

Analysis of the Educational Policymaking Process in Georgia: A Case of House Bill (HB) 247 (amended 1999) on Bullying in Schools.

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Abstract

This study analysed the educational policy making process in the state of Georgia in respect of House Bill 247 (amended), which entailed considering the events, social pressures and other indicators that pushed the bullying problem on the policy agenda. Of particular focus was identifying the problem that House Bill 247 sought to address, how this problem was identified and defined, indicators of the problem's existence, and the nature of factors and events that pushed this problem to prominence (agenda status) and inherent contradictions, if any, among actors. Employing the case study strategy, data were collected through document or textual analysis complemented by interviews with purposively selected key participants in and outside the Georgia legislature. Findings indicated that HB 247 educational policymaking in Georgia took an irrational process whereby politicians drafted policy drafts and shelved them until events that heightened public mood characterised by public debates for or against, judicial trials pushed the issue to agenda status. These events and attendant public mood opened a policy window through which to push the bullying issue onto agenda status. Coupling of the proposal to existing legislation was a political strategy of enlisting support for the bill from legislators on both political divides, which ensured easy sailing on the legislative floor. Conclusively, the policy making process characterizing the was not as neat a rational process.

Introduction

Aggression and antisocial behavior in American and European schools are persistent and visible problems, much of which involves individuals bullying their peers (Pellegrin & Long, 2002). Bullying results in emotional or physical injury (Langan, 2002; Salmon, 1998), or even death. The state of Georgia law House Bill (HB) 247 (amended) came into effect on July 1, 1999 mandating that the State Board of Education and school systems develop a program to address, by the start of the 1999-2000 school year, methods of discouraging bullying and violent acts against fellow students. According to Code section 20-2-751.4, the term bullying means:

1. *Any willful attempt or threat to inflict injury on another person, when accompanied by an apparent ability to do so; or*
2. *any intentional display of force such as would give the victim reason to fear or expect immediate bodily harm. According to the state of Georgia HB 247 (amended, 1999),*

The board of education shall adopt policies applicable to students in grades six through twelve, that prohibit bullying of a student by another student and shall require such prohibition to be included in the student code of conduct for middle and high schools in that school system. Local board policies shall require that upon finding that a student has committed the offence of bullying for the third time in a school year, such a student shall be assigned to an alternative school. Each local board of education shall ensure that students and parents of students are notified of the prohibition against bullying, and the penalties for violating the prohibition, by posting such information at each middle and high school and by including such information in student and parent handbooks.

Any school system which is not in compliance with the requirements of this Code section shall be ineligible to receive state funding pursuant to Code section 20-2-161 and 20-2-262.

In this study, I sought to analyze the events, social pressures, and other indicators that pushed the problem of bullying on to the policy agenda in the state of Georgia. The investigation had two goals. First, it sought to identify the problem that the bill sought to address, and how this problem was identified and defined. Second, the study sought to determine the source or indicators of the problem's existence, and the nature of actors and events that pushed this problem to prominence or agenda status, noting inherent contradictions, if any, among actors. This entailed also determination of other legal frameworks that might have impelled the development and subsequent passing of House Bill (HB) 247 (amended, 1999) on bullying.

This study is important in a number of ways. First, education is a public asset in terms of public investment, and therefore society has concern over the goings-on in schools in terms of safety of students. Taking from Freire's concept of *conscientisation*, which means awakening of, or increase in consciousness (Crotty, 1998), this study provokes researchers to debate and contribute towards advancement of more studies that seek to understand educational policymaking processes generally and, specifically, policymaking processes directed at creating safe environments for children in schools and their right to protection.

Second, bullying is a phenomenon that has seen growing interest in western European countries, Australia, United States, New Zealand, and Japan (Smith et al., 2002), its impact on victims and their experience of it, and intervention programs (Nairn, & Smith, 2002; Langan, 2002). This study, though in a small way, adds to the body of literature by bringing in the dimension of how educational policy or law on bullying evolved in the state of Georgia. This way, it provides data that is Georgia-specific, which can be a starting or comparative point in investigating, specifically, policymaking processes on bullying elsewhere, and education policy making processes in general.

