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LINKAGES BETWEEN FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL LEVELS IN EDUCATIONAL REFORM[1]

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In this chapter, we examine key linkages between systemic levels that impact classroom and school-level educational reform. Clearly, reform requires coordinated support (Datnow & Kemper, 2002; Earl et al., 2003). There is much that policy-makers, politicians, researchers, other reform stakeholders, principals and teachers need to know in order to effectively support the development and sustaining of high quality teaching and learning. People involved in trying to improve learning for all students often find themselves having to design systems for which they know no precedent. They must problem-solve in unfamiliar ways, develop up-to-date curricula, and coordinate resources in ways they have never before done. This requires systemic inquiry and system-wide capacity building. One of the least researched, yet most salient factors in educational reform is the linkages that exist across policy domains, and understanding how various kinds of resources work to strengthen – or tear asunder – these linkages.

The specific focus of this chapter is on explicating the linkages between systemic policy levels – primarily, between school, district, and state levels. We will address the following questions:

- What systemic linkages seem to be most effective in the process of school improvement?
- What systemic linkages seem to be least effective in the process of school improvement?
- How can understanding linkages inform our understanding of school reform?

We draw upon existing research to bring to light the linkages that exist between policy domains. In identifying the salient linkages between policy domains, the impact on the school level is highlighted, as this is the arena of central interest. We conclude the chapter with implications for future policy, practice, and further research.

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This chapter draws from one part of an extensive review of educational reform literature in the U.S. (Datnow, Lasky, Stringfield, & Teddlie, forthcoming). Our present analysis relies on a more limited review of research on school reform in the U.S. and on the empirical work that has evaluated the implementation of standards-based reforms in Ontario, Canada, and England. We limited our review to studies that deal with at least two levels of school systems (e.g., state and district, district and school). However, in trying to identify the linkages between the domains that comprise the policy system, it became apparent that there is a dearth of empirical research that has as its primary goal identifying or describing such linkages. Hence, in what follows we make inferences of linkages that exist across levels. We try to be clear regarding when text describes actual research as contrasted with our own inferences. We first present the theoretical framework that orients this review of research and our understanding of the linkages.

Theoretical Framework

We conceptualize the educational system as an interconnected and interdependent policy system. It is an open system, with permeable and malleable boundaries, embedded within a larger global context. When we speak of linkages, we generally focus on five enduring policy domains. These are: federal, state/provincial, district/board, school, and classroom. There are other policy domains not explicitly focused on for this analysis that are also significant arenas that shape policy processes, as a more comprehensive investigation was beyond what we could address in this chapter. These include teachers' unions, local communities, external professional development providers, universities, and non-governmental organizations.

Each domain is a unique policy context. The educational reform process can be conceived as a web of interrelated conditions and consequences, where the consequences of actions in one context may become the conditions for the next (Hall & McGinty, 1997, p. 461, in Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002). In other words, interactions in one policy domain generate "outcomes," such as policy statements, or new procedures, which in turn potentially condition the interactions of other actors in other domains in the policy system.

Similarly, we consider educational policy to be a social construction. Educational reform mandates represent a coalition of interests brought together under a common name at a particular point in time (Goodson, 2000). Educational policies are generated when people representing multiple interests and roles interact as they aim specific actions at a problem for announced purposes (Placer, Hall, & Benson, 2000). Ultimately, they are an expression of peoples' values, beliefs, and political or moral purposes that are embedded in contexts of power, relationship, institutional and societal norms, and economic or political movements that are unique to the time in which policies are generated (Lasky, 2001).

A core feature of our framework is the definition of linkages. A linkage creates

the connection between two otherwise disconnected points. It is an expression of existing capacity, while also being an aspect of potential capacity building. A linkage can be formal as in an official mandate or policy, or informal as in telephone communication, or email between colleagues. A linkage can be structural, as with funding that comes from state, provincial or the federal government to support schools. It can be relational as when district or board leaders work with friends or professional colleagues in the community as a way to develop partnerships. A linkage can also be ideological. This is especially important when reform stakeholders hold different beliefs or ideologies about the purposes of reform, how reform should look, or how it should be achieved. As we will discuss in the next section, just as important as the linkage between two policy domains is coordinating the movement of human and material resources across the linkage because a linkage is only a passageway or pathway between two or more policy domains. It is not necessarily reflective of how it is (or is not) used, nor is it reflective of quality of the resources or communications that cross it.

