CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

Problems arise when it comes to implementation of the policy[1]

In this chapter I survey the literature, drawing principally on the research dealing with policy implementation. I made the decision to concentrate on the general research on policy implementation in order to seek new interpretations and deeper understandings of the relationship between educational policy and classroom practice. The literature provided the conceptual basis for data collection plan, the research instruments used in this study, and the framework for the analysis of the data. The literature review emerged as a response to the targeted research questions in the study, which seeks to examine teacher understandings and beliefs about a new assessment policy, and to evaluate their classroom practices in relation to this assessment policy.

The knowledge base on policy implementation in the context of educational change and reform is formidable, and it is insightful for examining and understanding the relationship between macro-level policies and micro-level or classroom practice. Research on educational reform and policy implementation has been, and still is, the subject of substantial volume of research, debate and analysis among scholars both in developing and developing countries (see Angula and Grant-Lewis, 1997; Chisholm, 2000; Christie, 1998; Cohen 1990; Cohen and Ball, 1999; Cuban, 1988, 1993, 1999; Dunn, 2003; Elmore, 1996; Fullan, 1991, 1993, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2001, 2003; Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992; Hargreaves, 1994; Hargreaves, Earl and Ryan, 1996; Hargreaves, et al 1998; Jansen, 1998a, 1998b, 1999a; 1999b; 1999c; 2001a, 2001b,, 2002; Jansen and Christie, 1999; Newman and Wehlage, 1995; Reimers and McGinn, 1997; Sarason, 1990; Sayed & Jansen, 2001; Stigler and Hiebert, 1999; Spillane, et al., 2002; Stoll and Fink, 1996; Taylor and Vinjevold, 1999; Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Ward, et. al., 2003). Many of these studies claim that policy reforms designed to improve the quality of schooling have been more rhetorical than substantive in their impact in classrooms and schools, thus exposing the dissonance between policy

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[1] Excerpt from the interview with one of the case study teachers

intention and policy outcomes at the level of practice. In other words they show that policy is not self-executing. For example, Jansen (2002: 199) observes:

> [*Despite*] *unprecedented investments in policymaking and policy production …in South Africa, there appears to be very little change in the daily routines of schools and classrooms of the nation.*

Most reform efforts that have sought to significantly alter the status quo of schooling have been either adapted to fit what existed or sloughed off, allowing the system to remain essentially untouched (Cuban, 1988). Similarly, Elmore (1996: 1) argues:

> *Innovations that require large scale changes in the core of educational practices seldom penetrate more than a small fraction of U.S. schools and classrooms, and seldom lasts for very long when they do.*

Many educational policy studies attempted to provide explanations for the policy gaps. For example, Jansen (2001) invokes the construct of 'political symbolism' to argue that the failure of policy is a direct result of the over-investment of the state in the political symbolism of policy rather than in its practical implementation, (see also Smith et al., 2004). Jansen (2002: 200) theorizes:

> *Every single case of education policymaking demonstrates, in different ways, the preoccupation of the state with settling policy struggles in the political domain rather than in the realm of practice.*

Fullan (2001) argued that a large part of the problem is more a question of the difficulties related to planning and coordinating a multilevel social process involving thousands of people, who are much more unpredictable and difficult to deal with than with things such as policy. Angula and Grant-Lewis (1997) ascribe implementation problems to the overstretching of the system that was operating on many reform fronts, a lack of will to act, limited understanding and skills, and lack of support. Reimers and McGinn (1997) contend that policies fail because conditions to facilitate dialogue and organizational learning were absent. Other research on the implementation of policy indicates that policy ideas rarely translate unproblematically into classroom practice, and that implementers often undermine or alter policy intentions (Garn, 1999). This supports prior research that revealed that innovations were seldom implemented in the classroom in exactly the same way that the developers had intended (Elmore & Sykes, 1992). Allington (200:12) summarised his

findings on the studies of policy implementation as "few policies are faithfully implemented". He used the concept of "policy collisions" (ibid) to describe the contradictory mandates produced by policy. Familiarity with this litany of unsuccessful educational reform efforts or policy slippages during the implementation process is valuable for this study as it would enable me to recognize, consider and retain the messiness and complexity of policy implementation.