Lastly, child safety in schools is an issue of ethics, a fundamental right of children to protection. Educators, academicians, those with interest on school safety and discipline, and those with influence on, or access to the educational policy making process who come across this study may gain knowledge, insights, and develop interest in how legislation at the state level evolves to address problems such as bullying in schools. Similarly, this study enhances the readers', as well as researcher's understanding of the complexities, forces involved, and the problems at play in policymaking with regards to addressing bullying in schools. Importantly, it will also contribute, to the author and other readers interested, either validation or refuting of Kingdon's (1995) conceptual framework for analyzing the policymaking process. A brief literature review should situate the issue of bullying in Georgia into perspective.

Meaning and Nature of Bullying

Regarding the state of Georgia policy on bullying, it is pertinent to be clear about the nature and meaning of bullying. Olweus (1993), having earlier restricted bullying as use of violence against another boy, amended his definition to include any student being exposed repeatedly, and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more students. For Banks (1997), both direct and indirect behaviors that one or more students initiate against a victim comprise bullying. Direct behavior embodies teasing, hitting, stealing, taunting and threatening, and indirect behavior is evident if a student is socially isolated through intentional exclusion. Langan (2002) identifies physical intimidation: pushing, tripping, and hitting; verbal abuse, which can take forms such teasing, insult, mocking, threatening, and taunting peers. For Langan,

What makes verbal abuse even more hurtful is that it usually involves a large audience, with the target surrounded by people laughing at his or her expense (2002, p. 9-10).

Such behaviors are bullying because they are unprovoked, used by stronger students to assault weaker peers (Hoover, Oliver, & Hazler, 1992), and are therefore a way of deliberately causing distress to another person or group (Galloway, 1994). Arguably, Thompson (1991) sees bullying as aggressive behavior intentionally promoted to cause physical and psychological harm to an individual. In a comprehensive delineation of criteria, Olweus (1999) states that:

Bullying is thus characterized by the following three criteria: (1) it is aggressive behavior or intentional 'harmdoing' (2) which is carried out repeatedly over time (3) in an interpersonal relationship characterized by an imbalance in power, (pp. 10-11, In Smith et al., 2002, p. 1120).

The above definitions and nature of bullying are consistent with the definition in the Georgia HB 247 in terms of intentionality (willfulness), 'harmdoing' (infliction

of injury), and use of force (active attempt or threat). The Georgia definition is overarching, and broad, embodying all bullying behaviors without getting to specifics of the behaviors.

The social, psychological, and physical harm of bullying on both bullies and victims has raised concerns in the media, international governance forum, and on the research arena (Niarn and Smith, 2002; Goldstein, 2001; Pellegrini, 2002). Consequently, the study of bullying has recently assumed an international dimension, spreading from Scandinavia to other western European countries, the United States, and Australia and New Zealand (Smith et al, 2002), and Japan (Manzo, 2002). As Pellegrini and Long (2002) reiterate, aggression and antisocial behavior in American and European schools are persistent, visible problems during the transition from childhood and primary school to adolescence. Hence, Pellegrini (2002) observes that the problem of bullying is particularly acute in the middle and high schools. At the international level, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) Article 19 lists, alongside education provision and participation rights, the child's right to protection (Lansdown, 1994) affirming that:

Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, (Nairn and Smith, 2002, p. 37).

By design or otherwise, the state of Georgia's law on bullying is in consonant with expectations of the UNCROC article 19 regarding children's rights to protection and safe environments. A brief on the policy process alternative should give a comparative backdrop to this study.

