new policy WSE to be rejected at school level (John 22/05/2002).

...educators on the ground seem to have lost hope in the Department of Education. Many policies are coming and being implemented but at the end of it all they (the policies) die a sudden death (John 22/05/2002).

On a final note, there was outright dismissal of the WSE policy by SADTU as being no different from the inspections of the apartheid era. I argue that SADTU, by adopting this stance, created confusion among already sceptical teachers making them believe, more than ever, that WSE was no different from the inspections of the apartheid era. In doing so, SADTU was able to mobilise the teaching force with relative ease and stall implementation countrywide.

This proposition is therefore validated by the extensive experiential accounts of stakeholders. Whilst the proposition is validated it may also be extended to reflect that stakeholders draw on their experiences to guide them in their preparations for implementation of similar evaluation policies.

Proposition 5

The school-site conceptions of evaluation are constantly built and changed as a result of human interactions around the work of teaching and learning and running an organisation.

When the mandated WSE policy hit the school, it was constantly negotiated and reorganised in the ongoing flow of institutional life at *Wagpos*. The data indicates that strong forces of influence impacted on school-site conceptions of the policy.

The principal is a strong, visible and respected leader in the school and was the key creator of conceptions of WSE in the school. He strategically conveyed his own understanding (severely limited) to teachers at regular meetings. He conveyed mixed signals (knowingly or unknowingly) to the teaching staff leaving them highly confused. For example, he asked

all teachers to use novel ways in presenting their lessons but later asked them to prepare all their lessons on transparencies and use the overhead projector.

The following quotation reflects that the principal had created false impressions and expectations of the WSE process in the minds of teachers.

Ek het baie meer gedink hierdie mense gaan baie meer vra. Hy (die hoof) het vir ons verskriklik bang gemaak reg in die begin. Toe ons die eerste keer van hierdie ding gehoor het, ons was almal vrekbang en gedink – hier kom paneel inspeksie, en dit was nie so gewees nie. Ons was baie “surprised” gewees toe hierdie ou in die klas instap en hy gaan sit daar agter en hy vra nie eers vir boeke nie. Ek dink hy (die hoof) het dit baie erger gemaak as wat dit was. Hy maak altyd hierdie groot storie van n ding en dan is dit nie so erg nie (Hansie 24/05/2002).

I thought that these people would ask for much more. He (the principal) made us extremely scared at the beginning. When we first heard about this thing, we were all scared and believed – that this was going to be a panel inspection, but this was not the case. We were very surprised when the gentleman walked into the class and sat at the back and did not ask for books first. I think (the principal) made it more serious than it was. He always makes a big story of things and then it is not so serious (English translation).

Second, the arrival of the evaluation co-ordinator and her briefing of the staff conveyed a slightly different message from that of the principal. Staff were informed that they should not prepare anything special but continue with exactly what they had planned to do. Despite this message many teachers went ahead and prepared special lessons for the evaluation.

Third, teacher conceptions were significantly influenced by stories of experiences with inspections as relayed by the experienced teachers. These experienced teachers relayed experiences of cupboards and classrooms being inspected for neatness, teacher preparations being cross-referenced with samples of learners' work and entries being scrutinised in teacher mark books for accuracy.

Fourth, *Wagpos* teachers were also exposed to views and experiences, both positive and negative, of teachers at other schools during inter-school sporting activities, subject meetings and parent meetings. These activities provided a platform for a two-way exchange of views and experiences.

Fifth, every time the media released an article on WSE or the television channels aired experiences of policy implementation in the provinces, uneasiness and confusion reached heightened levels in the minds of the teachers at the school. Further evidence from teachers responses to questionnaires reflects that an excessively high percentage (81,5%) of *Wagpos* teachers agreed that WSE created anxiety and stress. Furthermore, newsletters distributed to parents originating from the confines of the school as well as documents about WSE received from other schools constantly generated new conceptions of WSE or reinforced ideas already held. A teacher at *Wagpos* shared the contents of a newsletter, which she had received from another school, with the *Wagpos* staff.

Sixth, the conceptions of teachers were constantly built and rebuilt as a result of the informal staff room discussions that they engaged in. Discussions focussed on teacher fears related to the fact that teachers were not confident with OBE teaching and that many teachers had abandoned the assessment forms and other documents that the department had made available to them.