It is insightful and relevant to my study to use the work of McLaughlin (1998: 70-84) who, in the context of the Rand Change Agent Study in the USA, investigated how federal education policies whose intent was to stimulate change in local practices, made their way through levels of government and practice. McLaughlin (1998) reported that as officials at various levels of the policy system responded to new education policies of the government, "implementation issues were revealed in all their complexity, intractability, and inevitably" (p.70). The issues surrounding the dilemma of translating educational policies into classroom practice are certainly not new. The problem and complexity of implementing policies was first described in the early 1970s by Jeffrey Pressman and Aaron Wildavsky who, in their investigation on the complexities of policy implementation, found that implementers did not always do as they were told, nor did they always act to maximize the policy objectives, but "responded in what often seemed quite idiosyncratic, frustratingly unpredictable, if not downright resistant ways" (p.70). This resulted in outcomes not only contrary to policy expectations, but also to enormous variability (ibid). McLaughlin observed:

> [*It*] *is exceedingly difficult for policy to change practice, especially across levels of government. Contrary to the 1:1 relationship assumed to exist between policy and practice, the Change Agent Study demonstrated that the nature, amount, and pace of change at the local level was a product of local factors that were largely beyond the control of higher-level policy makers.*

 (p71, emphasis in original)

This finding challenges the theory that enhanced inputs, namely more money or better policies would result in improved practice at the local level, as well as the assumption that a direct or linear relationship existed between policy and practice (ibid). McLaughlin also noted that policies ignored the "black box" of local practices, beliefs and traditions (p71) Furthermore, she noted that the dynamic, changing nature of local

factors over time produced strategically and substantively different contexts for policy (ibid.). One of the conclusions of the Rand Study was that the outcome of policy "depends on how policy is interpreted and transformed at each point in the process, and finally on the response of the individual at the end of the line" (p72). This resonates with the observations made by Bowe et al. (1992) in Looney (2001:157) that "policies will be interpreted differently as the histories, experiences, values, purposes and interests, which make up an arena, differ. The simple point is that policy makers cannot control the meanings teachers make of policies. Similarly, Darling-Hammond (1998) claims that policy is re-invented at each level of the system and that what finally happens in classrooms and schools is related more to the beliefs, knowledge, resources, motivation and leadership operating at the local level than is related to the intentions of the policy-makers. Allington (2000) supports such views that the implementation of educational policies entails translation of the policy by individual teachers. Elmore (1983) refers to this view about the fundamental importance of classroom teachers understanding, interpreting and translating policy to practice as "the power of the bottom over the top". Fullan (2001) similarly contends that changes in understandings and beliefs, which he refers to as 'first principles', are the foundation of achieving sustainable reform. The above review is relevant and valuable to this research study that seeks to explore, examine and explain teachers' understanding and beliefs of a new policy on assessment.

Understanding change is related to capacity and the will to change, the two critical variables identified by McLaughlin (1998:72) in affecting the outcomes of the implementation process. Furthermore, if policy gets interpreted, transformed or re-invented from one level to another, as indicated, it suggests that in the South African context, policies will get transformed or re-invented as it passes through the various levels of bureaucracy, namely from national level to provincial level to district level to the school level and finally to the classroom level – four bureaucratic levels of interpretation. If one follows the logic of re-invention above, the implication is that the policy interpreted by the classroom teacher would be substantially different from that of the policy-maker at national level: political will and local capacity will play themselves out here because will and capacity are not neutral concepts. They are loaded with different ideologies, values and belief systems. Relevant to this line of

thought is the observation by Manganyi[2] (2001:28) that in South Africa there are complex political, attitudinal, economic and even psychological forces at work, the interplay of which determine the depth, scale and sustainability of change. This observation finds resonance with the observation that policy, including implementation is not devoid of politics, power, competing interests and conflicting struggles (Jansen, 2001a:271). This means that these forces could shape the understanding, interpretation, transformation and implementation of policies by classroom teachers. Furthermore local capacity and will not only are beyond the reach of policy, they change over time (McLaughlin, 1998).

