

Implementing Nunavut Education Act: Compulsory School Attendance Policy

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Abstract

This paper discusses the implementation of Nunavut compulsory school attendance policy as part of the Nunavut Education Act (2002). Using a bottom-up approach to policy implementation in the literature and the author's six years teaching experience in Nunavut, the paper argues that the compulsory school attendance policy may not achieve its objectives unless the District Education Authority (DEA) of each community is allowed the flexibility to adapt the policy to its local context. Because each community in the territory has a different micro-implementation environment, the DEA in consultation with principals, teachers, parents, and other community members would be able to construct effective implementation plans based on the latitude that the policy allows them.

Introduction

Nunavut, Canada's newest territory, has 26 communities that make-up the territory but the local contexts of each community are different. Population in the communities ranges from a minimum of 120 to a maximum of 7000. In terms of economy, most communities depend on subsistence economic base in the form of hunting, trapping, fishing, and gathering; while a few others have a small service-based employment, mainly government administrative jobs. As well, all the communities are fly-in communities through either Yellowknife or Iqaluit, the territorial capital. And they are extremely isolated geographically from each other. Presently, all the 26 communities in Nunavut have k-12 schools with a bilingual system—English and Inuktitut – with Inuktitut as the only means of instruction from k-5. Students are instructed in English from then on, though at the high school level they could take Inuktitut course in grades 9, 10, 11 and 12. In large towns such as Iqaluit, Rankin Inlet, and Cambridge Bay where there is a substantial population of non-Inuit, English is the only language of instruction in the schools.

In spite of these differing characteristics, the territory has developed a uniform Nunavut Education Act (2002) to replace the North West Territories (NWT) Education Act that it inherited upon its creation in April 1999. The Nunavut Education Act (NEA), which may be implemented in the 2006/2007 academic year, sets out the fundamental regulatory framework for elementary, secondary, and tertiary education in Nunavut territory. Among other things, the NEA defines the duties and responsibilities of parents, teachers, principals, and directors of education and other stakeholders of the education enterprise. It also establishes the legal structure, financial accountability, and the administrative responsibilities of the District Education Authorities (DEA). As well, it deals with issues such as language of instruction, student record management, school attendance, student behaviour, and home-schooling. In these ways, the NEA has laid down policy precedence that is likely to influence future educational policies in the territory.

The primary intent of this paper is to analyze and critique the Nunavut compulsory school attendance policy stipulated in the NEA and pinpoint its implementation problems at both the school and community levels. The paper uses literature in the field, along with the author's experiences and observations as an educator in the Nunavut territory for six years. During 1998-

2004, the author taught and administered a high school in a medium-size community in Nunavut and traveled to other communities in the territory for both professional and leisure purposes. For the six years period, the author kept detailed journal recordings of his experiences, interactions, observations, and interviews of principals, teachers, parents, students and community members' beliefs about schooling, education, curriculum, and pedagogy mainly in his residing community. The journal entries provide a valuable repertoire of data, from which the author draws evidence to support empirically some of the analyses and arguments in the paper.

The paper is organized into four sections order to achieve its purpose. The first part of the paper discusses the policy implementation theory that informs the paper. The second part outlines the Nunavut compulsory school attendance policy and undertakes a critical analysis and critique of the policy. The third part discusses the implementation problems with the compulsory school attendance policy. The last part, the conclusion, discusses the nature of the flexibility and autonomy that should be given to the DEA to implement the compulsory school attendance policy at both the school and community levels.

Bottom-up Approach to Policy Implementation

Policy implementation has become a critical point of focus for many policy analysts, practitioners, and theorists who trace policy failures to ineffective implementation (Baier, et al. 1986; Berman, 1978; Dyer, 1999; Elmore, 1980; Linder & Peters, 1987; Lipsky, 1980; Marynard-Moody et al. 1990; McLaughlin, 1987). However, among them one group strongly favours a bottom-up approach to policy implementation. A leading proponent of this school of thought, Lipsky (1980) posits that in the human service organizations, the service providers are ultimately the policy-makers rather than the officially designated policy-makers at the top-echelon of the organization or located somewhere in the organizational system. Lipsky refers to these service providers as street-level bureaucrats. Fitz (1994) offers a more comprehensive description of street-level bureaucrats: "The institutions, organizations and actors considered to be most closely involved in the lives of target groups and individuals and, it is they, through their interactions with consumers, who determine the extent to which policies are rendered effective" (p.56).