The Most Important Systemic Linkages in School Reform

In this section, we address linkages that appear to be most salient for moving communication and resources across policy domains in the process of educational reform in today's schools. We found a striking consistency in linkages that were present across policy domains both within the U.S. and in the other countries. In those sections that only include U.S. research, it is because we found no international literature that explicitly addressed the presence the linkage under discussion. This is not to say such work does not exist, just that we did not find it while conducting the review for this chapter. Lastly, we wish to note that we use the terms "reform" and "improvement efforts" interchangeably throughout the text.

Federal, State/Provincial Financial Support for Public Schools and for Reform

Public schools in the U.S., Canada, and most of Europe are dependent on state or provincial, and federal dollars for their basic operating needs and for funding their improvement efforts. Funding formulas and structures to support schools vary across international contexts, and within the U.S considerably. Some have adequacy models, which intentionally create structures to channel financial resources to special needs, second language, and high poverty students, while other models emphasize equity across schools, and tend towards lower levels of basic funding of schools and improvement efforts (Berne & Stiefel, 1999; Carr & Fuhrman, 1999; Gindey, 1999; Guthrie & Rothstein, 1999; Helsby, 1999; Ladd, Chalk, & Hansen, 1999; Odden & Clune, 1998; Whitty, Power, & Halpin, 1998). These different funding models have a direct affect on the amount of actual dollars allocated to schools for teaching and learning.

Improvement efforts are proving to be more expensive and labor intensive than many policy-makers or school reformers imagined. Little is known about how much financial support is actually needed for schools to meet the challenge of providing all students with a high quality education (Finnigan, O'Day, & Wakelyn, 2003; Guthrie & Rothstein, 1999; Ladd, Chalk, & Hansen, 1999). We do know, however, that the way these resources are organized and structured can facilitate or hinder capacity building efforts[2] (Anyon, 1997; Christman & Rhodes, 2002; Earl et al., 2000; Ladd, Chalk, & Hansen, 1999; Massell, 1998).

For example, the provincial government in Ontario passed a complex package of standards-based school reform mandates in the mid 1990s. Core components of the reforms included new funding formulas based on a centralized equity model to provide equal amounts of funding to all provincial schools. As a result of these structural changes in funding, many provincial schools found themselves receiving fewer resources, while a few high poverty schools found themselves with slightly more financial support than they had received pre-reforms. With the exception of those in the poorest schools, teachers and administrators from ten schools across Ontario reported that the reduced funding substantively interfered with their ability to provide educational programs that could meet the new more rigorous provincial standards (Earl et al., 2002).

Within the US, state funding models vary greatly with some states having virtually no difference between what students in high poverty and low poverty schools receive. For instance in 2003, New Jersey reportedly spent $10,038 per student in low-poverty districts, and $10,026 per student in high-poverty districts-a difference of $12, or 0.1% (this equalization was due to a court order), while Illinois spent $7,760 per students in low-poverty districts, and $5,561– a difference of $2,384, or 39.5% (Carey, 2003). These differences both in total spending per student, and spending for high and low poverty students have real consequences for student learning and for schools' capacity for reform (Ladd, Chalk, & Hansen, 1999; Minorini & Sugarman, 1999; Odden, 1999). In sum, school and reform funding operates as a key linkage between systemic levels as it is a structural condition for both the basic operating of schools, and for supporting improvement efforts.

Resource Partnerships

What we call "resource partnerships" refers to a linkage that focuses on bringing some form of human or material resources to states, districts, or schools in need of additional resources to support improvement efforts. Improving teaching and learning in schools requires financial resources to hire external partners capable of increasing leadership capacity, and teacher content and pedagogical skill and knowledge; technological resources, books, teaching guides, and other material resources are often necessary as well (Finnigan, O'Day, & Wakelyn, 2003; Hamann & Lane, 2002; Horn, 2000; Longoria, 1998).

