The Micropolitics of Educational Change and Reform: Cracking Open the Black Box

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The first studies of micropolitics of education were published during the mid-1980s (Ball, 1987; Blase, 1987). Two decades later, a small but significant number of studies have been completed, some of which have centered on the micropolitics of educational change and reform. In 1998, Blasé conducted a comprehensive review of the micropolitics of educational change; this chapter highlights primary studies from that review but emphasizes more recent relevant work.

Micropolitics remains a fact of life in educational settings, and during times of change, such politics tend to increase and intensify. This chapter presents a review of studies that have generated findings on the micropolitics of educational change and reform. The chapter opens with an overview of macro– and micro–educational politics. Following this, a section focusing on the micropolitics of life in schools illustrates the ubiquitous nature of this important phenomenon in schools. Subsequent sections form the heart of this chapter and highlight findings about teachers, school principals, middle-level administrators (i.e., central office staffs), district superintendents, and school boards. Each section describes micropolitical factors that facilitate and impede school reform. The chapter closes with a brief discussion of directions for future research and a conclusion.

The Macropolitics and Micropolitics of Education

Generally speaking, the term "politics" refers to decisions about the allocation of valued goods for a particular society or organization – for example, who gets what, how, and when. Macropolitics and micropolitics (i.e., organizational politics), two broad aspects of the politics of education, refer to similar conflictual and cooperative processes and similar concepts including individual and group interests, power and influence, strategic interaction, values, and ideologies (Ball, 1987; Barott & Galvin, 1998; Blase, 1991; Blase & Blase, 2000; Marshall & Scribner, 1991; Spring, 1997,

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1998; Wirt & Kirst, 1992). In the United States, macropolitics of education may describe the school's external environment and its relationships at the local, state, and federal levels (Willower, 1991) as well as the interaction of private and public organizations within, between, and among levels (Cibulka, 2001; Marshall & Scribner, 1991; Spring, 1997; Wirt & Kirst, 1992).

In recent decades, several waves of school reform have dominated the macropolitics of education in the United States. Firestone (1990) notes that although efforts to improve public schools began in the late 1970s, the release of a Nation at Risk in 1983 launched an era of educational reform "that is arguably the most intense, comprehensive and sustained effort to improve education in America's history" (Bjork, 2001a, p. 19). Media coverage of the report heightened concern for the condition of public education, shaped the perception that the nation's schools had failed the nation's children and economy, and stimulated calls for reform.

Other reports over long periods have reflected separate yet related reform themes (Bacharach, 1990; Firestone, Fuhrman, & Kirst, 1990; Lane & Epps, 1992; Murphy, 1990). The first wave (1983-1986), which began with the release of the Nation at Risk Report (1983), was followed in rapid succession by similar commission and task force reports that called for using student test scores to hold schools accountable, increasing graduation requirements, lengthening the school day and year, and increasing the rigor of teacher licensure requirements (Björk, Kowalski, & Young, 2005). Legislative accountability measures lessened district policy-making prerogatives by shifting decision making to states.

An analysis of second-wave reports (1986–1989) suggests a continuation of accountability themes as well as greater emphasis on higher-order thinking skills, problem solving, computer competency, and cooperative learning. Importantly, many reports made a compelling case that schools should be responsible for ensuring that all children learn, particularly "at risk" children living in poverty (Murphy, 1990). In addition, efforts to establish teacher empowerment and strengthen teaching professionalism contributed to the devolution of decision making and governance from the district level to school councils. These shifts coupled with high stakes accountability attempted to alter both conventional practices and power configurations at the district and school levels (Björk, 1996; Murphy, 1990).

Third-wave (1989–2003) reform reports criticized previous commission reports for their focus on organizational and professional issues rather than on student well-being and student learning. These reports offered two canons to guide reform including recentering the profession to focus on student learning and realigning schools to support families as a way to enhance children's capacity to learn. In 2002, the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) reiterated previous school accountability themes and underscored the importance of ensuring that all children learn. NCLB shifted accountability from the building level to the individual child and introduced the notion of holding school superintendents, principals, and teachers responsible for bridging the learning gaps for different groups of children. The NCLB coupled hardnosed accountability measures, performance timetables, and remedies with parsimonious federal support; consequently, many critics have

characterized it as the largest underfunded federal education mandate in US history (Björk et al., 2005). Although it is generally agreed that NCLB has heightened attention to glaring inequities in student academic performance, many speculate that raising the bar to successively higher levels of performance until 2014 may result in a declaration that schools have failed and thus justify the offering of vouchers as an alternative way to fund public education (Björk et al., 2005).