Conceptual Framework

Underpinning this study was Kingdon's (1995) conceptual perspective of idea formation and agenda setting, which relates to problems that governmental and related outside officials pay attention to (p. 3), and specification of alternatives. Use of Kingdon's (1995) framework enables investigation of how a problem captures the attention of the people by taking note of indicators used to establish the existence of a problem and assess its magnitude, while taking cognisance of events that help focus attention to a problem. The gist lies in how information on the existence of a problem comes to the fore, through what sources, as well as the discrepancy between the underlying values and the prevailing conditions surrounding the issue. In this case, defining bullying as a problem meant that bullying contradicted some cherished societal values and beliefs of which this study sought to identify.

Presumably, taking to the *policy legislative floor* therefore, are policy communities with specialists in the issue area, such bullying, and entrepreneurs as advocates

who sense and advocate solutions to serve specific interests. Policy entrepreneurs then sell their ideas or proposal, what Kingdon (1995) called *softening up*, to familiarize policy makers, the public, and specialized communities with their ideas and building acceptance, which may take forms like hearings, speeches, commission reports, introducing a bill, et cetera. Important too, in this framework, was to determine the policy *window* that opened up to allow introduction of the bullying proposal. Kingdon also suggests possibilities of solutions that can be spillovers from related policies, mutations, or recombination of existing solutions, and this study sought to establish such nature, if any, regarding the Georgia bullying policy.

Kingdon's framework summed up above challenges the traditionally accepted Rational-Comprehensive framework (Anderson, 1979) that entails the following steps: (1) The decision maker is confronted with a problem that can be separated from other problems, or at least considered meaningful in comparison with them; (2) The goals, values, or objectives that guide the decision maker are clarified and ranked according to their importance; (3) Various alternatives for dealing with the problem are examined; (4) The consequences (costs and benefits) that follow from the selection of each alternative are investigated; (5) Each alternative and its attendant consequences can be compared with other alternatives; (6) The decision maker will then choose the alternative, and consequences, that maximize the attainment of his/her goals, values, or objective. This study sought to test Kingdon's (1995) framework in terms of the reality in the policy process against the backdrop of the rational-comprehensive approach to policy making.

Methodology

Because my desire was to learn and understand the process, action, meanings attached to events and experiences (Charmaz, 2001) that played into the formulation of the bullying policy in the state of Georgia, thus aiming at descriptive explanation, I used case study design. Case study design was ideal as a method of learning about a complex instance taken as a whole in its context (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994) wherein the case was the process that led to enactment of House Bill 247 amendment of 1999). Because the aim was to learn and describe the case, the product was a historical qualitative case study of the policy making process that resulted in House Bill 247 amendment of 1999.

Newspaper articles on the case as well as human participants that included legislators, staffers (office managers) at the state Capitol, legal practitioners and leading educators in and around Atlanta involved during the policy making process made up the population for this study. While I used the Georgia Legislature Website to identify target interviewees, selection of participants employed purposive sampling combined with network referral techniques (Glesne, & Peshkin, 1992),

incorporating use of connections as the data collection evolved, a reality that LeCompte and Schensul (1999a) and Glesne and Peshkin (1992) observe in qualitative research.

One key method employed in this study was document or textual analysis of primary documents. According to Crotty (1998), document or textual analysis is a powerful method that enables a researcher to gain meaning deeper than the author intended, "meanings and intentions that are, in a sense, hidden in the text," (p. 91). This case study therefore entailed collection and analysis of newspaper articles and legislative documents or records.

Complementing document analysis were interviews conducted with one legislator who co-sponsored House Bill 247 (amended, 1999), one secretary to a legislator, one lawyer, one journalist, and one educational leader/administrator then working in the school system. The interviews involved semi-structured and some open-ended questions designed along the advice of Ritchie (1995) where familiarization with literature and documents before hand is vital in historical investigation. I conducted telephone interviews with all participants that responded, while nobody responded to initiation of email interviews (for those whose email addresses I could get). I made appointments in advance during which I sought participants' informed consent. I also protected participants' identities through use of pseudonyms in the report.