Another conclusion of the Rand Study was that "implementation signals mutual adaptation" (McLaughlin, 1998:73). This suggests that the policy and local realities undergo mutual adaptation, which the study regards as useful since local factors are recognized in integrating and shaping policy and practice. The study claims that adaptation and variability are good. Glaser (1991) concurs that adaptation can provide for a range of opportunities for success. Mutual adaptation suggests a dialectical relationship between policy and practice as opposed to a direct relationship where policy and practice are dichotomised. My concern about mutual adaptation relates to the possibility of deliberate distortion of policy objectives and local realities by competing interest groups under the guise of adaptation, thereby undermining and subverting the goals of the educational reform and transformation agenda. I am also concerned about the extent to which adaptations could compromise the quality of implementation and its corresponding implications for achieving equity in education. The Rand Study also emphasized the critical role of local implementation and the 'street level bureaucrats' who decide about classroom practice (McLaughlin, 1998). Fullan (1993: 77), in arguing that "the actions of the teachers, the frontline agents of change, are critical to successful implementation" supports this. Malcolm (2001:200) also supports this view when he states that teachers are agents who are closest to learners, who work at the critical interface of teaching, learning and assessment. I agree with this view of the critical role of teachers in making decisions regarding classroom practice because they are closest to their students and know them better. I also believe that teachers as agents, rather than victims of change, can and do

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[2] The first democratically elected Director-General of national education in South Africa from 1994 to 1999

influence policy change (Sayed, 2001:195; Welton, 2001:175). But I do not regard teachers as a homogenous group who respond to change in uniform ways. This is confirmed by Datnow and Castellano (2000) that teachers respond to school reforms in varied ways such as pushing or sustaining reform efforts, resisting or subverting them in active or passive ways. This literature is essential to this study since the focus of this study is teachers or 'street level bureaucrats' working in their real classrooms from where insights into the implementation process could be mined.

I agree with Lieberman (1998) that changing teachers and schools is a long-term process involving an understanding of the policy problem and the local culture of individual schools and their teachers. Fullan (1999) concurs that translating ideas into practice is a more complex process than is realised. The difficulty of changing policy into practice is also reflected in a comparative study of assessment in a cross-section of countries, where it was found that:

> *The methods of assessment, the large scale use of marks and grades and the ways in which the results were recorded, did not lend themselves to any systematic use being made of assessment information to improve the quality of either teaching or learning.*

(Macintosh, 1994 in Pryor and Akwesi, 1998, p. 269)

Research reports on assessment practice in England also revealed that implementing assessment to improve pupil achievement was a problem (DES, 1992 in Harlen, et al., 1992). Black and William (1989b) also found that there was a widespread pattern of assessment practices that did not foster pupil learning. With reference to research on National Assessment in England and Wales, Torrance (1993) found that new approaches to assessment did not automatically have a positive impact on teaching and learning. In the USA, it was found that policies that have the greatest appeal are those least likely to produce any substantial change in teaching and learning (Muller and Roberts, 2000).

Similarly, in South Africa it was found that although teachers often claim enthusiasm for new policies, on close examination the actual classroom changes are modest (Chisholm, 2000; Jansen, 1999a; 1999b; 1999c; Taylor and Vinjevolt, 1999). The neglect of implementation concerns in the new education policies is argued to be a

fundamental flaw that had severely compromised the capacity of the policies to deliver change (Jansen and Christie, 1999). This gap between policy and practice is supported by Sayed & Jansen (2001:1) who add that "little had changed 'on the ground'" and that "South African Education is awakening to the fact that policy ideals seldom match classroom practice" (p2). This is the gloomy reality on the ground despite the heavy ideological investment in new curriculum policies (Jansen & Christie, 1999) and despite the claim that formal education policies in South Africa can be compared favourably to the best in the world (Asmal, 1999). Vally (2003) goes further, placing the policy implementation problem in a broader macro-economic context:

> [*The*] *overarching and political choice of GEAR[3]has had and continues to have a major impact on social development options, resource availability and social delivery at the local level.*

With reference to the implementation of education policies during the transition in South Africa, Manganyi (2001:32-36) refers to intrinsic factors such as the conception and development of the policy, and extrinsic factors such as resources to support the implementation process, as determining the chances of successful policy implementation. He outlines the mediating role of social institutions, both statutory and non-statutory, created by government. The Constitution, he argues, legitimates the separation of functions between the government and those social institutions that enjoy a high degree of operational autonomy. The position of Managyi is as follows: the lack or failure of implementation is blamed on the inability of the statutory institutions to execute their mandate; the national government is innocent because its function is not implementation of policy; the implementation functions of the public service sector have limited administrative and management experience; the three-tier system of government, namely, national, provincial and local is complicated because the Constitution again legitimates the differentiating functions of each tier; the national minister has executive accountability for higher education and all national policy in respect of the school system, while the provincial government have executive responsibilities for the schools under their jurisdiction; in some provinces there was widespread role confusion between politicians and senior public servants,

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[3] Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy, the macroeconomic framework of the democratic South African government released in 1996

which resulted in conflict and high turnover of senior education officials; and the national government did not have sufficient human and material resources to cope with the scale and complexity of the education change process. This complexity and frustrations with implementation resulted in a Cabinet directive for a "more hands-on, supportive and interventionist approach in national-provincial relations" (p33). This account suggests the reactive orientation of the government in the policy process, and its lack of attention to understanding the implementation process at the time of policy formulation and declaration. This is supported by Nzimande (2001:3) who attests to the lack of understanding and resources required to influence the formal process of policy implementation.

In a related study, Welton (2001:175) found that one of the results of South Africa's new policy-making and legislation programme had been the deskilling and disempowering of teachers and managers whose professional knowledge and identity have been challenged. He argues that although the challenging of professional knowledge and identity is necessary it needs to be accompanied by a strategy for implementation that includes a major programme of reskilling and re-empowerment. He bemoans the absence of a systematic, system-wide strategy for implementation at the level of practice (p176). He adds that the process of implementation generally is still very uneven and weak overall (ibid.). He uses the metaphor of 'tissue rejection' of a foreign implant to illustrate the fate of our new policies at the level of practice (p180).

The explanations for the lack of fit between education policy and practice in postcolonial states are usually ascribed to the lack of resources, the legacy of inequality and the lack of capacity to translate the policy intent into practical reality (Jansen, 2001b:271).   Jansen (ibid) challenges this conventional view and charges that "this is a view of policy that is devoid of politics and of power, of competing interests and conflicting struggles" (ibid). He uses this charge to provoke a challenge to the conventional view in terms of the policy intent, that is, he asks, "What if the policy stated was not in the first instance intended to change practice? What if other primary motivations lay behind the generation of new policies rather than transforming realities of teaching and learning in classrooms?" (p. 271).   He uses empirical analysis to develop a theory of 'political symbolism' to explain non-