The power of street-level bureaucrats to determine how a policy is implemented stems from discretion inherent in human service work. Marynard-Moody et al (1990) acknowledge the discretionary powers of street-level bureaucrats and go on to say that policy implementation stems from the interaction between the policy and the settings where the policy is implemented. For this reason, they argue that it is unrealistic to expect that a policy would be implemented in the exact manner expected by policy-makers. Marynard-Moody et al. (1999) also suggest that street-level bureaucrats should be given flexibility and autonomy to adapt policies to their local contexts. They argue that any attempts to rein in the behaviour of street level-bureaucrat is likely to drive street level decisions underground, making it difficult to exact accountability from them. This line of thinking is similar to that of Lipsky (1980), who advocates the delegation of some authority to street-level bureaucrats in policy implementation, as a means of reducing the dangers of discretionary power. Similarly, Berman (1978) looks at implementation from two levels – the macro-implementation level and micro-implementation level. At the macro-implementation level, centrally located actors formulate a policy; while at the micro-implementation level, local actors respond to the macro plans, develop their own programs, and implement them. These perspectives underscore the idea that implementation success or failure of a policy depends ultimately on how street-level bureaucrats respond to the policy and what they do about it.

Recently, Fullan (2001) argues that if there are more negative factors against policy implementation relative to positive factors, the process of implementation will be less effective. He goes on to argue that a policy must have the active support of a critical mass of school principals and teachers in order to ensure its effective implementation and continuation at the school level. In particular, Fullan (2001) puts an emphasis on the significant role of the school principal in policy implementation: “The principal is the person most likely to be in a position to shape the organizational conditions necessary for success, such as the development of shared goals, collaborative work structures and climates, and procedures for monitoring results”(p.83). This idea indicates the need to pay attention to street-level bureaucrats or local factors in planning policy implementation.

However, the bottom-up perspective of policy implementation does not suggest that education policy-makers in the Nunavut department of education should abdicate their

responsibility to the DEA or the school principals. On the contrary, it suggests that in some circumstances such as those found in Nunavut communities, allowing the DEA flexibility in the compulsory school attendance policy would enhance its implementation at the community level. This view finds support in Renihan and Renihan's (1998) moral admonition: "Lead(sometimes), follow (sometimes) and get out of the way (sometimes) in the best interest of getting the most out of people in circumstances when their expertise and skills are called for"(p.141).

Anatomy of Nunavut Compulsory School Program Attendance and Analysis

According to section 26 (1) of the NEA:

A Student shall attend a school program regularly and punctually during the academic year as required by this Act and the regulations if the student (a) is at least five years old or will become five years old before December 31 of the academic year; and (b) is less than 18 years and has not graduated from grade 12.

Subsection (3) of section 26 of the NEA gives a catalogue of exemptions from compulsory school program attendance. It states that a student is not required to attend a school program where:

- a) The student is unable to attend by reason of his or her own sickness or other unavoidable cause that has been reported to the principal;
- b) The parent has requested that the student be excused from attending in order to allow the student to participate in traditional activities on the land or other learning experiences away from the community;
- c) The student is, with the agreement of the parents, excused by the principal from senior secondary education program for a school term to work, to participate in traditional activities on the land or to participate in other learning experiences away from the community;
- d) The student is participating in a spiritual or religious observance recognized by the denomination or religious or spiritual authority or teachings to which the student adheres;
- e) The student has been suspended or expelled from school and the suspension or expulsion is still in effect;

- f) The student is attending a home-schooling program;
- g) The student is living at an outpost camp.