Seventh, individuals generate from their own reading of policy their interpretations and meaning of policy. Evidence from teachers' responses to the questionnaire reflects that 50 percent of *Wagpos* teachers indicated that the policy was made available to them through a circular. This implies that the document has been left open to a variety of interpretations and distortions when disseminated in the form of circulars.

Eighth, understanding was also influenced by interaction with the teacher unions. Since teacher unions sent out strong signals of WSE being similar to inspections, these impressions were filtered through to schools by teacher union representatives. These kinds of messages were absorbed by teachers on the ground.

There has certainly been a coalescing of a number of societal forces and events, which have impacted on stakeholder understanding and implementation of policy. The synergy effect of all these influences one cannot predict – some influences may compliment understanding and positively influence implementation whilst others may be in contradiction with deeply held views of WSE policy and impact negatively on implementation.

School site conceptions of evaluation were constantly built and changed as the different “forces of influence” came together. Therefore, the original proposition is validated.

Proposition 6

Homogenous culture, bureaucratic responsiveness, and hierarchical organisation together compose a positive response to official policy.

The homogeneous culture at *Wagpos* influenced the attitudes and behaviours of the staff. The majority of the teachers shared common religious beliefs, values and principles as well as a deep commitment to improving teaching and learning. For these teachers the universal goal of the WSE policy was to identify weaknesses and receive recommendations for improving teaching and learning. This was thus the key driver for the acceptance of the WSE policy in the first place. Any other goal did not seem to really matter since they agreed unanimously with this critical goal. What is evident from the research is that consensus on a particular goal does not, however, guarantee a change in practice.

Wagpos has a long legacy of compliance with political and bureaucratic authority (see Chapter 4). The school was highly responsive to the bureaucratic decision to implement the WSE policy despite the fact that they were aware of the deadlock in negotiations between the National Ministry and SADTU. The following excerpt from a teacher’s diary reflects that although the union had informed teachers that evaluators should not conduct evaluations, the teachers at *Wagpos* did not resist, showing that there was a strong institutional aversion to conflict and disagreement.

Many people came to me since I am the Union Representative for our school as well as the Brits-Rustenburg area, wanting to know what the union opinion was on WSE. I contacted our office and the answer I got was to inform the membership to cooperate as far as possible. The union attitude was to do nothing and to ask them (the evaluators) not to come (Chaart 10/03/2002).

At the time *Wagpos* was the only school in the province where evaluations took place. The school co-operated willingly with the provincial department – a response that does not differ much from historical ways of complying with political and bureaucratic authority.

The school is a hierarchically organised society and must be seen as a context in which there are impositions, extensions and lines of power and authority. Protocol was strictly followed, rank and authority were respected not only within the school, but this attitude was also visible among the different officials that visited the school. The principal in his position of power and authority was able to command respect and bolster support for WSE implementation. He championed the self-evaluation process with the support of his SMT. The SMT played a pastoral role by instilling a positive attitude in the teachers as well as by conducting follow up sessions with teachers. One member of the SMT expressed his role as follows:

After the feedback if there are any problems in my department, you have to look at these faults and not do it again. We have got a school policy, a subject policy, and if there are any criteria that we have to do better at, we have to do it. I will have to see that teachers under me do the improvements (Hansie 24/05/2002).

Clearly, lines of authority and roles and responsibilities of individuals were strictly adhered to. Level one teachers also had their own conceptions of the roles they had to play in the implementation process as shown by the following quotations:

I think to try and be a good teacher or to try and make the kids enjoy their subjects. And really try and do my work to the best of my ability, even the administration side of it... (Elize 21/05/2002).

But I won't play a managing role, I will just be part of the group that implements whatever the decision is (Marilene 21/05/2002).

Provide assistance to those doing external evaluation. To implement things they give us to do, that is, to implement what the department wants (Focus group 1 16/05/2002).

The three elements, that is, homogenous culture, bureaucratic responsiveness, and hierarchical organisation have together composed a positive response to official policy, therefore the original proposition can be supported.