implementation of policy or lack of change in South African education reform after apartheid despite considerable political investment in efforts to change apartheid schooling (Jansen, 2001b, 2002). He describes the policy-making process in South Africa as a "struggle for the achievement of a broad political symbolism to mark the shift from apartheid to post-apartheid society" (Jansen 2001b: 272). He rightly claims that the state was preoccupied with settling policy struggles not in the realm of practice but rather in the political domain (p. 272). He continues that political symbolism in policy development is disconnected from any serious concerns about changing educational practice (ibid: 273). He observes that politicians and the public pay more attention to the development of policy rather than to its implementation. Hence he adds that our policies receive much praise because it can be compared to the best in the world (Asmal, 1999). This, he continues, serves to consolidate the view of the political importance of the formal statement of policy in South Africa reflecting South Africa's fascination with policy statements and its social validation rather than their implementation (ibid). He correctly adds that implementation was not conceptualized as an advanced planning tool but something improvised or constructed through crisis, and that policy documents are not accompanied by implementation plans. He argues further that the continued over-reliance on political symbolism as the overarching framework for education policy rules out change in schools and improvement in education quality (ibid: 284-5).   By implication, an argument is being made that for change in practice to occur, deliberate attention should be focused on implementation that is "concerned with the sobering realities of making change happen in practical terms in sites where it is most manifest and effective, such as schools" (ibid: 7). I fully support his argument because it is paying deliberate, focused attention to understanding more accurately and deeply the dynamics and complexity of implementing change at the classroom level – the level that matters most because that is where we can directly make a difference to the lives of our students. De Clerq (1997) endorses this view.

This literature identified the potholes that mark the bumpy road to effective policy implementation. These studies demonstrate that most policies are not necessarily implemented as intended by the policy. Various arguments are offered for successful implementation: McLaughlin (1998) argues that local capacity and will, context and teachers professional communities are essential for success; Fullan (2001) argues that

a system of interactive factors such as the characteristics of the change (need, clarity, complexity, quality/practicality), local characteristics (district, community, principal, teacher) and external characteristics (government and other agencies) will accomplish change in practice. Garn (1999) shows how implementer attitudes to support policies ensured successful implementation. Jansen (2001b, 2002) uses a 'theory of political symbolism' to explain non-implementation of policy; Datnow and Castellano (2000) show how teachers' beliefs, experiences and adaptations shape implementation. The absence of a collaborative framework has been identified as a significant barrier to implementation of education reform in the Czech Republic (Polyzoi and Cerná, 2001). Allington (2001) argues that it is the time lag between the emergence of new policies and the initiation of the implementation of the policies that causes implementation problems. Others argue that local policy implementation is undermined because of the inability of state policymakers to craft clear and consistent directives with respect to the behaviours desired from the implementers (Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1981; Van Meter & Horn, 1975). Woodbury et al (2002) provide an alternative model to the implementation dilemma in response to their view that many perspectives on school reform did not adequately account for the complexity of the educational change process.

This exploration of the literature on educational policy implementation revealed very few if any arguments made for <u>deeper</u> understandings and explanations for the policy implementation dilemma. The exceptions are Coburn (2003), Fullan (2003) and McLaughlin and Mitra (2001). And these studies are located in developed countries. In developing countries contexts especially in South Africa, it is only Jansen and Taylor (2003) who argue for "deep and wide" (p.43) systemic reform. Their view:

> *We define systemic reform as having a breadth aspect –*
> *reaching across the education system to connect key leverage*
> *points that affect the education reform goals – and a <u>depth</u>*
> *aspect – reaching down the education system to ensure <u>deep</u>*
> *and sustainable change in the government's education reform*
> *initiatives.*

(p. 43, emphasis added)

Extending this deep change discourse in educational reform initiatives, I suggest a broader theoretical framework to understand the relationship between policy and practice, so that educational reforms are not only large scale in terms of going broader

but they also go deeper. In the next chapter I advance and articulate the conceptual framework employed in this study within which educational policy implementation could be examined and explained in an environment characterized by complex, multiple, contradictory and shifting priorities.

Summary of Chapter Two

This chapter explored the extant literature on education policy implementation in both developed and developing countries. I report that while most reform initiatives have educationally impressive intents such as calling for more intellectually demanding content and pedagogy for everyone, the outcomes of these reform initiatives at the level of classroom practice is less than impressive. Implementation scholars have offered numerous explanations for the dissonance between policy and practice. The chapter argues for a broader perspective of understanding this complex and dynamic relationship between policy and practice. The framework proposed is meant to supplement rather than supplant existing accounts of the policy implementation process. The next chapter elaborates on this new conceptual framework.