States, districts, and schools that have been more successful in sustaining improved teaching and learning generated extra financial resources by realigning

funding sources and/or finding new sources of money that supported their improvement efforts (Clune, 1998; Lusi, 1997; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). These can be partnerships with external partners such as reform design teams, philanthropic organizations, businesses or other community organizations, or universities (Bodilly, 2001; Datnow, Borman, Stringfield, Overman, & Castellano, 2003; Henig, Hula, Orr, & Pedescleaux, 1999; Stone, Henig, Jones, & Pedescleaux, 2001). This kind of linkage is particularly important for high poverty districts or schools simply to bring financial and human resources up to a level closer to what middle-class and wealthy districts and schools enjoy by virtue of their locale and tax base (Horn, 2000; Snipes, Doolittle, & Herlihy, 2002). Such resource partnerships in the U.S. have been facilitated by the federal Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) program and through Title I, both of which are federal funding programs that have been used by local school for building partnerships with reform design teams offering research-based reform models (Datnow & Kemper, 2002; Borman & D'Agostino, 2001).

Educational Policy Generated from Governmental Agencies

Educational policy generated from higher governmental agencies to local schools is one of the most robust and enduring linkages in virtually all educational systems around the world (Gidney, 1999; Jennings, 2003; Whitty, Power, & Halpin, 1998). Reform efforts are increasingly being initiated from these higher levels, greatly affecting how schools and districts work. The foci and intent of governmental education policy are shaped by historical, social, economic, and political circumstances, and thus change over time (Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Massell, 1998). The U.S., Ontario, and England have all seen new policies from the federal or provincial level that have significantly reshaped several dimensions of schooling, and notions of accountability (Ball, 2003; Cuban, 2003; Leithwood, Steinbeck, & Jantzi, 2000a; Pollard, Broadfoot, Croll, Osborn, & Abott, 1994; Whitty, Power, & Halpin, 1998). Governments in these countries have attempted system changing through policy mandates. With such a prevalence of educational policy from higher governmental agencies, one of the most salient linkages that exist between systemic levels is top-down educational policy. Policy significantly shapes many aspects of schooling including how schools are funded, what reform efforts look like, how they will be funded, and for what processes or outcomes they will be held accountable.

Accountability Policies and Systems are Powerful Linkages Between the Federal Government, States, Districts, and Schools

The standards and accountability systems that have been developed over the last decade are perhaps the most prominent linkages between the federal, state or province and districts, boards, and schools that we now see. Some policy-makers and reformers hold relatively top-down notions of accountability, while others hold more distributed notions of "symmetric accountability," which

include shared responsibility on the parts of students, teachers, administrators, researchers and policymakers in improvement efforts (Linn, 2003; Porter & Chester, 2001).

While designed for school improvement, state or district accountability systems can both facilitate and interfere with school improvement efforts (Elmore & Burney, 1998; Finnigan, O'Day, & Wakelyn, 2003; Hannaway, 2003; Leithwood, Steinbeck, & Jantzi, 2000b; Porter & Chester, 2002; Spillane, 1996; Spillane, 1999; Stein, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002). In England and the U.S., several efforts at improving classroom teaching and learning that have achieved modest increases in student test scores focused on system-wide internal capacity building to develop or choose, coordinate, and finance appropriate assessments, content and performance standards, and support systems for low performing schools (Anderson, 2003; Department for Education and Skills, 2002; Guthrie & Rothstein, 1999; Hamann & Lane, 2002; Hightower, 2002; Mac Iver & Farley, 2003; Togneri & Anderson, 2003; Wallace, 2000). On the other hand, accountability systems that saw no increases in student achievement tended to focus on sanctions, a strategy we describe below in the section on ineffective linkages.

Countries, states and local jurisdictions have varying strategies for providing support to schools that are low performing on standardized tests. England has one of the more extensive systems of providing learning opportunities to both teachers in schools and to Local Education Authorities (LEAs) that provide professional development to teachers (Department for Education and Skills, 2002). The system has undergone quite significant revision and reorganization over the years of the Literacy and Numeracy reforms, as reform stakeholders learned what was working, and what was not (Earl et al., 2003). One of the most challenging aspects teachers in Ontario faced while implementing the new secondary school curriculum was that they had close to half of their professional development days discontinued as part of the bundle of reform mandates. This was exacerbated with a lack of qualified professional developers to guide teachers through the new curriculum and accountability practices (Earl et al., 2002). In this instance linkages necessary to facilitate implementation of the new curriculum and accountability practices were not included as part of the province's implementation plan.

In the U.S., states differ in their approach to accountability and developing support systems, some are more centralized than others (Lusi, 1997; Oakes, Quartz, Ryan, & Lipton, 2000). States with strong centralized policies need a way to bridge the gap between policy makers and practitioners, while local control states find that the assessment/support network format has been a politically acceptable way to provide strong instructional guidance. In both kinds of states, assessments and professional development networks have been used to bridge the often substantial gaps between the large "grain size" of the standards and the more specific tasks demanded by teaching and learning (Clune, 1998).