Proposition 7

The course of policy implementation is influenced both negatively and positively by variables operating within and outside the school context.

First, policymakers had made false assumptions about the ease of implementation, underestimating the complexity of school self-evaluation for novice implementers, since little guidance was provided on the process. Collecting data on present practice, identifying and agreeing on areas for improvement and implementing changes turned out to require skills that the principal and staff did not have. It was a case of “all review and no action”. The absence of related staff development and resource assistance in the form of preparatory training and facilitation in school did nothing to help implementation along.

Second, on a bureaucratic plane, decentralisation⁵¹ has been advocated to both improve efficiency and provide greater sensitivity to local variations in educational needs. Did decentralising WSE policy implementation meet these expectations? It seems that the associated lack of skill in managing self-evaluation at school level may have been mirrored by the lack of skill amongst district officials in managing the change to be implemented at *Wagpos*. Lack of a clear vision of roles and responsibilities coupled with poor communication channels impacted negatively on policy implementation in the school. Senior officials spent many hours writing letters to other officials in order to clarify roles and responsibilities, resulting in unnecessary delays with regard to delivery. The implementation process was hindered by the lack of physical and skilled human resources at circuit and district level. In addition, a lack of proactive leadership at the district/circuit level could also be seen as an impeding factor in WSE policy implementation. According to a district official, follow up to external evaluation was not given priority because:

...in our meetings we have never had time to focus on this. I think it is something that has been shelved (DDM 06/11/2002).

Third, the role of politics in the delay or derailment of policy implementation was not anticipated. Strong political interference from the largest teacher union in the country wreaked havoc in the implementation of the WSE policy creating confusion for teachers and frustration amongst bureaucrats. SADTU called for an urgent moratorium on WSE strongly opposing WSE because they claimed that it was being “imposed upon teachers” and that it is “punitive and not developmental”. SADTU was also in disagreement with the department because they had called for a developmental appraisal system which the

⁵¹ The South African education system is decentralised. The district/circuit is closest to the school. The district has authority, responsibility and financial resources for providing public services to the cluster of schools within its boundaries.

department had agreed to as part of a collective bargaining agreement during 1996, but which the department had “unceremoniously reneged upon” (see press article, Chapter 6). The union embarked on a programme of mass action, which involved mass meetings, marches and demonstrations.

As a result of negotiations between the Department and SADTU, a Task Team was established to table the major concerns of SADTU and to reach consensus on aligning the DAS and WSE classroom observation components of the two policies. Despite having reached an “amicable solution” there continued to be a delay in WSE implementation. A frustrated senior national official suggested that SADTU’s delay tactics were a carefully orchestrated political stance. According to him SADTU expressed that:

They will come back to us after the conference. It was used to get other people elections, most probably. That is our thinking, we do not know. You will recall that this started around May, they have been dragging it but in the last meeting in August, they came out very clear to say to wait for the Congress. After the Congress⁵² we shall talk better language (Phalani 06/09/2002).

Political interference in the restructuring of districts also impacted negatively on policy implementation. Decentralisation of service delivery was initiated in 1999 and continued through 2002 without much progress being attained. During this turbulent period officials were reported to have experienced high levels of frustration, uncertainty and fear over loss of jobs among those employed at district offices. Finally, in August 2002 three districts were merged, that is, Brits, Mabopane and Themba.

Fourth, several factors contributed positively towards enhancing policy implementation. The school was fortunate to have a loyal and supportive SMT who assisted the principal in carrying out the self-evaluation in a short period of time as well as making the necessary physical and human resources available for the preparation of documents for the entire process.

Fifth, the school received moral support from the school governing body, parents and circuit. The positive attitudes of these individuals spurred those teachers on who were

⁵² SADTU National Congress was held during September 2002. Elections were held for a new executive council.

uncertain or confused. Neither the school governing body chairperson nor the circuit manager provided any pedagogical support to staff but they did visit the school at the start of the evaluation and on completion of the evaluation.

This proposition is valid in light of the extensive data that supports it.

7.3 Outcomes of the WSE policy implementation process

Did the implementation (though incomplete) of the WSE policy lead to positive gains for the staff and the school? The data reflects that the losses far outweigh the negligible gains recorded in this research.

