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### Document

#### **Teachers as Mediators Between Educational Policy and Practice**

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Brain, K., Reid, I., & Comerford Boyes, L. (2006). Teachers as Mediators Between Educational Policy and Practice. *Educational Studies*, 32(4), 411-423.

#### Abstract :

Introducing change in education is no easy feat. Successful implementation of educational policies depends on a host of factors. Among them, the role of teachers is a critical element since they are the ones who eventually serve as mediators between education policies and their delivery. To date, the nature of this mediating role and its effects have not been much studied.

#### Authors' Goal

The goal of this article was to study the role of teachers as mediators between policy and practice in the British context and suggest a typology of teachers' level of adaptation to educational policies. A greater understanding of this role could lead to the development of educational policies better adapted to the school setting, ensure more successful implementation and, ultimately, foster students' higher academic achievement.

#### Typology of Teachers' Level of Adaptation

Reforms implemented in England in recent decades have gradually changed the role of teachers especially by curtailing their freedom of action. These changes have led to the creation of a functionalist model of policy implementation in which teachers are seen as technocratic implementers of policy to enhance school effectiveness. As such, it is taken for granted that teachers will subscribe to the policy and dovetail their practices with the role dictated in this policy.

Nevertheless, there is a range of possible responses. To better understand these, the authors presented a typology inspired by the Merton typology of adaptation to social systems.

This typology is based on two elements: goals and means. Even when goals are widely accepted, the means used can vary according to the level of adaptation of each individual. The success of policy implementation depends on the extent to which players accept the goals and adopt the means.

The typology includes five levels of teachers' adaptation to educational policies:

- (1) Conformity – Acceptance of goals and application of means as prescribed;
- (2) Innovation – Acceptance of goals but rejection of practice (prescribed means);
- (3) Ritualism – Rejection of policy (goals) but acceptance of practice;
- (4) Retreatism – Rejection of both practice and policy;
- (5) Rebellion – Rejection but substitution of policy and practice (teachers' creativity).

#### Illustration Based on the Application of Various Policies

The authors then presented examples of research and assessment projects on national and local policies to illustrate the mediating role of teachers in the application of reforms. Among these examples were the Education Action Zone and Network Learning Community. Other examples dealing with more general aspects of educational policies were also presented, such as Accelerated Learning, teaching gifted children, teaching of reading.

#### Conclusion

One of the avenues likely to increase the chances of successfully implementing a policy is to consider utilizing teachers' professional knowledge, skills and values in the policy-making process. Therefore, a collaborative approach is preferable to a prescriptive approach.

In addition, the authors emphasized the importance of raising the awareness of teachers under training of their roles as mediators between policy and practice, and encouraging them to reflect on policies and explore all the possible alternatives in policy application.

In conclusion, if policies are better adapted to the needs of teachers and, in turn, teachers are better prepared for policy application, the chances of success are increased tenfold by this very fact. Ultimately, students will only benefit from the improvement of teachers' mediating role.

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**Key Words :**

Education Reform, Implementation, Support, Teachers' Roles, Reform Mediators, Change in Education, Teacher Training, Newsletter5