While the case is House Bill 247 of 1999 (amended), this study also involved documents and people outside the legislature or state Capitol (the setting). As Wilcox (1982) notes, an issue is investigated in its context. Arguably, "a case may not be contained within the boundaries of a setting: it may be necessary to go outside of the setting to collect information on important aspects of it," (Hammersley, & Atkinson, 1995, p. 41). The variability of data sources used provided for triangulation and trustworthiness of findings even though these cannot be generalizable to other policy cases (Merriam, 2001; Yin, 1994; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

Because the aim was to construct a story that depicts process aspects through which the bullying policy moved, analysis of data involved establishment of patterns and themes. Thus, I used Roe's (1998) narrative policy framework, which involves identification of stories and non-stories or counter-stories that ultimately inform the meta-narrative, on the basis of which to determine whether the policymaking process depicted Kingdon's (1995) framework. In keeping with contemporary developments in qualitative research, I maintain an authorial voice ("I") as an instrument of data collection and analysis. I interacted with the data during collection and interpretation processes. Arguably, I maintain an authorial voice in this report.

Results and Discussion

Using Roe's (1998) narrative policy analysis, key themes and patterns emerged from the data. In line with this method of analysis, I placed findings in one of three categories: main story, non-story and counter-story. I developed a metanarrative by sorting data and responses into these categories.

Main Stories

In building a metanarrative for this story, evidence indicated that the main story for the bullying policy process was safety of children/students in schools. What then triggered the development of an anti-bullying policy in Georgia? Illustratively, Ted Roberts, a journalist turned historian said, "Incidents of suicide and shootings in schools by students have been linked to bullying, both bullies and victims. There was no way to ignore the problem, or turn a blind eye to it. Something needed to be done to make schools safe for children," (personal communication, October 28, 2002). Consistent with Ted Roberts' view, Petros Macay, a veteran educator and lawyer said, "The wave of shootings, physical injuries, and violence by students on other students, and sometimes teachers, could not escape the concern and attention of society and law makers. Remember we are talking of death and security of students and teachers too," (personal communication, November, 28, 2002).

There is evidence that legislation on bullying in the state of Georgia came in the backdrop of the death of a student, thirteen year-old Joshua Belluardo of E. T. Middle School in Cherokee County on November 2, 1998 (Dodd, 2002; O'Briant, 2002; Quinn, 2000). "Throwing a punch" (Quinn, 2000) [saying] "he was going to beat the hell out of the victim," (Dodd, 2002) led to another boy's death (Quinn, 2000, p. C1). Joshua died after being struck by another male student, Jonathan Miller (barely fifteen years old), at a bus stop (O'Briant, 2002). In agreement, Georgia House Representative Leon Chuckston noted that, "If a student dies in a school as a result of bullying by another student, the whole county, the whole nation mourns. The media get it and it draws national attention, and pressure for solutions to the problem begins there. ... everyone want their children safe, and to feel free in school" (personal communication, December 2, 2002).

Referring to the same case, Dodd notes in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution of May 2, 2002, that "Jonathan Miller ... never intended to kill 13 year-old Joshua Belluardo, the boy he ambushed outside a school bus in Cherokee County on November 2, 1998. Miller landed a surprise punch to the back of Belluardo's head, a blow that caused an artery to rupture in the brain of the E.T. Booth Middle School Student. ... This child was struck and died of a single blow." As the attorney told the justices, "The intent is the significant issue" ... As they were walking towards their

subdivision, [Miller] struck Joshua in the back of the head and raised his hands in some sort of celebration 'Rocky style,'" (Dodd, 2002, p. 1).

Is it really Joshua Belluardo's death that led to drafting of the law on bullying? Evidence reveals that while "Georgia passed the anti-bullying law in 1999, Representative Chuck Sheid (R-Woodstock) drafted the law after talking with Bill Head, a Woodstock man whose son Brian killed himself in a classroom at Etowah High School in 1994 after being taunted by bullies ..." (Schneider, 2001, p. A16). In this case, it means the draft law lay in limbo from 1994 to 1999.