Indeed, nationally initiated legislation in the United States and the external collection of private and public organizations with interest in such legislation have had significant effects on politics at the district and school levels (Barott & Galvin, 1998; Blase, 1991, 1998; Cibulka, 2001; Datnow, 2000; Fuhrman & Elmore, 2004; Mawhinney, 1999; Oakes, Quartz, Ryan, & Lipton, 2000; Sarason, 1990, 2004; Smith, Miller-Kahn, Heineke, & Jarvis, 2004).

> The building or site level is the immediate organizational unit within which the principal and classroom teacher work, children are instructed and direct supervision occurs. At the same time, it is important to recognize that the school is nested in multilevel governmental structures. The organizational politics of the building site is the micropolitics of a subunit of a larger complex organization: the school district. In turn, the school district is a local government unit, variously connected to other local governments, as well as to the state and national governments (Barott & Galvin, 1998, p. 312).

In fact, in recent years macropolitical influences have strengthened in many parts of the world, and this has resulted in increased political conflict at the local and school levels, notably in the context of reform adoption and implementation processes (Ball, 1994; Blase, 1998; Cibulka, 2001; Hoyle, 1999; Lindle, 1999; Mawhinney, 1999). Consequently, beginning in the early 1990s, policy studies in education have increasingly investigated implementation processes associated with school reform at the local level.

> Those actually implementing policy in schools turned out to be the final policy makers, as evidence mounted that they could reshape or resist the intentions of policies adopted at higher levels. From these not entirely surprising revelations, it was only a short jump to the beginning of the systematic study of the dynamics of the "micropolitics" within the schools (Boyd, 1991, p. vii).

Not surprisingly, theoretical and empirical work has underscored stark differences between policy rhetoric and the reality of policy implementation, referred to as the "implementation gap" or "black box" of educational reform (e.g., Datnow, 2000; Mawhinney, 1999; Scribner, Aleman, & Maxcy, 2003).

Micropolitical Perspectives and Educational Change and Reform

Studies of the micropolitics of educational change and reform have relied heavily on Ball's (1987) and Blase's (1991) perspectives. Ball's approach emphasizes the politics of conflict:

I take schools, in common with virtually all other social organizations, to be arenas of struggle; to be riven with actual or potential conflict between members; to be poorly co-ordinated; to be ideologically diverse. I take it to be essential that if we are to understand the nature of schools as organizations, we must achieve some understanding of these conflicts (Ball, 1987, p. 19).

Blase (1991) constructed a more inclusive definition of micropolitics from an exhaustive review of the literature that includes conflictive and cooperative processes:

Micropolitics refers to the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organizations. In large part political action results from perceived differences between individuals and groups, coupled with the motivation to use power to influence and/or protect. Although such actions are consciously motivated, any action, con-sciously motivated, may have "political significance" in a given situation. Both cooperative and conflictive actions and processes are part of the realm of micropolitics. Moreover, macro and micropolitical factors frequently interact (Blase, 1991, p. 11).

More recently, Blase and Blase (2002) have argued that micropolitics is a critical aspect of many organizational structures and processes, and often constitutes the *central mechanism* through which major organizational outcomes related to school change and reform are produced:

An organization's political processes, for example, a school's formal and informal (e.g., organizational stakeholders and their power sources, interests, ideologies, and interchanges) as well as its political culture (e.g., patterns of interests, ideologies, decision making, power distribution) dramatically influence most school outcomes, including teaching and learning. The degree to which political processes and political culture account for a given out-come (e.g., decision, policy, program, practice, event) varies, of course, from one school to another and, over time, within the same school. (p. 10).