However, subsection (2) of section 26 puts the responsibility for compulsory school program attendance on the shoulders of parents/guardians:

A parent/guardian of a student referred to in subsection (1) shall ensure that the student attends a school program regularly and punctually during the academic year as required by this Act and its regulations.

Furthermore, subsection (7) prescribes punitive financial fine against a parent who violates subsection (2):

A parent who contravenes subsection (2) is guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding \$100 or, if the offence relates to more than one child, to a fine not exceeding \$100 for each child.

The NEA gives the DEA (District Education Authority) of every community the power to commence such legal action only after all reasonable means, including counseling, for compliance have been tried and exhausted (subsection 9). However, in order to improve the conditions of schooling, Section 34, Subsection (1) of NEA gives the DEA of each community the authority to develop policies to promote a positive, safe, and supportive learning environment in schools under its jurisdiction. Section 34 subsection (2) states: A District Education Authority shall develop the policy referred to in subsection (1) on the basis of Inuit Qaujimaningit and Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit, with the advice of parents, students, school staff and elders and in accordance with the regulations and direction of the Minister. It is not clear whether section 34, subsection 2 is referring to the development of curriculum policy and pedagogy. Whatever its intent or implication, the DEA alone does not have the professional and administrative infrastructures to handle such a mammoth undertaking.

Nevertheless, section 26 needs a thorough analysis, for Taylor (1997) have suggested that the first stage in policy analysis is to understand the issues which the policy was designed to address. From my perspective, this seems a logical exhortation because one can not engage in a critical analysis of a specific policy without a thorough understanding of the issues that the

policy was developed to resolve. Nunavut compulsory school program attendance policy was designed principally to curb student absenteeism, truancy, and school drop out at the junior and senior secondary level (grades 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12). Absenteeism and truancy are perceived to be threatening the integrity of the territorial school system (A. Smith & P. Peterson, personal communication, July 13, 2000). Moreover, the author's observations during his professional teaching assignment in that Nunavut community show that student absenteeism and truancy were rampant and occurred mostly in January-March of the year than other times. Further, according to a report titled, "Toward Excellence" (1996), in 1994/95 560 students enrolled in grade 10 in Nunavut but only 280 or 50 % enrolled in grade 11 and out of that only 160 or 57% enrolled in grade 12. Similar statistics were reported in the 1996/97 academic year. So, one may ask, what happened to the other 50% that did not enroll in grade 11 program? It is highly unlikely that those students were made to repeat grade 10 or transferred out of the territory. Thus, it is quite logical to conclude that those students dropped out of school.

Again, the Government of Canada's survey (1995) reports that grade nine premature school leavers was 71% in 1982-1983 and 68 % in 1990-1991. Moreover, Statistics Canada (2003) reports that for the academic year 1999-2000 to 2000-2002, Nunavut experienced 20% net reduction in graduation rate. As well, some Nunavut school principals in one of their annual conferences in Iqaluit stated that high school student absenteeism and dropout rate that plagued their schools were responsible for the sluggish rate of grade 12 graduations (T. Matterson, F. Jamieson, & D. Wyte, personal communication September 12, 2003). These principals also related that student absenteeism and dropout rate threatened to shut down their schools. The statistics and the principals' narratives demonstrate that truancy is a critical issue in Nunavut school system. Recently, Kunuk (2006), chair of the Iqaluit District Education Authority, stated that ... "Since 1999, the growth in the number of graduates in Nunavut has in fact slowed, ... we simply can not continue to quietly accept graduation rates that leave 75 percent of our students to fall through the social safety net". Nevertheless, the statistics above and the principals' narrative do not point out where the causality of Nunavut's problem of school absenteeism, truancy or low graduation rate lies.

Furthermore, Mackay and Myles (1989) blame Aboriginal parents for the low aboriginal graduation and premature school leaving rates in Canada. Using interview as their main data collection instrument, Mackay and Myles (1989) made two major inferences about aboriginal education in Canada. First, those Aboriginal communities that value formal education tend to have a higher graduation rate compared to those that do not value formal education. Second, the level of parental support, interest, and encouragement contribute to native students' decision to remain in or leave school. However, Mackay and Myles (1989) also state that many of the Aboriginal premature school leavers are ESL students, which complicates their findings that parental involvement is a crucial factor that affects native students' decision to leave school prematurely.