In summary, accountability systems are one of the most significant linkages across policy domains. They both facilitate and interfere with improving teaching

and learning particularly in classrooms. Standards-based reform is based on the assumption that systemic linkages are in place, and that capacity especially at higher levels in the educational system exist to support such complex reforms. That assertion is unproven and provides ample ground for further research.

Professional Development and Learning Partnerships

"Learning partnerships," or a focus on increasing the knowledge or skills of people in varying levels in the policy system, can be a key linkage in educational reform. Because we address system-wide learning, we use professional development and learning to refer to the acquisition of skills and knowledge necessary to facilitate reform implementation across all policy domains and increased student learning in schools. Reform stakeholders from countries around the world who have made the most significant inroads to improving teaching and learning in schools, as measured by standardized tests of student content and or process knowledge, and teacher reports of implementation, have taken seriously their responsibility to learn what needs to be done to achieve improvement goals (Hamann & Lane, 2002; Harris, 2002; Wallace, 2000; Lusi, 1997). Learning opportunities include both formal and informal educational sessions; visiting other countries, provinces, districts, boards, or schools that have been more successful in their improvement efforts; hiring outside experts or vendors to provide professional development; or conferences where people successful in a specific domain or skill share their knowledge or expertise with less skilled others (Clune, 2001; Datnow & Kemper, 2002; Day, 1999; Harris, 2002; Horn, 2000; Levin, 2000; Ross & Hannay, 1997; Stoll, 1999).

Although the evidence is still scant indicating that professional development can lead to increased student achievement as measured by standardized assessments at the school level, there is mounting evidence to suggest that train-the-trainer and one-shot professional development intervention models are not time intensive enough to bring both breadth and depth of change. Supovitz and Turner (2000) propose it takes from 80 to 160 hours of professional development in a content area to see significant changes in teaching practices. The most promising professional development models appear to be those which have highly qualified mentors providing the service; are site based, integrated into teachers' working days, while also offering more intensive summer institutes; meet teachers' developmental needs; and relate directly to how teachers can better meet the objectives set by state standards while also increasing subject area knowledge and improving teaching technique (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Suk Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Elmore & Burney, 1997; Stein, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002; Finnigan, O'Day, & Wakelyn, 2003; Supovitz & Turner, 2000).

For instance, Cohen and Hill (2001) found that teachers who took workshops that were extended in time, and which focused on teacher study and discussion of tasks students would do, what units students would be taught, and student work on assessments had deeper understanding of mathematical topics and concepts. They also reported more classroom practices similar to those in the

state reforms. There is also evidence suggesting that professional development itself is not enough to increase student learning. Reformers in New York District # 2 found that the combination of intensive professional development and curriculum frameworks which developed higher level thinking skills and process knowledge helped to reduce the gap between white and minority students (Elmore & Burney, 1998). Datnow, Borman, Stringfield, Overman, and Castellano (2003) found that both depth of comprehensive school reform (CSR) model implementation and the kind of CSR affected achievement outcomes for linguistically diverse students. In summary, learning partnerships are a key linkage for increasing system-wide capacity to support reform implementation and increased student learning.

Problem-solving Partnerships

"Problem-solving partnerships" coordinate efforts across levels to develop problem-solving and planning capacity to implement or adapt reform efforts. People working in national, state, provincial, district, board or LEA organizations responsible for designing, coordinating, and overseeing the improvement requirements of systemic reform are often faced with having to create infrastructures, funding formulas, and systems for which they have no precedent. Some reform leaders at higher levels in the policy system have created partnerships with outside experts to help them envision, plan, and implement improved learning and teaching in classrooms (Earl et al., 2000; Hamann, 2003; Harris, 2002; Henig, Hula, Orr, & Pedescleaux, 1999; Levin, 2000; Lusi, 1997; Stone, Henig, Jones, & Pedescleaux, 2001). Central to what these leaders have done is the creation of a habit of mind or orientation towards learning (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2002). The leaders in these organizations reported that they could not achieve what the new reforms required of them, so they sought outside help. Challenges at these higher levels that required outside assistance included such things as coordinating work assignments and reports of support teams; providing quality training of sufficient frequency, depth, and breadth to be useful; issues of quality control; defining what a good state, district, or LEA plan looks like; techniques to collect and analyze data; methods to access information and resources; techniques for being responsive to local or school needs, and for understanding the extent to which the external groups hired to provide professional development can actually meet the needs that districts and schools have for assistance (Barber et al., 2003; Billig, Perry, & Pokorny, 1999; Finnigan, O'Day, & Wakelyn, 2003; Goertz & Duffy, 2001; Harris, 2002; Massell, 1998; O'Day & Gross, 1999). In summary, problem-solving partnerships are another key linkage for increasing system-wide capacity to support reform efforts.