In essence, micropolitics processes and structures make up the "political culture" of a school and account for both stability and change in school settings; certain political forces work to sustain (maintain) the status quo, while other political forces serve the interests of change and reform (Ball, 1987; Blase, 1991, 1998; Blase & Blase, 2002; Burlingame, 1988; Burns, 1961; Malen, 1994; Townsend, 1990). "The strong advocacy of some and the strong opposition of others...will be called into service to bring about or successfully oppose the innovation under consideration" (Mangham, 1979, p. 133).

Typically, externally imposed initiatives to change and reform schools must con-tend with existing internal political cultures that promote and protect the school's status quo (Ball, 1994; Blase, 1991, 1998; Cusick, 1992; Elmore, 2004; Gronn, 1986; Gtazek & Sarason, 2007; Lukes, 1974; Sarason, 1990, 2004). With refer-ence to the micropolitics of change, Mangham (1979) stated, "[S]o significant is the collection of forces which underpin behavior in organizations that it is surprising that any changes ever manage to be promulgated let alone implemented" (p. 122). Sarason (1990) wrote,

Schools will accommodate (change) in ways that require little or no change...the strength of the status quo—its underlying axioms, its pattern of power relationships, its sense of

tradition and, therefore, what seems right, natural, and proper—almost automatically rules out options for change in that status quo (p. 35).

During periods of externally imposed change and reform, school-based political interaction tends to intensify, and new micropolitical processes and structures emerge and become more visible in formal and informal areas of school life. Specifically, change dynamics – uncertainty, diversity, ambiguity, and goal disparity and complexity tend to exacerbate political interaction within the school (Blase, 1998).

The Micropolitics of Life in Schools

In the past two decades, empirical political studies have revealed strong findings about the ubiquitous and natural occurrence of micropolitics in the everyday life of schools. Topics studied include personnel evaluation (Bridges & Groves, 1999), superintendents and interest groups (Björk & Lindle, 2001), teacher induction (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002a), beginning teacher development and micropolitical literacy (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002b), teacher supervision and evaluation (Cooper, Ehrensal, & Bromme, 2005; Stronge & Tucker, 1999), school-level management teams (Cranston & Ehrich, 2005), educational interest groups (Johnson, 2001), and court-ordered desegregation (Goldring & Crowson, 2001).

A number of studies of teacher–student interactions and instructional and social issues in the classroom have demonstrated the degree to which micropolitics pervades life in schools (Anton, 1999; Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Huart-Faris, 2005; Cazden, 2001; Connell, 1985; Gilbert & Yerrick, 2001; Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Lee, 2006; Lightfoot, 1983; McDevitt, 2004; McNeil, 1983; Morgan, 2001; Nias, 1989; Pauly, 1992; Pollard, 1985; Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985; Sedlak, Wheeler, Pullin, & Cusick, 1986; Waller, 1932; Winograd, 2002; Woods, 1990). Powell et al. (1985) and Sedlak et al. (1986) found that interaction between classroom teachers and students was essentially political; interactions were based primarily on power dynamics; "negotiation" between teachers and students produced "understandings," "bargains," and "treaties" that defined and controlled all aspects of classroom life. These findings have been confirmed by Winograd (2002), who reported that students' resistance to teachers' authority resulted in negotiated political agreements in the classroom. Anton (1999) found that interactive exchanges between students and teachers in learner-centered, second language classrooms were characterized by negotiation of form, content, and classroom rules of behavior, and such political processes created environments conducive to learning.

McDevitt (2004) specifically studied issues of pedagogical and cultural appropriateness that arose between teachers and students from two disparate cultures of learning; she found that conflicts were resolved by negotiating course content and classroom procedures. Lee (2006) and Bloome et al. (2005) found that language, patterns of interaction, and activities used in classrooms were negotiated, a

finding consistent with Pauly's (1992) conclusion that "education is the result of working agreements that are hammered out by the people in each classroom, who determine the rules, the power relationships, and the kinds of teaching and learning that will take place there" (pp. 13–14). Such findings are also consistent with how informal language used in classrooms to promote learning (e.g., African American English paralinguistic practices) resulted from cultural negotiations and power relations linked to race, class, and ethnicity (Cazden, 2001; Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Morgan, 2001). In contrast, Gilbert and Yerrick (2001) found that the quality of science instruction was subverted by negotiation between students and teachers in the context of low academic expectations in rural, underrepresented school contexts.