As a matter of fact, a vast majority of Aboriginal parents can not afford the services of private English tutors for their children. Consequently, the onus of responsibility is on the Nunavut Department of Education to develop appropriate ESL programs for Inuit students and employ teachers with ESL preparation. Sadly enough, this is one major area that Nunavut school system has failed woefully to do. Inuit junior and senior high students, whose mother tongue is non- English, are instructed in English in a manner similar to students in Southern Canada where English is the dominant language of communication. However, Nunavut Education Act (section 27) makes the following promise to encourage school attendance in the territory: "The Minister, working in cooperation with the District Education Authorities, shall establish programs to encourage regular and punctual attendance". The Act does not give any further indications about the form the regular and punctual attendance program will take. But from my experience, the development of any regular and punctual attendance program would require a substantial decentralization of decision-making to the District Education Authorities rather a mere cooperation with the minister of education or the regional school boards.

Framing School Attendance Problem in Nunavut

Given the deplorable attendance and graduation problem, education policy-makers in the territory might have reasoned that a school attendance policy with clear legal implications and punitive monetary fines for parents would reverse the trend and restore some degree of sanity to the territorial schooling and education system. Nonetheless, the choice of mandate as a policy

instrument to solve the student absenteeism problem in Nunavut may be the result of how those policy makers defined the problem. McDonnell and Elmore (1987) have argued that the way a policy problem is framed influences to a significant extent, both the search for causes of the problem and the selection of policy instrument. For example, if the school characteristics were framed as the causation of the student absenteeism and dropout rather than the parental or familial characteristics, perhaps a policy instrument such as inducement or capacity-building might have been selected to solve the problem.

Reynolds (1987) also argues that most research on school truancy and absenteeism tends to pathologize family characteristics of students to the total exclusion of school-based characteristics which could cause students to be truant or drop out of school. Reynolds (1987) further states that family characteristics were such a prominent factor in early research on student truancy that any new research that deviated from that belief was simply ignored. Brown (1987) and Robins (1979) also agree to this assertion, contending that research on truancy tends to focus disproportionate attention on parents of truants as the main cause of the phenomenon.

Robins (1979), furthermore, reports that there was a wide spread belief in certain quarters that truancy had a hereditary basis and that this occurred when one or both parents were truants during their school days. Such parents, it was contended, tend to encourage or tolerate truancy behaviour in their children. Carlen (1992) adds that policy-makers believe that a normal school child comes from a household where both parents have a full control over the behaviour of their children. This may explain why in the case of the Nunavut compulsory school program attendance policy, Inuit parents are made responsible for ensuring that their children attend school regularly and punctually, regardless of the nature of the school program.

Nevertheless, contemporary literature on student absenteeism and premature departure approaches the problem from multiple perspectives rather exclusively pathologizing students' families. For example, Dougherty (1999) identifies student alienation, different cultural values, academic vigour, the failure of the school to teach social responsibility, school climate, and chaotic family life as the primary causes of student absenteeism, truancy or dropout. For Leonard et al (1999), the school environment is similar to the workplace in terms of its ability to generate

stressors. These authors assert that there is a positive correlation between student absenteeism and the level of stress in the school environment. Their research findings demonstrate that school-based characteristics are also responsible for student absenteeism or dropout. However, the Nunavut compulsory school attendance policy does not sanction the schools for student absenteeism. Instead, it holds Inuit parents exclusively responsible for ensuring that their children attend school regularly and punctually, whether the students find the school program culturally relevant or not. I wonder what responsibility the school has toward student absenteeism or dropout. It could be argued that Nunavut school environment-- what teachers teach, the way they teach, methods of assessment, and language of instruction-- has the potential to drive away Inuit students because it is culturally alienating to them.