On a positive note, I have found that *Wagpos* has succeeded to a limited extent in generating a whole school culture of quality assurance. Teachers appear to have gained a more strategic and enlightened view of external evaluations, which could ultimately result in them conveying WSE in a more positive way to other educators. A gain, probably more on the part of learners, was that the instructional timetable was reconfigured to allow teachers more time per teaching session. Furthermore, immediate action was taken with regard to enforcing safety precautions in the workshops.

On the negative side, as soon as WSE was announced, teacher appraisals, which were being conducted by the principal, were put on hold as attention was to be now focussed on what was perceived to warrant immediate attention. Implementation of the DAS policy had also been discontinued because of logistical problems. Basically, teacher appraisal and development ceased altogether in the school environment.

There is no evidence from the case study that teachers gained substantially from the WSE experience. Whilst a minority of teachers described the experience as useful and enlightening, the overwhelming majority expressed that it was a period of intense pressure and extreme stress. Feedback sessions during and after the evaluation were brief and unconstructive in most cases. Some recommendations were also contradictory to what subject advisors were advocating hence the value was highly questionable. This was labelled as a disappointment because at the outset teachers embraced the policy with the belief that they would gain ideas on how to improve. Teacher workload did not lessen and

teacher morale seemed to hang in the balance. Thus the whole idea of teacher improvement is debunked in the absence of empirical grounding for this expectation.

The data did not suggest that there were any extraordinary gains for the school as a whole. A transparent partnership approach was developed by the principal and some teachers with the evaluation team. The principal was successful in encouraging a teacher whom he believed was incompetent to resign from the school. The principal's request to the Department of Education for financial assistance to conduct routine maintenance at the school was unsuccessful. A "spin-off" from the process was that the school governing body dedicated funds for the immediate upgrade of school infrastructure. Overall, in the absence of a school development plan the school could not be put on a "path to recovery".

7.4 Implications for education planning and policy

First and foremost, one important finding was the lack of coherence within the WSE policy framework and across similar policies. Policies should be developed such that they are internally coherent and reflect "joined up thinking" with other related policies so as to facilitate understanding in the minds of implementers. Change will only be possible if new policies make sense to the implementers and if the new knowledge is integrated with implementers' prior sets of understandings and experiences.

Second, I want to suggest a rethinking of the strategies currently employed by government to ensure maximum participation in policy development. I do believe that creative strategies should be used consistently and persistently to encourage broad-based stakeholder collaboration and participation in the policy development arena. Encouraging union participation especially in policy development is crucial for successful implementation.

Third, one striking observation in this case study is that the implementation process came to a halt because of a lack of leadership, among other things, at the district/circuit level. By using a combination of in-service training emphasising development and growth and replacement of leaders through attrition, leaders can be developed to lead and facilitate implementation at specific points in the chain. I firmly believe that these strategic leaders must be engaged in vision-building and working with other leaders to think through

problems and conceive alternative solutions. A paramount task of the leader is to build capacity to handle any and all innovations – which does not mean to implement them all.

Fourth, a further striking finding in this study is that misconceptions about WSE existed in the minds of so many implementers. Therefore, I argue strongly for rigorous advocacy campaigns to be directed and sustained over prolonged periods of time so that stakeholders come to increasingly understand the policy, clarify misconceptions and believe in the effectiveness of the approach to change being used. Instead of promoting specific innovations, policymakers should be emphasising broad-based programmes (i.e. incorporating all evaluation initiatives) and providing corresponding support for local development of specific forms of implementation, thereby facilitating the clarity and explicitness of each policy on the part of users.

Fifth, if we are serious about change, the implementation of any new policy should be directed towards improving local system capabilities through data feedback and other forms of support, rather than towards judging success or failure (Berman & McLaughlin 1978:368). There should also be more mechanisms for contact among would-be implementers at both the initiation or adoption stages, and especially during implementation. Provision of resources may not be politically and financially feasible in many situations, but there is no question that effective implementation will not occur without them⁵³.