Linking Present Reform Efforts with Past Reform Efforts

One of the most important linkages between systemic levels is the connection of present reform efforts with past reform efforts. Elmore & Burney (1998) use

the term continual improvement in describing reform efforts that have continuity over time of core components, which have internal feedback loops so that reform leaders can make decisions based on the most current information, and adapt reform strategies accordingly. To accomplish this kind of stability in reform focus requires coordination and planning across multiple policy domains and reform stakeholders (Clune, 2001; Stone, Henig, Jones, & Pedescleaux, 2001). In comparing reform efforts across England, the US, and Ontario, England has probably come the furthest nationally in providing this kind of continuity over time. The British have had relative continuity in reform efforts across the country since the Thatcher government began the Literacy and Numeracy strategy almost twenty years ago. They have made strides in learning from their early mistakes, for instance they found that improving classroom teaching, ensuring higher levels of reform implementation, and increasing student achievement required putting both financial and human resources into reform implementation. They have also made several adaptations over the years including redefining the role of LEAs, providing learning opportunities for people throughout the policy system; and allowing somewhat increased levels of flexibility in implementation (Barber et al., 2003; Earl, Fullan, Leithwood, Watson, Jantzi et al., 2000; Wallace, 2000).

In the U.S, sustainability of state policies is difficult (Cibulka & Derlin, 1998), although Cuban (2003) has asserted that there has been quite a bit of consistency in educational policy from the federal level across the Clinton and Bush Administrations. Instability of reform at the state level is due part to state policies being rejected by a new governor, chief state school officer, state board, or legislature before they are adopted or implemented (Cibulka & Derlin, 1998). Generally speaking, states that are most successful in creating both depth and breadth of reform implementation built on previous reforms that went back ten to fifteen years. In these instances there was continuity, rather than discontinuity between the earlier reform efforts and the current systemic reform efforts (Clune, 1998). In sum, creating the systemic linkages necessary for sustaining continuity over time in reform efforts helps to ensure greater depth and breadth of reform.

Political Alliances

Political alliances are a powerful linkage for coordinating and aligning both human and financial resources across policy domains. Continuity in political will across multiple stakeholders and over time is essential for effective and sustained capacity building to improve teaching and learning (Clune, 1998; Hamann, 2003; Massell, 1998). Robust and enduring political alliances create a critical mass necessary for determining the direction policy will take; what kinds of reforms and improvement efforts will be emphasized; how resources will be allocated and to whom they will go; how state accountability systems look, including the assessments that are used, the development of content standards and the proficiency levels for performance standards; how district superintendents and school boards are chosen; and whether or not building capacity in low performing schools is valued or whether sanctions are emphasized (Anyon,

1997; Beck & Allexsaht-Snider, 2001; Cibulka & Derlin, 1998; Hamann & Lane 2002; Hess, 1999; Oaks, Quartz, Ryan, & Lipton, 2000; Spillane, 1999; Stone, 1998).

Relational Linkages

Robust, trusting professional relationships across policy levels, which we term "relational linkages," are essential to sustained reform efforts (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Stein, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002). Teachers are more likely to be receptive to external intervention when they trust and feel respected by the people providing professional development or introducing intervention strategies (Stein, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002). Collegial trust and collaboration among teachers enhances the likelihood of changed practices (Hargreaves, Davis, & Fullan, 1993; Stoll, 1999; Sugrue & Day, 2002). Trusting relationships between teachers and students also appear to be necessary for teachers to willingly risk being vulnerable in front of their students when trying new teaching techniques or strategies (Lasky, 2004).

