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**Grant, E. (2024). *Deliberative policymaking: Redesigning how we make education policy*. Harvard Education Press.**

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*Deliberative Policymaking: Redesigning How We Make Education Policy* is a heartfelt, vision-based look at the challenges and opportunities currently impacting the development of education policy. The author, **Elizabeth Grant**, has extensive experience as a researcher, professor, and practitioner. She was formerly Associate Professor of Education at George Washington University's Graduate School of Human Development, as well as a senior policy adviser and chief of staff to the Assistant Secretary in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education in the federal Department of Education. She currently serves as the superintendent of schools for Salt Lake City School District. These experiences bring context and urgency to her message of deliberative policymaking.



This book was published at a critical moment in our collective history as sweeping education policy changes were, and continue to be, politically mandated. It would be beneficial reading for policymakers both in and outside of the education and school leaders such as superintendents and principals. In a review of current writing on policymaking, rather than an overarching policymaking literature, more international sources or research exist concerning specific types of targeted policy addressing issues like equity. There seems to be little published on the process of creating education policy.

However, the publication *The Convergence of K-12 and Higher Education Policies and Programs in a Changing Era*, published in 2021 by Harvard Education Press, speaks to the connections between education policy in K-12 spaces and higher education. This idea of building a collective efficacy between policy spaces corresponds to Grant's plea to investigate varied models for collaboration in policy creation. Grant adds a needed voice to the conversation about building capacity to make policy that is implementable.

The book is organized into three parts with eight chapters in total. The first section, *Redesigning Education Policymaking*, identifies the need for a new way of approaching education policy. Critiques are levied at the timelines often used for the implementation of sweeping policies, the opportunities for access and opportunity for all populations, and the need for building civic capacity and deliberative democracy into the policymaking process. The second section, *New Policymaking Practices*, envisions the ability of policymakers to utilize, design, build, and revise processes that are used in creating physical products such as chairs or tables to the world of policymaking. The third section, *Implications of Deliberative Policymaking*, invites readers to contemplate how future policies might be designed and implemented in new, impactful ways. Grant makes it known that the ideas presented in this book have not yet been tested, but she invites policymakers and readers to test them in building policy that matters.

### **Section I: Redesigning Education Policymaking**

Grant builds a timeline for education policymaking from the 1960s, with the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), to present-day policies, including policies influenced by COVID-19. Policymakers have looked different over time, and the variety of people at the policymaking table has expanded. Those in the legislative branch, either federal or state, have the opportunity to pass policy and make law, but they often rely on outside sources for ideas and wording for policies. Grant describes memos written by her and others at the Department of Education (DOE) and, with some surprise, reflects on how those memos were included in written policy, even at times with verbatim wording. She expected that policymakers would be more involved in the creation process. This point was also raised in the final portions of the book where she discusses the benefits and drawbacks of the hundreds of organizations that are currently part of the policymaking process, from think tanks to privately funded policy groups that have specific, targeted motives for all aspects of education policy. A caution is issued to recognize these dynamics and their implications for passing policy with specific viewpoints in mind.

Grant argues that policies are, by design, an action to influence and change behaviors, beliefs, and actions. She introduces two difficulties that arise because of this purpose. First, it is vital that policy creators define and place problems into context and clarify their boundaries. The assumptions made when defining problems that need policies are varied, including influences from lack of resources, poverty, racial inequity, or poor leadership. This view, taken with a specific lens to solve the problem, makes an impact on other contributing factors. While reading this section, I felt discouraged by the current tendency for education policy to be guided by very specific concerns and problems that, when addressed by policy, become problematic or difficult for other, often disadvantaged, populations.

The second challenge is the assumption by policymakers that policy design and policy implementation are two distinct stages and not an integrated process. This challenge is illustrated by policies such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) or the rollout of the Common Core State Standards. Grant suggests that instead of looking at these issues as disparate parts, policymakers should consider policy as a hypothesis to be explored in iterations that are meant to be updated and revised.

## Section II: New Policymaking Practices

In the second section, Grant implies that policymaking could look more like the design process for products like a chair. When a functional design problem is presented, such as how to make a chair ergonomically satisfying, designers take an empathetic discovery view to uncover how people are interacting with the design problem. Grant shares how using this lens would have strengthened the DOE's ability to meet school accountability challenges placed on educators because of the NCLB and Race to the Top policy pressures. Initially, this section of the book was difficult because there seemed to be no alternative to failed policies. However, Grant lends some assurance that policymaking can look different when policymakers attend to complexity or implementation as part of policymaking.