The Micropolitics of Educational Change and Reform

A growing number of micropolitical studies address relationships at various levels of school organization that range from the nature of teacher engagement in school reform processes to superintendent–board interaction in district governance processes. General studies of school reform can also be interpreted from a micropolitical standpoint. *Taken together, these studies demonstrate the critical role of micropolitics, a role that appears to facilitate and support as well as impede and inhibit educational change and reform.*

Teachers and Educational Change and Reform

A number of studies have demonstrated that teachers' political participation in school-wide decision making, classroom autonomy, empowerment, and reflective critique of curriculum and instruction have *facilitated* successful school reform efforts (Allen, 1993; Blase & Blase, 2001; Bredeson, 1989; Brimhall, 1993; Corbett & Rossman, 1988; Melenyzer, 1990). Smylie and Brownlee-Conyers (1990) described teachers' use of specific political strategies to develop innovative collaborative relationships with principals. Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, and Myers (2007) found that teacher problem-finding teams employed autonomy and relational leadership skills to facilitate collaboration and to avoid marginalization by principals. In a micropolitical study of a school's implementation of site-based management, Somich (2005) found that when teachers' political involvement in school increased, teachers' classroom instruction benefited significantly. Reed (1992) reported that teachers who defined efficacy as greater formal authority in school-wide decision making were seen as more politically important than colleagues who participated primarily to facilitate classroom instruction and implement site-based initiatives. The work of Chrispeels and Martin (2002), Goldring and Simms (2005), Firestone and Fisler (2002), Feuerstein and Dietrich (2003), and Goodman (2006) affirmed the significance of teachers' political involvement in school-wide and interorganizational relationships: when teachers participated in negotiating a redefinition of

roles, building trust, setting agendas and standards, and confronting sources of conflict, they frequently facilitated reform. Heck, Brandon, and Wang (2001) found that decentralized (school-based) decision making was successful when teacher participation focused on improving student learning and selection of issues addressed in Site-based Decision Making (SBDM) meetings. Achinstein (2002) demonstrated that collaborative reform efforts in schools with strong professional learning communities generated constructive political conflict crucial to organizational learning. Johnson (2004) reported that leadership teams in several Australian schools enacted school reform through primarily positive political approaches; they conceptualized, negotiated, and implemented reforms via consensually and morally based approaches sensitive to teacher professionalism.

There is also evidence that teacher-related micropolitical factors – classroom territoriality norms, protectionist orientations to outside intrusions, resistance to internal threats of work intensification, and relationships of power and negative forms of politics within classrooms *impede* school change and reform (Altrichter & Soukup-Altrichter, 2000; Cusick, 1992; Gitlin, 2001; Pauly, 1992; Powell et al., 1985; Sedlak et al., 1986). Moreover, confusion about roles and authority in school-level decision making, and structural factors (e.g., inadequate planning time and administrative control of planning topics and outcomes) interfere with collegial dialogue (Gitlin, et al., 1992). Other teacher-related micropolitical factors that interfere with reform include adversarial factions with competing interests that fail to share resources (Robertson & Briggs, 1994), domination of governance processes by particular teacher groups and the types of strategies teachers used to pursue their interests (Peterson & Solsrud, 1993), compliant orientations toward principals (Allen, 1993; Blase & Blase, 2001), resistance to decentralization by veteran teachers (Heck et al., 2001), and conflict arising from partial faculty involvement in school planning (Mintrop, Gamson, McLaughlin, Wong, & Oberman, 2001).

Micropolitical factions do not only facilitate or impede reforms, but also alter and adapt them. For instance, in a 5-year case study of inquiry-based school reform, Stokes (2000) reported that responses of teachers and other stakeholders, largely defined by political forces (e.g., emotional and ideological differences), transformed a "literacy" project into one that emphasized "equity."