Reform efforts can begin or end over casual or informal conversations, or serendipitous encounters among reform stakeholders (Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002; Hamann, 2002). Relational alliances and allegiances are potent linkages as the people who are brought together often share values, sense of purpose, and have common ideas about the direction reforms might take. Bonds of personalism are significant as informal linkages that create unity and common sense of purpose across different groups (Rich, 1996). These can both facilitate and impede improvement efforts (Hamann, 2003). An obvious differentiation here concerns whether the effect of the relational linkage is on improvement rather than maintaining the status quo or practices such as nepotism, personalism, or patronage politics (Anyon, 1997; Rich, 1996; Stone, 1998).

In a recent study of school reforms in Maine, Hamann and Lane (2002) found reform leaders relied on several relational linkages among state personnel, school personnel, external service providers, and university evaluators to redesign several dimensions of the state's secondary schools. These people worked together in a coherent way to create a vision for reform, problem-solve, direct, and oversee implementation. For instance, the Maine education commissioner brought together a twenty-six member ad hoc commission on secondary education to design a new vision for what high schools in Maine should look like. Once the vision called 'Promising Futures' was completed, the Center for Inquiry in Secondary Education (CISE) was created to direct implementing the new reform plan. One key linkage in the effectiveness of the new agency is that most of the CISE staff had served on the commission that helped to draft 'Promising Futures,' assuring a high degree of consistency in values, a shared sense of purpose, and history. The State Commissioner of Education also kept close relational ties with CISE. He knew the people directing reform on a personal basis, they felt a strong loyalty to him, which created stronger motivation, and led to extra

resources being allocated to the reform efforts. Relational linkages can thus both create the conditions to promote as well as hinder school reform.

Ideological Linkages or Shared Values, Vision and Goals Across Reform Stakeholders

When reform leaders initiate improvement efforts that challenge individuals' existing belief systems, one of the most important linkages that people need to make is ideological. Creating shared vision is one of the most commonly cited linkages across reform stake-holders – both within schools and more broadly (Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbeck, 1998; Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993; Togneri & Anderson, 2003; Wallace, 2000; Young & Harris, 2000). Creating a shared vision or sense of purpose can mean that ideological chasms need to be bridged, particularly when working with a broad spectrum of reform stakeholders. If the ideological chasms cannot be bridged, productive change is unlikely to occur.

Individual beliefs are one of the critical dimensions in understanding how educators exercise their agency when responding to educational reform (Datnow, Hubbard & Mehan, 1998). Beliefs about students' race, and socioeconomic status are particularly important in the ways they shape district personnel, school administrator, and teacher willingness to implement improvement efforts requiring teaching rigorous curriculum to all students (Oakes, Quartz, Ryan, & Lipton, 2000; Spillane, 1998). Teacher beliefs about reform efforts also greatly affect how they understand, interact with, implement, adapt or ignore them (Datnow, Hubbard & Mehan, 1998; Geijsel, 2001; van Veen, 2003; Hargreaves, 1997). Thus, ideological linkages can be critical for moving improvement efforts forward when reform requirements are in conflict with individuals' belief systems and their sense of moral purpose.

District as Mediator of Federal and State Policy Directed at Schools

As midlevel organizations in the policy system, districts can be key mediators of federal, state or provincial policies (Elmore, 1993). When district leaders have a strong and articulated theory of change, or clear and articulated directions for change, they can help buffer schools from fast changing or inconsistent policies, while also coordinating the demands from multiple and possibly inconsistent accountability systems (Earl et al., 2003; Stein, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002; Togneri & Anderson, 2003; Wallace, 2000).

Local Educational Authorities (LEAs) in England have played an important role in implementation of the Literacy and Numeracy strategies. Their role and function has changed quite considerably over the course of reform efforts, with their present role being one of providing both support and pressure to local schools (Earl et al., 2003). As a midlevel policy domain, they coordinate a multi-directional flow of communication. They both receive and direct communication and resources to agencies to whom they are accountable, and to schools under their supervision. There is a clear interdependence between all individuals and

groups affected by the reform process (Wallace, 2000) with LEAs being a primary anchor for and mediator of reform implementation.