Complexity, as defined in the book, is different than complicated when it comes to defining problems. Complex problems stem from multiple needs by multiple stakeholders, where complicated problems might just be hard to solve. Grant surmises that complex problems need to be solved with collective capacity from many perspectives. This leads to the thesis of the book, which centers around building civic capacity through deliberative democracy:

The policymaking process can reflect the power and position of an elite set of actors and amplify only a small set of voices or can increase democratic participation, legitimize public decisions, and grow the civic capacity needed to take on and sustain education reforms that will better serve children (p. 10)

This thesis requires collaboration, and collaboration is necessary when designing policy for implementation.

Implementation at the forefront of policymaking requires intentional planning. Grant suggests four models of policy planning that can guide this: Ground-Centric Policymaking, or involving those that are actual practitioners of the policies; Collaboration Policymaking, or integrating those that are both upstream and downstream from those that mandate policies; Trial-and-Error Policymaking, or designing into the process ways to test policies as prototypes and include feedback loops into the process; and Anticipatory Policymaking, or thinking ahead to future and possible difficulties, such as the rise of artificial intelligence. Integrating different policymaking frameworks is important as the relationship between the organizations that are mandating and implementing them. These models highlight the importance of building relationships between policymakers and policy implementers.

One of the strongest points the author makes is how implementing a relational model between federal and state education organizations might make a difference in current policy discussions. One of the struggles is the current view of federal and state interests and power being on opposite ends of a tug-of-war rope. Power gained by one entity means power lost by the other. Grant's conjecture is that building a new power relationship where a natural back-and-forth move would make the goals of policymaking possible. This relational model recognizes and values the power of policymakers and implementers. While this book was written in 2024, before the uncertainty of the current political climate and the dismantling of the Department of

Education, the contribution to understanding the relationship between federal and state goals for education is still, and maybe more, applicable.

### **Section III: Implications of Deliberative Policymaking**

In section three, Grant discusses how implementation, as a vital part of policymaking, is being used to impact the next generation of policymakers through university courses and focus. It is clear in Grant's writing that to be successful in the future, policymakers must think anew, but they will also be endowed with greater success. As the author states,

With that shift comes an emphasis on a new set of skills oriented toward understanding education policy design, facilitating public deliberation, building useful feedback systems, partnering effectively with policy intermediaries, creating effective conditions for implementation, and facilitating the development of shared knowledge. (p. 120)

Building implementation into policymaking requires collaboration and trust. This shift involves a move away from players with big ideas about groups to blame when things fail toward a collective responsibility for success with input and revision throughout the process.

Grant discusses how some of the big policy decisions in the last decade and a half, such as the roll out of NCLB or Common Core State Standards, have suffered because the policy creators were detached from the implementers. One of the suggestions she offers is that implementors are involved from the creation point to plan and build in the process for implementation as part of the policymaking process. In my view, this offering from Grant is the most likely to be implemented and impactful. As policymakers come together in a deliberate way with the view of listening and amplifying voices, policymakers and policy implementors can make progress and move education forward.

*Deliberative Policymaking* is a realistic, yet empathic and hopeful view of education policy. Grant is fair and accurate in her critique of policymakers, including herself. Discussions about policy design, implementation, power dynamics, and collaborative practices are strengths in this book. Grant shares her extensive knowledge and insight into the process and goals, and policymakers would do well to test her hypothesis, especially in the current climate of change and disruption. It is evident by Grant's discussion of past failures and the importance of collaboration in the future that it will take policymakers with courage and discernment to implement her ideas and share in the likely success.

The biggest critique of this book is the need to match the author's experiential knowledge with feet-on-the-ground suggestions for implementation. Questions readers will need to grapple with might be "How do leaders create meaningful collaborations between state and federal entities?" and "With two or four-year election cycles and highly partisan discourse around education, how can leaders see beyond the next cycle and create policy that will be long-lasting and empowering for students?" While Grant recognizes this work will not be easy, readers will need to marry the realities of failed policy creation and implementation with the courage to look beyond simple answers for empowering educators and serving students.


## Reference

Loss, C. P., & McGuinn, P. J. (Eds.) (2021). *The convergence of K-12 and higher education: Policies and programs in a changing era*. Harvard Education Press.

## About the Reviewer

**Kathryn Clark** is a practitioner and researcher. She currently serves as assistant director and mathematics specialist for a K-8 charter school in Northern Utah. She is also a PhD student at Utah State University with research interests in early childhood mathematics assessments and teacher curriculum planning. Kathryn previously taught grades 4-6 with an emphasis on the math and science curriculum. Kathryn formerly served on the board of directors as a member and board chair for a K-12 school and has engaged in public school policy creation on both the state and local levels.



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