Principals and Educational Change and Reform

The importance of the principal's role in *facilitating* school reform has been widely discussed in the restructuring literature. Studies of several models of school reform – Coalition of Essential Schools (Hall & Placier, 2003); the New American Schools project (Berends, Bodily, & Kirby, 2003), and the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC) (Copeland, 2002) – have identified that principals are central to successful implementation. Maxey and Ngyuyen (2006) assume that distributing, sharing, and facilitating leadership are inherently political, and principals who engage in facilitative leadership and work with and through others are

engaged in the politics of power sharing. Principals' political role in facilitating reconfiguration of school structures and governance processes to ensure higher levels of collaboration and teamwork has been examined by a number of scholars (Berends, et al., 2003; Blase & Blase, 2001; Blase, Blase, Anderson, & Dungan, 1995; Etheridge & Hall, 1995; Firestone & Fisler, 2002; Freeman, Brimhall, & Neufeld, 1994; Hall & Placier, 2003; Murphy & Louis, 1994; Smylie, Wenzel, & Fendt, 2003; Somich, 2005; Reitzug, 1994; Rollow & Bryk, 1995; Rulfs, Crocker, Wright, & Petrie, 2001).

Successful school reform has been strongly associated with principals' facilitative leadership and specific political practices including empowering teachers (Berends et al., 2003; Blase & Blase, 2001; Hall & Placier, 2003; Smylie et al., 2003; Rulfs et al., 2001; Somich, 2005), team building (Farrell, 2003; Somich, 2005), enhancing parent and community participation in democratic governance processes (Berends et al., 2003; Copeland, 2002; Farrell, 2003; Flinspach, Easton, Ryan, O'Connor, & Storey, 1994; Goldberg & Morrison, 2003; Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitvanichcha, 2001; Rollow & Bryk, 1995), managing internal conflict (Beck, 1993; Goldberg & Morrison, 2003; Hall & Placier, 2003; Peterson & Warren, 1994), developing teachers' capacity for critique (Reitzug, 1994), maintaining balance between district-level initiates and school-based initiatives (Conley & Goldman, 1994; Goldberg & Morrison, 2003), challenging teachers to transform schools (Prestine, 1994), maintaining accountability of organizational stakeholders (Bondy, Ross, & Webb, 1994; Feuerstein & Dietrich, 2003; Lopez, et al., 2001), and using high stakes accountability to garner support for school reform (Spillane et al., 2002). Moreover, these studies demonstrate that principals' facilitative leadership is correlated with the development of democracy in schools and substantial increases in teachers' sense of political efficacy.

In contrast, studies have demonstrated that a control-oriented political approach to school reform on the part of principals (i.e., unwillingness or inability to let go of power to enact democratic facilitative leadership approaches) has been a major *impediment* to successful school reform (Blase, 1991; Cooper et al., 2005; Datnow & Costellano, 2003; Kilgore & Jones, 2003; Finnan & Meza, 2003; Maxey & Nguyen, 2006; Robertson & Briggs, 1994; Rollow & Bryk, 1995; Scribner et al., 2007; Smith, 1995). Malen and Ogawa (1988) were among the first to report that even properly conceived structural approaches to educational innovation and reform (e.g., wherein school-based councils had broad jurisdiction and decision-making authority) were easily sabotaged by principals' predisposition to "control" interactions with teachers and parents. Implementation studies of school reform, including the *Success for All Project* (Datnow & Costellano, 2003), the *Comer School Development Process (CSDP)* (Payne & Diamond, 2003), *The Modern Red Schoolhouse* (Kilgore & Jones, 2003), *Accelerated Schools Project* (Finnan & Meza, 2003), and earlier studies of Chicago school reform initiatives (Rollow & Bryk, 1995) have also affirmed that principals who worked to control or mediate school reform impeded its success.

More specifically, studies have found that principals have impeded school reform initiatives by controlling discourse, maintaining power, and preventing power

sharing with teachers via a wide array of political tactics such as an unwillingness to facilitate shared leadership, failing to empower teachers, opposing collaborative work, dismissing agendas, marginalizing dissenters, intimidating teachers, postponing meetings with teachers, limiting access to information, providing misinformation, holding traditional expectations of self and teachers, undermining trust, and practicing favoritism and exclusion (Blase & Blase, 2003; Bredeson, 1993; Brown, 1994; Datnow & Costellano, 2003; Cooper et al., 2005; Etheridge & Hall, 1995; Finnan & Meza, 2003; Gitlin, et al., 1992; Kilgore & Jones, 2003; Lonnquist & King, 1993; Murphy & Louis, 1994; Reitzug & Cross, 1994; Scribner, et al., 2007; Smylie & Crowson, 1993).