In the U.S., the roles that districts play in school improvement efforts are quite diverse. Some have high capacity to design, direct and coordinate improvement strategies, while others have virtually no reform capacity. Districts that have begun to improve classroom teaching and student learning have several elements in place including stable leadership across the school board, district office, and school all focused on one primary purpose- improving student learning. Those districts provide quality resources and skillfully coordinated resource distribution. School leadership is networked across sites. System-wide capacity – particularly content and process knowledge – problem-solving skills, and planning ability are developed. Material and human resources are provided. Minimal crisis situations exist. A history of trust and cooperation exist. School-level authority is legitimated, and efforts are made to ensure union support (Bodily, 1998; Elmore & Burney, 1997, 1998; Hightower, 2002; Kirby, Berends, & Naftel, 2001; Resnick & Glennan, 2002; Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

Aligning district standards, curriculum, and accountability systems internally and with state standards is a key linkage that can increase collective district capacity because it helps to focus reform activities (Regional Educational Lab Network, 2000). Some districts have developed standards and accountability systems that go beyond state systems (Hightower, 2002). Along with creating a buffer between schools and the political vicissitudes at the state level, this kind of proactive stance can become another strategy for focusing goals. Rather than vaguely trying to 'improve student achievement,' districts have specific, measurable long-term goals associated with deadlines and specific intermediate goals for each year of reform, i.e. school identified targets (Snipes, Doolittle, & Herlihy, 2002). Districts, boards, and LEAs thus become key midlevel linkages for coordinating both the flow of resources and communication across multiple levels of the policy system.

Lastly, each of the linkages we have identified as being a positive or effective linkage can be used to maintain status quo practices, or to usurp reform implementation. The human factor is the primary unpredictable element in each policy domain, and in how linkages are or are not used. Nepotism is one example of 'relational linkages' and 'shared values' run amok. Similarly, in the U.S. a weak district Title I director can focus on the least-likely-to-be-productive aspects of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, and impede improved instruction in schools. Recent reform mandates necessitate building support for a new set of political arrangements that support excellence and equity in schools (Stone, 1998). Transforming long-standing personal, social, and political arrangements in the education system is no small task, and is likely to be a core factor in why reforms based on equity and excellence are difficult to implement.

What Systemic Linkages are Less Effective in Producing Sustainable School Reform?

When analyzing linkages that are not particularly effective, we need be clear that the presence of a linkage does not assure that resources or communication

across policy domains are coordinated, high quality, or generally conducive to facilitating improved teaching and learning. Each of the linkages we identified in the previous section becomes an ineffective or counterproductive linkage when the resources that flow across it are of low quality, inappropriate for the context in which they will be used, their distribution is not coordinated, or the linkages are used toward goals negatively aligned with the stated purpose of the system. Likewise, if a linkage exists, but is not used, it also becomes ineffectual. For instance, learning partnerships are not effective when they are short in duration, not based on mutual respect, or utilize materials inappropriate for the situation. Similarly, funding linkages that do not provide adequate operating expenses for high quality education, and that do not allocate sufficient funds for personnel and other supporting resources are ultimately ineffectual in bringing about improved teaching or learning. For example, it is possible that there are grants available to schools to facilitate their improvement efforts, but if school or district personnel do not know about the grant sources, it becomes an ineffectual linkage for school reform. Similarly, if a 'start up grant' is of insufficient duration to lead to institutionalization of a change, the long-term effect is likely to be counter productive.

Linkages Between State-Federal Levels and Local Levels that are Simply Funding Streams and No More

Simply providing money can but does not necessarily improve capacity for improved teaching and learning. Low capacity states, districts, and schools need outside expertise and other kinds of assistance to develop the skills necessary for supporting school improvement efforts (Bascia, 1996; Hatch, 2000). The key here is helping these organizations develop basic organizational and leadership capabilities, reduce non-productive teacher turnover, create an orderly school climate, develop teacher pedagogic and content knowledge, and develop self-monitoring and continual learning capabilities. In some instances, improvement efforts also need to include repairing the actual physical plant, or building safe, new schools with enough basic equipment for students to learn and teachers to teach (Cotton, 1995; Reynolds et al., 2002; Reynolds & Teddlie, 2000; Snipes, Doolittle, & Herlihy, 2002; Taylor, 1990). In short, capacity is built most naturally on top of existing capacity (Hatch, 2000).

Private and government seed money for school reform is often not enough to sustain reform efforts in cities that do have a strong tax base, and vibrant local economies (Rich, 1996). In countries that fund schooling largely through local land taxes, schools and districts in areas that generate low amounts of property tax are at a disadvantage compared to their counterparts in more wealthy communities. In schools that are located in high poverty areas, funding formulas based on adequacy rather than equity seem promising as a way to provide extra financial resources just to get schools and districts up to the per student spending amounts closer to those their counterparts in more wealthy communities enjoy just by virtue of their locale (Ladd, Chalk, & Hansen, 1999; Odden, 1999; Odden

& Clune, 1998). There are, however, many examples of more affluent districts creating political and relational linkages to defeat efforts to equalize funding.