Making Inuit parents responsible for the behaviour of their teenage children is also unfair. McClusky et al. (2004), in their research into chronic absenteeism report that parents have a greater influence on their elementary school aged-children's attendance than they do on their middle or high school-aged children. While in Nunavut most Inuit parents could persuade their elementary school-aged children to attend school, they could hardly persuade their children 13 years or older to attend school. Part of the problem is cultural. From my longitudinal sociological observations, Inuit culture offers greater latitude of freedom to their children aged 13 and over compared to the dominant Euro-Canadian culture. Most Inuit teens and adolescents are allowed to make their own life decisions without any consultation with or inputs from their parents. In light of this analysis, the implementation of the Nunavut compulsory school attendance policy would be fraught with difficulties, not only in terms of unsuccessful implementation but in terms of non-implementation — the policy may not achieve the effects that policy-makers intended (Elmore, 1980; Hogwood & Gunn, 1984; Lipsky, 1980; Mclaughlin, 1987).

Nunavut compulsory school attendance policy aims to curb absenteeism and reduce drop out rate in the territorial school system. Threatening Inuit parents with punitive fines may compel them to exert maximum pressure on their unwilling teenagers to attend school program. But many Inuit parents may refuse to do that by rationalizing it on the grounds that it is likely to push their children into committing suicide. In fact, suicide rate among Inuit youth is the highest in Canada. Some Nunavut communities experience suicide six times higher than the national

average (Ajunnginiq Centre, 2004). *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation* (1999) documentary film titled, “Link between School and Inuit Youth Suicide”, concluded that the school system in Nunavut is partly to blame for the escalating rate of suicide among Inuit youth. The film based that conclusion on the observation that the school environment is culturally alienating to the Inuit youth.

Furthermore, the implementation of the Nunavut compulsory school attendance policy is most likely to create an army of internal dropouts. Toby (1999) states that internal dropouts, students who attend school program but refuse to commit maximum efforts to the learning process, constitute an immense source of discouragement to teachers. Toby (1999) also asserts that the presence of internal dropouts in the school system does not only discourage teachers, but it also causes teacher burn out and turnover. Leonard et al (1999) in their research, state that the school environment is one of the primary sources of stressors in teachers’ and principals’ lives. Certainly, the presence of internal dropouts contributes to teacher stressors. From my observation of Nunavut schools, internal dropouts usually get into unprovoked fights with other students, smash windows and kick furniture at the least provocations, hurl threats at both teachers and students with the object of getting suspended so that they could stay at home. Not surprisingly, the Nunavut compulsory school attendance policy exempts suspended students from attendance; hence internal drop outs could eventually become temporary drop outs. I wonder how that would that help students to graduate from school.

Anticipated Response of Street-level Bureaucrats

Principals and teachers would have to respond in some ways if they see that the rate of internal dropouts is growing out of control. This is where principals and teachers as street-level bureaucrats would come to play in order to minimize stressors in the school environment and maintain the integrity of the schooling system. Lipsky (1980) describes the nature and circumstance of service provider work that gives rise to discretionary power:

Ideally, and by training, street-level bureaucrats respond to individual needs or characteristics of the people they serve or confront. In practice, they must deal with clients on a mass basis, since work requirements prohibit individualized service...At best street-level bureaucrats invent benign modes of mass processing

that more or less permit them to deal with the public fairly, appropriately, and successfully. At worse, they give in to favouritism, stereotyping, and routinising—all of which serve private or agency purposes. Some street-level bureaucrats drop-out or burn -out relatively early in their career (p. 8).

As Lipsky (1980) has emphasized, street-level bureaucrats within their work environment are compelled to devise their own methods for survival.

In the same way, Nunavut principals and teachers would have to use their creativity, skills, and knowledge of the school system to invent their own methods that would allow them to deal with the presence of internal dropouts in their schools. A possible solution could be to order an internal dropout to go home, isolate them from the rest of the class or find them some hands-on projects in the school to do. Nonetheless, none of these strategies for dealing with internal drop outs conforms to the letter and spirit of Nunavut compulsory school program attendance policy. The reason is that assigning hands-on projects to internal dropouts is not part of the courses that would earn them the required credits for grade 12 graduation. As well, ordering internal dropouts to go home means that they are not attending their academic programs either. Unfortunately, Nunavut compulsory school program attendance policy did not take these issues into consideration in the implementation process. May be the policy-makers were mindful of the fact that it is impossible to force students to learn but they could be compelled physically to attend an academic program.