Middle-Level Administrators and Educational Change and Reform

Central office efforts to *facilitate* processes and protect schools engaged in restructuring from interference have been important to achieving successful implementation of school reform. Although central office administrators are often viewed as technocrats responsible for carrying out bureaucratic operations such as program planning, budgeting, compliance, accountability, and reporting, politically, they are not benign functionaries. As professional staff, their expert knowledge enables them to influence strategic policy decisions at the district and school levels. Björk (2001b) found that a district financial officer institutionalized a building-centered financial system that was essential to implementing decentralized decision making in schools. Spillane et al. (2002) found that central office staff functioned as sense makers, mediated district accountability policies, and used accountability policies as levers to support educational reforms. Studies have also revealed that central office support for training principals and teachers in collaborative processes facilitated implementation of decentralized decision making (Slavin, Madden, Shaw, Mainzer, & Donnelly, 1993; Smylie & Crowson, 1993). A study of collaboration within an external coalition of partners (university, district, and computer manufacturer) highlighted the importance of both central office strategy and resource control for school-level innovation (Baker, 1994). Morgan and Peterson (2002) found that multilevel collaboration among central office staffs enhanced superintendents' work as instructional leaders in their districts.

In contrast, studies also indicate that central office administrators *impede* school reform. Skrla, Reyes, and Scheurich (2000) reported that male-dominated societal and district office professional norms, and the use of coercive political pressure, effectively prevented female superintendents from publicly acknowledging gender-based discrimination. Rusch (2005) described a similar pattern of influence—in particular, how organizational cultures at the district office level created institutional scripts that sanctioned talk about school reform and inhibited learning among professionals. Björk (2001b) found that central office staffs leveraged internal and external influence among community interest groups and school board members to resist school decentralization initiatives that reduced their influence and threatened

their positions. Honig (2003) reported that central office staffs defended conventional administrative roles until they were effectively threatened by school reform progress or marginalized by school reform initiatives. Glassman and Fuller (2002) found that superintendent evaluation practices illuminated the politics of local decision making and highlighted the role played by multiple and diverse constituency groups within central office professional staff, who required the inclusion of student achievement data in the evaluation protocol.

Superintendents and Educational Change and Reform

Superintendents who maintain high levels of involvement in instructional matters play a crucial role in launching and sustaining district-level-initiated educational reforms (Björk, 1996, 2000). Recognition of their contribution to the improvement of learning and teaching has advanced efforts to redefine their roles as instructional leaders (Björk et al., 2005: Peterson & Barnett, 2005); this has also heightened interest in the politics of the superintendency. Superintendents' capacity to work effectively within community and school board political dynamics and build community-based business coalitions has been directly related to the success of district reform initiatives. Such political capacities have provided the continuity necessary for long-term change initiatives (Björk, 2000, 2005; Glassman & Fuller, 2002).

The importance of district-and-school-level leadership in launching and sustaining educational reforms specifically in high-poverty schools has been described by Berends et al. (2003). These researchers found that superintendents were instrumental in building organizational political support needed to establish a professional climate to advance teaching and learning as well as effectively communicating with the public about the purpose and status of change initiatives. Goldring and Sims (2005) reported that superintendents' efforts to build collaborative partnerships in the community based on trust and power sharing were key factors in initiating and sustaining educational reforms.

A growing academic literature on the role of female superintendents in educational reform shows that relational ways of working have enabled them to survive in office and successfully engage in district-level educational reform efforts. Ortiz (2001, 2002) found that female superintendents' knowledge of community power structures and cultural practices in Hispanic communities contributed to their longevity and success in reforming educational programs. Owen and Ovando (2000) reported that superintendents who were knowledgeable about community cultural and political contexts were particularly adept at coalescing interest groups, building coalitions, negotiating agreements, forcing concessions when required, and empowering others, all of which were associated with effective educational change. In addition, Grogan and Blackmon (2001) and Skrla, Scott, and Benestante (2001) found that understanding constituent group interests, school board power structures, and competing community values enabled superintendents to protect their positions

and unify board members, build coalitions, counter adverse interest group politics, and achieve district educational reform goals.