Rewards and Sanctions that are Not Accompanied by Capacity Building

Rewards and sanctions by themselves do not build organizational capacity to support improved teaching and learning. They can be effective as warnings to low performing schools, and function as a way to alert them that changes need to be made in the school or district, or to warning schools and districts that adequately educate a majority population that a specific minority group is not being adequately served. They are occasionally viewed as effective rewards for successful teachers, schools, or districts, but research demonstrating long-term effects of such rewards is lacking. Of equal concern, Clune (1998), and Finnigan, O'Day, and Wakelyn (2003) found that to improve organizational capacity for teaching and learning, opportunities for professional development and learning that go both broad and deep are necessary.

There is mounting evidence in the U.S. and in England that in instances where the risk of sanctions is high, broadly defined teaching and learning are compromised due to narrowing the curriculum, replacing the regular curriculum with test preparation material; losing teaching time to test preparation, or encouraging low achieving students to drop out of school (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Broadfoot, Pollard, Osborn, McNess, & Triggs, 1998; Hannaway, 2003; Livingston & Livingston, 2002; McNeil, 2000; McNeil & Valenzuela, 2001).

Results of state takeovers and reconstitution efforts for schools that have been sanctioned are mixed. On the positive side, they can in theory help to reduce nepotism within a school district's decision-making processes, improve a school district's administrative and financial management practices, and upgrade the condition of rundown school buildings (Cibulka, 2003; Rudo, 2001). There is virtually no evidence that state takeovers or reconstitutions actually improve teaching and learning in schools (Cibulka, 2003; Malen, Croninger, Garet, Suk Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Rudo, 2001).

Implications and Directions for Future Research

The findings presented here suggest that there are systemic linkages that can be potent forces in efforts aimed toward educational improvement. Inherent in our analysis are several areas where countries, states, and provinces need to develop internal capacity through out the policy system for supporting and sustaining school reform efforts. Within the limited available data, the importance of linkages seems to generalize internationally, though there is a great need for further study comparing linkages across contexts.

The entire area of linkages in has been greatly understudied. For instance, not a single piece we cited provided a working definition for linkages between or within policy domains. Likewise, we found a dearth of research which has as its

primary foci understanding what linkages exist between policy domains, how resources and communication move across these linkages, or questioning what other linkages need to exist to facilitate coordinated flow of resources and communication across policy domains.

We did identify evidence to suggest that simply creating more tightly- or loosely-linked policy systems does not in and of itself assure increased capacity for teaching and learning. Likewise, the story is more complex than suggesting that the presence or absence of linkages between policy domains is a key factor in school reform. It is possible to have a policy system that is relatively tightly coupled, or that is linked closely to other policy domains, while still having low individual capacity, collective capacity, or material capacity in any one of the key policy domains. The lack of capacity suggests that there would be a lack of resources, will, skill, knowledge or disposition to create the conditions in classrooms to improve student learning (Lasky & Foster, 2003).

Our analysis of linkages indicates that the flow of resources across linkages, and the quality of these resources greatly affect the viability of improvement efforts. With all of the linkages we have identified as being important in school reform, it is essential that the flow of resources or communication across these linkages is coordinated, and that the resources or communications themselves be of high quality and appropriate for the context in which they are being used. Our analyses demonstrated that a lack of capacity to support reform at any one level in the policy system, affects the ability of people in other policy domains to successfully direct, coordinate, or support improvement efforts. By analogy, an automobile with a wonderful engine and new tires, but a broken transmission, simply cannot be powered forward until the transmission is repaired.

To make the school system move forward, policymakers need to more carefully examine current system linkages and consider how to develop system-wide capacity to support improved teaching and learning. Finally, much, much more research must be conducted on how states, provinces and federal governments can most effectively develop their own internal capacity and linkages to other organizational levels in order to develop, direct, coordinate, and support school reform.

Notes

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2. In contrast to the US, the Netherlands funds schools on a student-needs basis, such that every middle class Dutch speaking students counts for 1 unit of school funding, a child from a high poverty family counts as 1.25 (e.g., the school receives 25% additional funding, and a child in whose home Dutch is not the native language is funded at 1.9 (Reynolds, Creemers, Stringfield, Teddlie, & Schaffer, 2002).

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