Perhaps policy-makers have hopes that compulsory school program attendance would eventually lead to some form of learning for even the most reluctant students. However, this optimism ignores stark realities in the classroom. It reminds me of the old Calvin and Hobbes cartoon. Calvin was sitting at his desk; the teacher was in front of him and asked ‘Who would like to summarize what we just read? Calvin, how about you?’ Calvin says, ‘Sorry! I am here against my will. I refuse to cooperate.’ He then stands up and shouts ‘They can transport my body to school, but they can’t chain my spirit! My spirit roams free! Walls can’t confine it! Laws can’t restrain it! Authority has no power over it!’ The teacher then says ‘Calvin, if you’d put half the energy of your protests into your school work...’ Calvin says ‘You can try to leave a

message, but my spirit screens its calls.’ (New Hampshire politics, n.d). The moral of the cartoon is that you can not force anyone to learn if she/he does not have the desire to learn.

Other Implementation Problems

The co-operation of Inuit parents would be needed in order to successfully implement the Nunavut compulsory school attendance policy. However, most Inuit parents are not fully informed of the goals and values of the schools in their communities and, even where they are informed, they do not unequivocally share those goals and values (Inuit elders, personal communication, March 20, 18, and 27, 2000). In the past, feeble attempts were made to explain the goals of schooling and education in the territory to Inuit parents. Most of those explanations focused on old platitudes: “in-school education is good for Inuit youth because it will help them to get a job and make a good income” (Inuit elders, personal communication, February 25, 2002). But the problem with this statement is that it fails to take into account the economic realities in the communities. The Conference Board of Canada (2001), for instance, reports that Nunavut communities were established in areas without considerations to economic resources and this has contributed to the poverty in the communities.

Another problem is that prior to the colonization of the Inuit, they had their own system of education that was concerned with preparing the youths for survival in the harsh Arctic ecology and also for future assumption of adult roles (Inuit elder, November 6, 1999). Does the modern schooling and education system in Nunavut prepare Inuit youth to fulfill these goals? The differences between the school and Inuit community values have resulted in periodic conflicts between the two. The conflict hardly takes the form of physical violence or confrontation. Instead, it assumes the character of passive resistance, non-cooperative attitude toward the school. Goddard and Foster (2002), in their research on indigenous communities in northern Alberta report a similar conflict between the schools and the community,

The sometimes conflicting understandings between the imported educators and the indigenous parents reflected the significant linguistic, cultural, and world-view differences between the dominant national society and the minority society of the community. Such differences were manifested not only in the administrative personnel but also in the very underlying fabric of the education

system. The teachers, the curriculum, the examinations, the governance structure, and even the very concept of school itself were foreign interventions into northern communities (p.9).

Similarly, writing about the conflict between the school and the Inupiat communities, (ethnic Inuit communities in Alaska), Ongtooguk (n.d) asserts:

... Why does this estrangement between school and community continue? Some parents have questions about the goals of the school. The parents may not care about the school or they do not equate it with the education they have in mind. Many parents see lots of papers passed back and forth, but they do not see their children being prepared for anything that they value. Some parents believe that learning about traditional life is the most valuable knowledge that can be taught to their children. Many parents still participate in the more traditional native education system as they prepare their children to contribute to the community. Whatever the reason for the estrangement, the school does not have a monopoly on education in Alaska Native community and is seen by some as a competing learning system (p.6)

The conflict between the values of Inuit parents and the school complicates the implementation of Nunavut compulsory school program attendance policy. Nevertheless, it should be stated that the degree of this conflict differs from one Nunavut community to another. It is at its peak in communities that are most traditional, remote and isolated from the influence of Southern Canadian values and norms; and those that are most politicized about Inuit rights and assertion of Inuit sovereignty. This differing community politics would make the implementation of Nunavut compulsory school attendance policy more difficult. In some cases, it would exacerbate the existing conflict or open up other areas for conflict. Whatever form it takes, it is likely to create more tension between the school (principal and teachers) and the community on one hand, and between the DEA and the community on the other hand.