Non-stories

The media played a significant role in shaping public feelings about bullying in schools. Reactions that relate to background experiences of respondents' or human data sources are what Roe (1998) classifies as non-stories. Lawyers are known to be critical and particular about the media in general. Petros Macay, the lawyer observed,

I recall the media, both print and on television, picked on the Cherokee County case and blew it up. The TV invited specialists ... psychologists to live interview clips on main news. They talked about bullying, it's effects, and so on. Security specialists talked about safety and security of children, and the law enforcement aspects. You know the problem with the media; 'yellow journalism?' There was so much sensationalization of these cases that everyone got scared. ... The whole issue was turned into such a big mountain. It was like "Oh, all America – you're never safe. Your children are in danger. That gave legislators quite some pressure, and it created an anti-bullying mood. The issue ends up highly emotionally charged.

As Quinn's (2000) article tells, "Joshua's death attracted national attention and led to legislators passing the statewide bullying law in 1999. Consistent with both Quinn's (2000) and lawyer Petros Macay's observations are emotional concerns parents, specialists and excerpts in the form of testimonies from bullying victims and other citizens raise in the opinions section of the print media. Concomitantly, writing about group praying for schools in Decatur, Hill, a journalist-writer with AJC wrote that, "Decatur school Superintendent ..., her voice shaking, prayed for a safe school year at an interracial, multichurch service. Wiping tears from her eyes, she requested divine guidance ... ' Carry us through this year in peace and harmony', " (Hill, 1999, p. JA5). Fausett (2001, p. A13) alleges, "Appeasing bullies leaves quiet kids seeking revenge ... school shootings and deaths are not a mystery ("Don't call school shootings mysteries that have no answers," Column, March 8). Years ago, the bullies went to the principal's where a peddle was applied to their backsides. Now ... they get out of school [on suspension] for seven days, which amounts to a nice vacation ... the bully and the quiet nerd who behaves himself and makes good grades sees his A's reduced to C's. This feels the bully with flendish glee" [sic]. Other examples are: "Anti-bullying law not getting much use" (Quinn,

2000); "Teach tolerance in school" (Goldstein, 2001, p. A19); Bullies: the pain of being picked on" (Schneider, 2001); "Praise the Lord! Amen. Freedom!!! I've been set loose of the bondage that is sixth grade! Free from the prison they dare call school" [A diary entry on May 17 2000 (end of sixth grade) by a student teased and taunted continuously in sixth grade] (Schneider, 2001, p. A16); and "Treat all equally" (Cantrella-Matheson, 2001). These evidence a call for action and tougher measures on bullying among school children.

Regarding how the problem came to the attention of policy makers, Sue Gray (pseudonym), a secretary to one house representative at state capitol said about her boss,

She is a really busy person. She is hardly in the office. She takes part in a lot of foundations, political forums, meetings, goes out to meet people, and so on. This is how she gets to know of problems. At times, parents phone like you have done, and I list them down on her telephone schedule, and she makes sure she returns all calls when she gets the time. Some write her letters about problems they want addressed. Where she gets a problem, she investigates, consults with those who know, you see?

Although reflecting the ideal for someone working for a House Representative, Sue Gray's perspective aligns well with, as I noted earlier above, what led to Representative Chuck Scheid to draft the anti-bullying law in 1994, that is, after meeting the father of a boy who killed himself in a classroom as a result of bullying.

Making it sound like legislators who drafted the proposal and introduced it were somewhat not genuine, Petros Macay says, "Politicians like legislators work hard to bring 'pork' home: pork barrel politics. They have to deliver through little projects in their constituency to benefit the constituents and the rest of the state. There was public pressure from the constituency – safety is a big issue. They look for co-sponsors outside their district so that it does not appear to the majority as a district issue, lest the proposal cannot be passed, ... politicians have to quickly respond to any indication in their district that there is a problem, at least before the media catch it first." (personal communication, November 28, 2002).