Sixth, an important finding was the lack of a system for monitoring implementation – except during the external evaluation phase. I strongly argue for the need for institutionalisation of an information-gathering system to assess and address problems of implementation. If there is horizontal and vertical two-way communication, there will be more knowledge about the status of change. Williams (1980) claims that the need is not for formal research methodologies, but for “competent, reasonable people” in the system to be concerned about improvement through careful observation, questioning and discussions. This is none other than the systematic social interaction referred to so frequently as the core ingredient of developing knowledge and meaning about change (Fullan & Stiegelbauer 1992).

⁵³ Creating more time does not necessarily mean more money. The existing school schedule could be re-organised to create time for dealing with implementation problems, if it is seen as crucial to effective change.

Seventh, the incentive system for implementation would have to be drastically altered especially at the school level. If there is one finding that stands out in this research study, it is that effective implementation of policy requires time, personal interaction and contacts, in-service training and other forms of people-based support. Therefore, if implementers are to remain eager and committed to change, a system of incentives (extrinsic rewards) should accompany the new challenges that confront stakeholders.

7.5 Chapter summary

In this thesis I have explored stakeholder understandings and perceptions of the WSE policy as well as documented the unfolding of the WSE policy at *Wagpos* High, given the presence of other competing policies. I have shown how the apparently simple sequences of events depend on complex chains of reciprocal interaction. Hence I have built each part of the chain with others in view. Though I have isolated my discussion of policy design from policy implementation (see Chapter 5 for policy design and Chapter 6 for policy implementation), I have attempted to bring them into closer correspondence with each other in Chapter 7.

I have provided new empirical evidence and insights into implementation of competing evaluation policies in receptive contexts. I have also tried to capture the moments of triumph and success, as well as the frustrating and difficult times. I have shown that change processes embrace both these extremes, as well as the myriad of shades in between.

The research has shown that when implementers are faced with multiple competing policies they adopt a particular stance to implementation. This stance is determined by what is considered to be immediate, practical and known to the implementers. Those in positions of power determine what is immediate and practical. However, what is known about the policy may not necessarily be what the policy expectations are. Thus the chances are that mandated “new” policies may be immediately embraced and “old” policies may be temporarily or even permanently abandoned. And both “old” and “new” policies may be implemented in ways that may differ considerably from the policymaker’s original vision.

The study shows that for policies to have desired impacts there has to be a high degree of “coherence” among the different related policies. What this means is that it is imperative

that the policies have a common values base. But such “coherence” among related policies has to also be coupled strongly with “coherence” within individual policy frameworks or else the desired impacts may not be achieved. The evidence also reflects that another aspect seldom neglected in transforming contexts is the need to have a combined and well-coordinated approach to policy implementation. Considerations on such a strategy will lead towards enhancing the chances of successful multiple policy implementations in rapidly transforming contexts.

The study presents the argument that stakeholders who have negative experiences of an evaluation policy issue remain sceptical of the value of similar policies. Stakeholders continue to draw on these deeply entrenched negative experiences to guide their future actions. Overcoming this scepticism is extremely difficult due to the many and sometimes unsuspecting, competing “forces of influence” operating in the environment. As a result, stakeholders find it virtually impossible to make the transition.

The multitudinous “forces of influence” constantly impacted on *Wagpos* practitioners, reinforcing or changing their conceptions of evaluation. Some of these forces are more dominant than others. The study acknowledges that although one cannot accurately predict the synergy effect of the forces on stakeholder understandings of policy, it is sensible to assume that these “forces of influence” may compliment views already held or oppose such views and either positively influence or severely hinder implementation.

I have found supporting evidence in this research study that there are key ingredients that compose a positive response to policy. These ingredients are a homogenous culture, bureaucratic responsiveness and hierarchical organisation. Co-existence of these three elements sets the stage for a positive response to official policy.

In my opening line of this dissertation I posed a question as follows: “Why is it that policies are seldom implemented as planned?” The research I have presented in this thesis has shown that policy implementation is not a “rational technical process in which official policy is a mirror image of institutional practice” (Jansen 2002). The study provides evidence that the course of policy implementation is influenced both positively and negatively by variables that exist and operate both within and outside the school context. At *Wagpos* these variables included staff development and resource assistance. At district level

the variables were more pronounced, that is, lack of physical and skilled human resources, poor communication networks, lack of a clear vision of roles and responsibilities, to name but a few. Politics played a profound role in the delay and derailment of policy implementation. However, variables such as a loyal and dedicated SMT and moral support from the school governing body, parents and circuit contributed positively towards steering policy implementation along.