Although the role of superintendents is pivotal to facilitating educational reform, the ways in which their political behavior *impedes* progress cover a wide spectrum of organizational issues (Björk, 2001b, 2005; Björk & Lindle, 2001; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Brunner, 2000; Hoffman & Burrello, 2004; Keedy & Björk, 2002; Kelsey & Lupini, 2001). Along these lines, Björk (2001c) found that a superintendent stalled district-initiated decentralization efforts when he acquiesced to pressure from the school board to retain a politically connected central office staff member who opposed the change. In addition, superintendents' failure to support school site policy decisions, provide adequate time for decision making, clarify the role of principals, and develop assessment criteria relevant to principals' new leadership roles has inhibited educational reform efforts. Hoffman and Burrello (2004) reported that superintendents' needs for power and control and their reluctance to release test scores to reduce unfavorable political exposure undermined attempts to improve teaching and learning in low-achieving schools. Superintendents have also hindered reform by failing to clarify ambiguous governance procedures (Bondy et al., 1994), trust the professional judgments of teachers, provide adequate funding and resources (Murphy & Louis, 1994), and support principals in conflicts with others (Crowson & Boyd, 1991). The use of top-down mandates to create school-based collegiality among teachers (i.e., "contrived collegiality Hargreaves, 1991)" and extending inordinate power to school principals involved in site-based management have also been linked to adverse effects on school reform (Smylie & Crowson, 1993).

School Boards and Educational Change and Reform

Throughout the history of American education, schools have been viewed as extensions of local communities bound by shared social, economic, and political circumstances. Alsbury (2003) and Björk (2000) found that political configurations of school boards were influenced by changes in community values and power structures, which, in turn, can *facilitate* or *impede* school reform. Shipps (2003) contends that school board policy making is influenced by multiple coalitions, the composition of which affects reform agendas. The dynamic relationship between communities and schools provides a framework for understanding school board responses to calls for school reform in the context of declining financial resources and politicization of educational policy making (Björk, 2005; Björk & Keedy, 2002; Johnson, 1996). Clearly, some view school boards as unworkable and detrimental; others see them as viable political forums in which individuals and groups openly express real needs and interests and reconcile differences through consultation and negotiation (Björk, 2005; Björk & Gurley, 2005).

Unfortunately, there is very little empirical research on school boards in general. Björk (2000) discovered that some boards were remarkably consistent and resilient in their efforts to engage community interest groups, factions, and

citizens to successfully advance school district reform. On the other hand, Glass, Björk, and Brunner (2000) found that many school boards' primary expectations for superintendents have emphasized effective management of district affairs rather than instructional leadership or school change and reform. Louis and King (1993) discovered that educational reform efforts were *impeded* because the school board required teachers to share negative feedback about reform that potentially threatened the board's willingness to continue its support. Feuerstein and Dietrich (2003) found that local political turbulence and interest group conflict frequently impeded the ability of schools to implement state-initiated academic standards and testing.

Future Research

Although research on the micropolitics of educational change and reform has increased significantly during the past decade, much more work will be required on all aspects of this incredibly complex, dynamic, and unpredictable phenomenon, particularly research on central office administrators and school boards. We suggest that future research employ a broad theoretical perspective of micropolitics that requires, among other things, investigation of cooperative and conflictive processes, overt and covert forms of political activity, the activities of relevant stakeholders, and the impact of school context, including macro-level factors. Methodologically, it will be important to employ both quantitative and qualitative research approaches at this early stage of inquiry. We especially need long-term, retrospective studies (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006), and also real-time observational studies at the school level to capture the dynamic interplay of micropolitical factors that evolve in situ and that transform change and reform efforts and outcomes in unpredictable ways (Stokes, 2000).

Studies of both successful and unsuccessful school change and reform initiatives would provide invaluable insights about related micropolitical configurations. Recently, the effects of NCLB and high stakes testing legislation in the United States have begun to emerge (Jennings & Rentner, 2006). It will be important to examine whether such heavy-handed, top-down, control-oriented approaches to school reform spawn the type of positive, facilitating school-based micropolitical processes and structures that appear to be essential to authentic school reform. The evidence from a range of other countries that have previously adopted similar measures and from states that had already adopted more centralized curriculum along with high stakes testing suggests that they will not (Hargreaves, 2003).