The role of the judicial system in pushing an issue to agenda status was revealed by journalist Ted Roberts who said, "... Yes the media keeps track of such weird cases in the courts, and their coverage informs the public, who in turn take sides. Are you aware the 1998 Cherokee court case is still appearing in newspapers?" Evidence of Ted Roberts' assertion can be seen in Dodd's (2002) and O'Briant's (2002) Atlanta Journal- Constitution articles following up the court appeals by the defendant in the case of Joshua Belluardo (Cherokee County) case of 1998. Similarly, Washington-CNN's "Child's play or sexual harassment?" article of October, 24,

2002 expects the Supreme Court's ruling on a teasing and sexual harassment lawsuit concerning LaShonda's (then 10 years old) victimization by a boy in one of Georgia's schools.

Counter Stories

According to Roe (1998), counter stories are stories that "run counter to the controversy's dominant policy narrative," (p. 154). These were influenced by backgrounds, culture, and political and ideological experiences. In discussing reactions to advocacy for an anti-bullying policy in Georgia, lawyer Petros Macay said, "Yes, there was opposition from some quarters of society. Some anti-bullying law people tied the proposal to civil liberties." Arguably, he pointed out, "You know America is a very litigious society. Some go too far as to demand free reign in the name of freedom. Bullying is bad, evil, and criminal at times, but some seek just to oppose" (personal communication, November 28, 2002).

In a related counter story, Lee (2001) writes, "It used to be considered a part of growing up on the school playground and in the classroom. Hurling insults, almost everyone experienced it. The teasing and taunting by a school bully was considered inevitable initiation into childhood. Other states, such as Georgia, are taking a zero tolerance stance ... Opponents of anti-bullying legislation fear that all cases will be handled in a similar manner, regardless of the situation or child." In DeKalb County, Georgia, for example, talking about the tough attitude on bullying in response to the Georgia law, the director of student relations says the problem is when talking to parents about such issues of discipline as bullying, some parents would say, "... in years past I was met with a somewhat similar attitude. We... I went through it. It's a right of passage. Don't overreact," (Quinn, 2000, p. C1). This transforms the issue into one of cultural or generational differences. For example, in *A parent's guide to bullying behavior* (undated) written for Cobb County in Georgia, Jeff Dess indicates that some of the so called bullies may come from homes where they are taught to strike either out or back physically. Similarly, Heath's (1983) study shows how different communities differ in child rearing practices and expectations when it comes to aggressive behavior, teasing and verbal taunting, and how these are approved in some communities (and households) than others.

Metanarrative

Given the main story, non-stories and counter stories from participants I interviewed and evidence from media articles, I turn to how these stories formulate a metanarrative that tells a story of the policy process that led to the bullying problem securing agenda status and getting to the legislation floor in the state of Georgia (adapting and slightly deviating from the conventional metanarrative perspective in Roe, 1998). Based on the stories above, this metanarrative is a build-up of an emerging pattern that depicts Kingdon's (1995) conception of the policy process. This way I summarize the dynamics of the process.

The problem of bullying in Georgia schools rose to agenda status mainly as a consequence of tragic deaths of students that were related to bullying. First was the 1994 death of Brian Head who killed himself in a classroom (Schneider, 2001), and second was the 1998 death of Joshua Belluardo who was struck by another student, Jonathan Miller, at a school bus stop (Quinn, 2000). Both cases occurred in Cherokee County. Representative Chuck Scheid of Woodstock drafted the bullying law in 1994 (Schneider, 2001) after visiting Bill Head, the father of Brian. These deaths were events that indicated the presence of a problem of bullying in schools. Agreeably, the problem was related to child safety in schools.