The District Education Authority (DEA) in each community is made up of predominantly Inuit, except Iqaluit, the territorial capital, which is becoming more diversified because of the

settlement of Euro-Canadian population. In Nunavut the DEA of every community is the primary agent responsible for education governance at the local level. As a street-level bureaucrat, the DEA's decisions at the local level impact policy implementation processes. The DEA members are elected by the community members with the exception of school principals who represent the regional school board and the school as a whole. As a school management committee, the DEA is responsible for the appointment, discipline, and termination of school principals, hiring of teachers, control of school budget for recurring expenses, school operations, scheduling, reporting to the community, and the development and implementation of student discipline policies. In fact, in most official documents of the Nunavut government, the DEA is presented as a democratic institution that controls education at the local level.

Indeed subsection (9) of section 26 of the NEA gives the DEA the power to bring legal action against parents who have violated subsection (2), after reasonable means for compliance have been exhausted. From my perspective, this section would be interpreted according to the vision, beliefs and values of individual members of the DEA, which would in turn affect the implementation process. DEA members, who share more of the values of the school, including its mission, would be highly motivated to commence legal action against parents who have violated subsection (2), than those who do not share such values. It is for this reason that McLaughlin (1987) argues that the successful implementation of a policy depends on the will, motivation, beliefs, and attitudes of the implementers toward policy goals. In fact, this has nothing to do with capacity, as McLaughlin (1987) has emphasized, capacity could be built through the appropriate training program and consultancy.

The Nunavut compulsory school program attendance policy as I have stated above, gives a number of exemptions from attendance. However, the exemptions do not cover every eventuality that could be construed as a justifiable exemption on cultural, social or humanitarian grounds. Consequently, each DEA in every community, acting in the spirit of street-level bureaucrat, is likely to create its own list of exemptions in addition to those in the subsection (3). For example, it may authorize the schools to exempt students from compulsory school program attendance in the following events:

- 1) A parent requests permission from the principal so that her son would stay home for one week to provide babysitting functions for her 3 year old child, while the parent is away on the land;
- 2) A senior secondary student is either pregnant or has given birth and is asked to stay home from school and nurse her baby;
- 3) A student stops attending school program for a month for the purpose of engaging in carving or hunting or artwork in order to make money to support himself or supplement his family's resources;
- 4) A student drops out of school for one semester so that her aging grandmother could teach her Inuit traditional stories, legends, wisdom or throat-singing in the community;
- 5) A student misses school for two weeks or so helping his uncle or grandfather to design and build a "qamotiq" or harpoon;
- 6) A student takes one semester off from school in order to learn traditional soap stone carving.

In Nunavut communities where school-community relationship is of paramount importance, principals and teachers are most likely to exercise a considerable flexibility in implementing the compulsory school program attendance policy. This is why Clune (1990) characterizes the school as a policy mediator, because of the great discretion power it wields about how it implements a policy. Clune (1990) also states that schools are policy constructors, suggesting that schools could be sources of alternative policies. In fact, the socio-political environment of each community in Nunavut would compel the school to construct its own parallel attendance exemption policy, which may be implemented along with those in sections (26), subsection (3).

The construction of a parallel attendance policy would also make it easier for schools in each community to resolve ambiguous terms contained in section (26), subsection (1) such as "regular attendance" and "punctual attendance". Assuming the total number of student days in the academic year is 190 days, does 50% (or 95 days) attendance constitute regular attendance? What about a student who is habitually 15 minutes late for school program or one who comes in the morning but not in the afternoon or vice versa, does it mean that the student is not punctual? These issues would be resolved differently in each school. It is in deciding these issues that the school contexts would mediate the implementation of the compulsory school attendance policy.