There are also other “lessons learnt” from the case study on policy implementation at *Wagpos* High. Policy matters – it creates frameworks of aspiration and expectation, it shapes resource allocation, and it invites detailed consideration of implementation. But implementation should not be divorced from policy. From the outset the emphasis was on designing the WSE policy, obtaining agreement at the local level, and securing donor and local funds for the rollout. All this was done quickly. The later steps of implementation were considered to be “a simple process” that would resolve itself if the initial policy agreements were negotiated and commitments were made. But the seemingly routine questions of implementation formed the foundation which would determine the outcome of the policy, as was seen in the *Wagpos* case study.

The problem is to make the difficulties of implementation a part of the initial formulation of policy. Implementation must not be conceived as a process that takes place after, and independent of, the design of policy (Pressman & Wildavsky 1973:143). If implementation was considered during policy formulation then parallels would have been drawn with the DAS and this would have negated some of the subsequent difficulties experienced with the teacher unions during implementation. For example, a common teacher observation schedule would have been designed since this is an element in both policies.

For WSE policy implementation multiple stakeholders at various levels of the bureaucracy are involved. Overall, the process is lengthy and rendered unpredictable because of the many decision sequences in implementation, for example, external evaluation to be done by the school; self-evaluation to be done by the provincial team; oral and written reports to be done by the provincial team and then school development plans to be done by the school and district. Having each of these phases being conducted by different groups of individuals adds to the probability of stoppage or delay. This has been shown by the district’s inability (due to many reasons – see section 6.3.1) to assist the school with school development

planning resulting in (temporary?) stoppage of implementation. If the policymakers are to close the gap between design and implementation they should consider more direct means of accomplishing ends.

Finally, there may be people who think that attempts at implementing multiple policies in

A better balance and clear prioritisation seem to be needed when expecting schools to implement multiple policies. So also is more understanding of how stakeholders interpret, subvert, reinterpret, and assimilate policy ambitions through the actions they choose in the contexts that they operate in. The study also foregrounds the need to recognise the attitudes, values and motivation of teachers in processes of policy change. This is part of the complex interplay between the formulation and implementation of policy – the “policy gap” (Sayed & Jansen 2001) – that remains a central concern for system change. All these issues invite sharply focused enquiry to determine why such fundamental disjunctions occur and whether they really are inevitable. Also, I do believe that there is a need for research that unpacks each of the many issues highlighted in my study at the levels of theoretical frameworks and new models for understanding how multiple policies are implemented in rapidly transforming contexts such as South Africa.

This thesis has indicated the difficulties of implementing planned policy change even in contexts where there is a receptiveness to change. A profound contribution of this research is that it exposes the difficulties of formulating and realising appropriate institutional responses in a shifting and uncertain climate. Recently there has been an unleashing of a plethora of initiatives to rewrite the educational map of South Africa. The release of multiple policies has tested the capacity of schools for change up to and beyond reasonable limits. The research has shown that even in cases where schools are enthusiastic to implement policy they too experience difficulties and resort to compromises. Deeply entrenched practices and beliefs persist in the face of new policy. As teachers are constantly challenged to implement the bewildering array of policy texts issued about school and teacher evaluations in a relatively short space of time, these overloaded and fatigued teachers invent new ways of coping with the change. Teachers perceive what is significant in a practical situation and decide on appropriate action.

The skills, aspirations and energy of the leader are key attributes for steering the school through various cycles of change. Unity of purpose and harmonious cooperation among

members in an organisation are also essential if implementation of a reform is to occur, let alone succeed.

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Finally, there may be people that think that attempts at implementing multiple policies in transforming contexts such as South Africa are in vain – that these attempts may prove to have minimal chances (or none?) of success. I still believe that difficulties of implementation can be mitigated, but I urge continued scepticism if anyone suggests that inherent features of political life can be summarily abolished.

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What we call the beginning is often the end

And to make an end is to make a beginning

The end is where we start from.

(T.S. Eliot 1969:197).

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