In addition, future micropolitical studies must devote greater attention to the historical and cultural context of schools (Blase, 1998; Chrispeels & Martin, 2002; Pillay, 2004), including gender, race, and ethnicity (Datnow, 1998). Unfortunately, individuals and groups often experience intense stress and strain stemming from educational change and reform; however, very little research has addressed this crucial aspect of micropolitics (see Troman & Boyle-White, Durham, Leithwood, etc). Furthermore, few studies have attempted to uncover subtle and covert types

of micropolitics such as the politics of powerlessness by stakeholders who practice "silence" in the face of school change (Pillay, 2004). Both of these areas provide fertile ground for political research. Datnow (1998) found that micropolitics was the centerpiece to adoption processes preceding implementation (i.e., how schools decide whether to implement a change project or approach); this suggests that greater attention to such factors would be worthwhile.

Smith, et al. (2004) have argued that educational reform at all levels of the educational hierarchy and in varying degrees is, in large part, a "political spectacle"; that is, more symbolic than substantive. Using Edelman's (1985, 1988) theory of political spectacle (which includes elements such as symbolic language, dramaturgy, illusions of rationality, democratic processes, and front-and-back stages), Smith et al. contend that political spectacle currently dominates American politics, and NCLB is but one conspicuous example of political spectacle. Needless to say, under such circumstances, authentic reform cannot be expected. Relatedly, Ball (2003) has discussed the relationship between educational change and reform as "spectacle" and performativity whose performances of organizations and individuals represent their respective value. Study of these fascinating phenomena would open new and exciting aspects of the micropolitics of educational change and reform.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on micropolitical studies of change and reform at the school and district levels. In each case, micropolitics *impedes* or *facilitates* school change and reform. Our examination of the extant research underscores the dramatic transformative effects of micropolitical processes and structures on internally and externally initiated school change. To be sure, cracking open the black box of educational change and reform reveals stunning differences between the intent of educational reform policies and the reality of school-based implementation efforts. Our review also reveals that, generally speaking, uses of positive forms of micropolitics (e.g., empowering, collaborative, problem centered) by political stakeholders, such as teachers, school principals, and central office administrators, are associated with facilitating school change and reform. Conversely, uses of negative forms of micropolitics (i.e., controlling and self-serving) is associated with impeding school change and reform. There is little question on the fact that school-based micropolitics pervade all aspects of educational change and reform and have the potential to promote successful and/or unsuccessful change. Despite this conclusion, educational policy makers and school district and building-level school administrators frequently fail to adequately acknowledge or address micropolitical features of their work. Further, university-based administrator and teacher education programs typically do little or nothing to equip students with relevant micropolitical knowledge and skill.

For these and other reasons, decades of research indicate that successive iterations of reform have failed to produce significant, enduring changes in school improvement. Oakes et al. (2000) are not alone in contending that the educational

"reform mill" (p. 264) rarely delivers improvements in student achievement. "[It] grinds out reworked versions of the status quo that do little to address whatever initially motivated the reform. . . .[D]isappointed policy makers, the public, and educators judge the reform to be misguided, poorly implemented, or both; and the next reform, waiting in the wings with new funding or new leadership, takes center stage" (p. 264). Long ago, in commenting on educational change and reform, Sarason (1971) observed, "The more things change the more they remain the same" (p. 297). Recently, he declared, "the one thing that history of educational reform indisputably proves is that the more things change the more they do not remain the same but rather do or will get worse" (2004, p. 25).

> Schools and school systems are political organizations in which power is an organizing feature. Ignore [power] relationships, leave unexamined their rationale, and the existing system will defeat efforts at reform. This will happen not because there is a grand conspiracy or because of mulish stubbornness in resisting change or because educators are uniquely unimaginative or uncreative (which they are not) but rather because recognizing and trying to change power relationships, especially in complicated, traditional institutions, is among the most complex tasks human beings can undertake (Sarason, 1990. p. 7.)

The implications are clear. As scholars we must substantially increase our efforts to understand micropolitics and educational change and reform. As policy makers, educational administrators and teachers we must learn to create the positive, robust type of political processes and structures in schools that lead to school improvement.

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