And it is for this reason that the implementation process would be beyond the control of the policy makers in the territorial department of education, making the school a policy constructor.

From my teaching experience in Nunavut, some schools, for instance, may have to establish a baseline attendance of 80% as regular attendance as part of the software strategy to encourage school attendance. This idea is similar to Boloz and Lincoln's (1983) report, that to encourage school attendance in a Native school in Northern Arizona, the school established a baseline of 80% as the regular attendance. In that school, students were allowed to miss school for not more than 5 days in a month. Beyond that, the school either takes an immediate action to contact the parents or arranges for a home visit. Some schools with the support of the DEA may even be compelled to implement a scheme of incentives to encourage attendance (Dougherty, 1999).

Another issue has to do with the wording of section (26), subsection (1). It states that regular and punctual attendance is mandatory for students who are less than 18 years and have not graduated from grade 12. Does this suggest that a student who is 18 years old or older is exempted from regular attendance? The answer to this question is crucial, because from my teaching experience in Nunavut, a majority of students in senior secondary school in Nunavut celebrate their eighteenth birth day while in grade 11 or 12. Some principals encourage students over and above 18 years of age to attend school programs and work toward their high school diploma. Thus, the implementers of the policy would have to interpret that subsection in the light of individual school contexts. For example, some schools may pursue a policy of persuading students over twenty years of age to enroll and earn a high school diploma. Again, these issues further support bottom-up implementation theory that policy-makers can not predetermine or control the implementation process and that those closest to the target problem should be allowed latitude of authority to implement the policy.

Conclusion: Resolving the implementation problems

The above analyses may demonstrate that four fundamental problems beset the implementation of the Nunavut compulsory school program attendance policy. First and foremost, each Nunavut community is different in terms of the importance it attaches to in-school education; the level of conflict between the school and the community; the values of the DEA members; parental perception about the vulnerability of their children to suicide; and the remoteness of the community. Second, principals and teachers of the school and the DEA members in each community would have to interpret the Nunavut compulsory school attendance policy in accordance with their own beliefs and motivation. Third, some parts of the Nunavut compulsory attendance policy are ambiguous, and must be resolved by the implementers according to their own personal or professional beliefs about what works and what does not work in the contexts of the school and the community in which the school exists. Considering that there are more than two dozen communities in Nunavut territory, ultimately, the compulsory school attendance policy would assume a different character and its predetermined goals would not be precisely achieved as the policy-makers have envisaged. Finally, while the compulsory school program attendance policy acknowledges the need to change school-based characteristics in order to make schooling conducive to Inuit, it does not give much detail about how this would be done.

Taylor (1997) has stated that mere policy analysis is not good enough and that “policy analysis needs to concern itself with the question of how progressive changes might occur and the desirability of alternative policy actions” (p.38). This being so, the fundamental implementation problems enumerated above could be resolved by giving the DEA flexibility to implement the compulsory school attendance policy at the local level. As Chapman et al. (2002) rightly stated,

One of the central premises of decentralization is that around many aspects of schooling, communities know best. Advocates of decentralization argue that those closest to the community and school have a better understanding of local conditions and are in the best position to make decisions about the educational processes that best serve local needs (p.181).

Since the DEA is closest to education problems at the community level, it is more knowledgeable than bureaucrats in the territorial department of education about the problems, issues, and challenges related to school program attendance. It also has more cultural resources needed to build cooperative relationships with parents and to allow parental participation in any decision-making. Therefore, the DEA in consultation with principals, teachers, parents, and community members should be empowered to make additional regulations for the portion of the policy relating to the grounds for exemption from compulsory school program attendance. As well, the DEA must be allowed to determine the punitive measures for non-attendance. Using its cultural resources and democratic mandate, the DEA would be able to determine non-monetary punitive measures against parents who violate the tenets of the compulsory attendance policy. Not only would this flexibility enhance the implementation and continuation of the policy, it would also strengthen education decentralization in the communities and make local control of schools in the territory a reality.

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