As interview excerpts revealed, the media played a major role in shaping the national mood, defining the problem, and also attracted the attention of the whole nation to the problem. The media emotionalized the problem, shaping people's reactive feelings, emotions, and expectations. In so doing, the media also played a "softening up" role through involvement of specialists (Schneider was a medical professional and professor), with such specialist panels reviewing these and similar cases on live television host shows. Members of the public and specialists also wrote in the print media to express their feelings, emotions, and criticism of existing ways of handling bullying in schools. Some articles carried emotionally charged testimonies of children who had been bullied, or parents of victims testifying their children's experiences. Churches and Education chiefs joined (with tears) through prayer for safety at school. Readers were also reminded of other tragic incidents in the past and elsewhere in America, like the Columbine shootings, the Charlotte and Santana incidents, to name some. This way, a whole national mood was created, focused, and heightened.

On the contrary, other writers and members of the public criticized the idea of an anti-bullying law, especially on the feasibility of equity issues during implementation. Such opposition could well explain the "limbo" period between initial solution draft (1994) and introduction of the Bill proposal to the Education Committee (January, 1999). Besides, such opposition from the media, members of the public, and specialists helped the policy entrepreneurs to gauge the public mood, and to refine the proposal accordingly. The time can also explain the need to "soften-up" by way of selling the proposal to other legislators, drumming up support, building coalitions and enlisting co-sponsors. The proposal did not stay long at the committee level because the Education Committee chair was a co-sponsor of the bill. Thus, at the reading stage, the proposed bill sailed through its first and second reading in two consecutive days: January 27th, and 28th of 1999 (Georgia State Legislature, 1999).

If the 1994 Brian case indicated a problem existed, and led to development of the draft solution, it follows along Kingdon's theory that the 1998 case, its sensationalization in the media and the resulting national mood provided a "window" or opportunity to push forward to policy agenda status a four-year old

solution – it was waiting for the right time and all policy streams converged favorably. Conclusively, solutions are always there in advance, and these wait for the “right time” and public mood to move to agenda status.

A related force in moving the bullying problem to agenda status, as well as setting the opportunity or “window” was the judicial system. The court ruling in the Jonathan Miller case surely added to the shaping of the public mood, and rationalization of the need for policy. It stirred policymakers to action and energized their efforts to push the solutions onto the agenda. In any case, when legislators are voted into office they, in turn, seek to serve the common interests of their constituents, and they want to be seen to be active in this regard. They must be seen to be enhancing the welfare of their constituents by responding to authenticated problems.

Some criticisms, opinions and suggestions in the media were tied to other legislation statutes, such gun laws, character education and other safety laws in Georgia. The bullying law ended up combined with the initial HB247 on comprehensive character education, with the amendment requiring schools to also design programs that discourage bullying. Combining the new policy with an existing, and related legislation explains the easy sailing of the bullying law in the House.

Conclusion

Evident in the data is the fact that the policymaking process that led to House Bill 247 –*Education; bullying; discourage and prohibit* was not as neat a rational process as earlier rational models of policymaking portray. Solutions pre-exist before the problem. Emergence of proposed solutions on the agenda depends on the opening of policy windows, the timely confluence of the different policy streams, and the public mood. Actors in the policy problem definition, setting of the mood and “softening up” were events, the media, experts who review the events, victims, policymakers, the judiciary and critics. Other forces included existing legislation to which solutions can be tied, and the composition of the committees. Data in the paper confidently validates Kingdon’s (1995) conceptual framework, depicting the policy process not as a neat, execution of rational decision-making steps that Anderson (1979) portrays in the rational-comprehensive model.

Importantly, I do acknowledge limitations of this study. The sample of interviewees in all categories was limited due to time and financial constraints. Even then, findings are only specific to the case studied. Timing of the research was very erroneous. It coincided with state legislative elections, making it difficult to get hold of some relevant players in the political arena, especially some few connected to the policy case studied. The outcomes of the elections posed another drawback. Most of those who lost could not be accessed even though it was still the interim period of handover-takeover.

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