

EDLS018



Educational Leadership in South Africa
Lecture 4
The bumpy road of implementation

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THE BUMPY ROAD OF IMPLEMENTATION

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THE BUMPY ROAD OF IMPLEMENTATION
(Title of article by HJ Stone, 1997)

Some platitudes (trite knowledge) about reform and implementation:

- You cannot legislate change.
- Reforms are plagued by many unintended consequences.
- Reforms often flounder on the rocks of reality (Roos).
- The predictable failure of educational reform (Saranson) – because power relationships are not considered.
- Our generation has to do it (reform) (Saranson).
- It is not that nothing has happened, that a new era has not been entered. Rather that era having been entered, it is necessary now to live in it rather than imagine it, and that is a deflating experience (Geertz). *
- Utopian visions are dangerous fallacies (Paul Johnson). *
- A new horse is more difficult to ride than the beautiful promises and ideals indicated.
- Reform is often characterized by government inaction (Cibulka) .*

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* Quoted by Stone, 1998: The world keeps on turning (published in Afrikaans)

THE BUMPY ROAD OF IMPLEMENTATION continued ...

While great strides have been made in the past 12 years to equalize the education system, this process has not always produced equality or equity in outcomes for the learners who pass through our school gates. It is thus an opportune time to take stock of the achievements and identify the obstacles that block the realization of the right to basic education.

The stark imbalances of access to resources, services and opportunity undoubtedly impacts on the fragility of our democracy. The right to basic education is a facilitative right that unlocks many other rights and it is a right that ultimately will decide whether, in a sense, one is able to give effect to the wonderful sentiments expressed in our Constitution. It is thus critical that we engage on these issues. This engagement is made easier by the large amount of research that has been completed in recent years and that has assisted the Commission in carrying out its task.



South African Human Rights Commission. 2006.
Report of the Public Hearing on the Right to Basic Education

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1 OVERTURES TO DEMOCRACY



- Starting with the HSRC Report (1981), the state and the democratic movement (the ANC and its allies) entered the debate on changing the education system from a racially-based one to a non-racial and democratic one and offered various policy options.
- A vigorous debate on the question of how much power should be distributed and at what levels of the system they should be located.
- The issue of decentralizing powers of governance was never questioned. Neither was the notion of meaningful powers of governance at school level ever seriously contested.

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Political symbolism



- 1994 saw the newly elected democratic government embarking on the road of implementation of policy on the back of a landslide victory at the polls.
- It enjoyed global legitimacy.
- One would have expected decisive action in the form of laws and policies and vigorous implementation to transform the education system and to create vehicles that would deliver on promises.
- The new government created an impressive array of laws and policies that made strong democratic control over schools possible.
- However, from annual matric exam results and reports on various investigations one gathers the distinct impression that many of the good things brought about by 1994 have reached but a small number of schools (Department of Education, 2001).

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Political symbolism continued ...



- Generally, the situation in many of the previously-disadvantaged schools is still desperate with a lack of resources and funding.
- Most of the former better-resourced schools seem to be doing business as usual.
- Jansen (2002) invoked the concept of political symbolism to explain the apparent lack of progress and to answer the question, "What if policies were never intended primarily to change the situation at a practical level?"
- Stone (1997) quotes Cibulka's concepts of "inactions of government" and "what governments choose not to do" in support of his description of policy after 1994 as a "policy of disguise".



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Political symbolism continued ...

- The phenomenon often takes the form of compromise formulations containing deliberate ambiguities that appear to be conciliatory but lead to a great deal of confusion.
- Davies (2003) refers to the primacy of political ideology over practical educational considerations.
- It was initially more important for the state to record symbolically that it had won a struggle and was in control than actually changing practical situations.
- One cannot argue that the state did not want to change the system, but there is compelling evidence that it was hard for them to demonstrate in practice that they were succeeding.
- Practical implementation of policies was perhaps not given the attention it deserved.



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