Discussion Questions
February 28, 2006

What do policy research and policy analysis attempt to do? [p.23]
• “Policy research and policy analysis attempt to bring understanding to complex problems and 
  processes. They direct our attention to critical features—contextual conditions, institutional 
  arrangements, cultural norms and belief systems that influence policy activity and change.”

What is meant by rational approaches to policy analysis? [p.23]
• “Rational explanations focus on the intentional activity of policymakers in pursuit of clearly defined 
  organizational goals.”

What is Structuralism? [p.23]
• “…structuralism suggests that human behavior is externally conditioned by society’s institutions, 
  as opposed to emanating from the internal goals of actors.”

What is meant by “cultural approaches” to policy analysis? [p.24]
• “Cultural approaches to policy focus on the historical or temporal context and how this contributes 
  to policy patterns that develop over time. Cultural approaches examine value conflicts, tensions, 
  the dynamics of negotiation and coalition building…the various environmental and institutional 
  conditions...”

What is meant by “conceptual framework”? [p.25]
• “Policy frameworks ‘may be understood as mechanisms for comprehending empirical situations 
  with simplification.’”
• “Different conceptual approaches to the study of policy provide somewhat different explanations of 
  events.”

What is a “theory” in policy analysis? [p.25]
• “Theories allow the researcher to specify which parts of a conceptual framework are most relevant 
  to certain types of questions.”

What is a “model” in policy analysis? [p.25]
• “…models makes more precise assumptions about a limited set of variables.”

To what extent do policies penetrate the system? [pp.26 & 27]
• “Despite the political rhetoric directed at changing public education, it is difficult to determine under 
  what conditions policies will actually penetrate the educational system and produce institutional 
  change.”
How does research reinforce and shape our thinking? [pp.28 & 29]
- “The intermixing of politics and funding in the process of defining problems and solutions can have a powerful effect on what issues get recognized and who receives support in making claims about the effects of policies.”

What methods are used? [pp.30-32]
- “There can be certain data challenges in studying certain policy problems.”
- “As a result of this complexity, the scope of the scholarly field has become considerably larger over time form the original, limited goal of policy analysis providing information that would lead to improved governmental decision making.”

What voices are heard? [p.32-34]
- “Because of the study of educational policy has often concerned the definition of problems and policy choices of those in power, other perspectives are often silenced, declared irrelevant, postponed, or ignored.”

From Spring:
Chapter 10

What amendments to the U.S. Constitution are most often cited in education lawsuits? [p.206]
- First & Fourteenth Amendments

What groups most often file lawsuits in education citing those amendments? [p.206]
- Minority groups, minority religions, anyone who is on the margins and not in a position of power to have their views heard without litigation or other extreme measures.

What is a common problem with class-action lawsuits? [p.206]
- Do the plaintiffs actually represent the “class” that they claim to represent.

What is the primary problem with evidence in education lawsuits? [p.207]
- The problem with evidence in education lawsuits is that educational statistics, studies, and analysis often are debatable. The meaning of the data can be easily challenged if not misconstrued.

What was the central claim of the plaintiffs in Otero v. Mesa County School District? [p.211]
- That Hispanic children were being discriminated against by in the educational system as evidenced by poor test scores and other aggregate data on student performance.

What was the problem with that claim? [pp.213-215]
- Many of the “Hispanic” children did not speak Spanish.
- The “Hispanic” children tested better than the “Anglo” children in mathematics.
• Also, did the Hispanic community support the claim— that is, believe their children were victims or want them portrayed as such.

What was the central claim in *Hobson v. Hansen*? [p.215]
• That by virtue of a permissive transfer policy and a “track” system the District of Columbia schools were operating a segregated school system.

What assertion does Spring make about judges in educational lawsuits? [p.215]
• Judges are at a disadvantage because education is not their field of expertise.
• They are used to dealing with more concrete evidence where there is far less room for debating the data’s relevance or meaning.

To what degree have court decisions impacted upon education? [p.220]
• Enormously.
• *Brown v. Board of Education*.
• Bussing decisions in Buffalo, Atlanta, and Prince George’s County Maryland just to name a few.
• NYC lawsuit about inequities in state funding.