



# The Impact of WIA and Welfare Reform on Practice

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# Research Questions:

In what ways do policies written as statute at the federal level actually alter practice in programs and classroom?

What are the implications of these changes from the perspectives of practitioners?

What are the implications of these changes for practitioners, policy makers, and researchers



# Research Methods

- State director interviews (6 states)
- Selection of 4 programs in each state (24 programs)
- Program manager and teacher interviews (78 practitioners)
- Qualitative analysis



# Findings Y



# Program Type responses

Program response reflects the fit between the program and the policy. State level policy also played a role.


- Refiners
- Reinventors
- Resistors

# Program level changes

- Program operations and structures
  - class time and location
  - change in intensity
  - instructional format
  - new learner orientation
  - shifted staff responsibilities
  - response to changing learners


# Program level changes

- Assessment and documentation
  - new assessment procedures, requirements and documentation
  - new assessment instruments
  - more systematic pre- and post-testing
  - new/tweaked management information systems




“To be honest, we made up stuff [before]. Now we have to report out the actual assessment data.” (Program Manager)

“I like having a way to organize the data and have a to organize the data and have a way to look at the big picture. But when I’m sitting here entering data, it’s making more work for me.” (Teacher)




“Our students who are really low level, we can’t tell them what the learners say [their goals are]. Because they’ll never make it. So we don’t report that as a goal.” (Site Coordinator.)

“You can’t honestly report what the student’s goals are when they’re far from being able to reach them...I know that some programs aren’t reporting everyone...They’re afraid it’ll count against them.” (Program Director)



“You can become an academy for test taking.” (Principal)

“There’s the old saying that not everything that is measured is worth measuring. And not everything that is worth knowing is measurable.” (Teacher)



**Benefits:** Provides data for decision making, evaluation, and planning

**Challenges:** Time away from educational leadership and instructional responsibilities. Morale issues. A zero sum game. Conflict between maintaining program identity and goals and policy compliance.

# Classroom level changes

- Instruction

- Greater emphasis on test preparation, testing, documentation, goal setting


- Shift in emphasis away from traditional academic content to pre-employment and job retention skills

# Classroom level changes


- Instruction (cont.)

- More contextualized in the world of work

- Greater emphasis on goal setting and responding to goals in instruction



They're doing more job readiness things than they used to, probably more life skills like trying to find a job, more referring of students to their counselors for resume writing and things like that. They would have stuck with reading, writing, and math before, and that's it... That isn't something we would have done before. We used to do that, but only on an as needed basis. Not as a regular part of the classroom activity... I think we're doing more to integrate career information and workforce education into what we do every day. Not that we didn't do it before, but we're certainly more aware that it has to be done.



I think this is sort of interesting and in the abstract I'm all for it, but I think it becomes, given the present mood, it's just another way to move from education to training. So my tendency is to take my students at their word if they say they want school knowledge. They want their GEDs, and that is a test of school knowledge. Do I try to contextualize that? I sure do. I've always done that, but I wouldn't design an entire curriculum around problems from work. I know that there are a number of national curriculum projects, which attempt to do that for adult ed., but I think...they have a different set of assumptions of what students are coming to do. So yes, we should always be looking to rely on and build on the knowledge that they bring. But what I don't want to do is create a work-centered curriculum.


# Impact on learners

- Shift in population served
  - unemployed, harder to serve
  - employed, different program formats
  - serving fewer students
  - increase in non-welfare students
- Reduced access
- Morale
  - Discouraged by results
  - Appreciate feedback
- Motivation
  - Greater purpose and focus
  - Increased anxiety and pressure



# Access to resources

- Additional funds from TANF
- Leveraging resources through other collaborations (e.g., with one-stops)
- More alignment and increased availability of support services



“I’ve seen a lot of improvements. The clients have been pleased with the level of communications across [agencies], knowing that they can come to one place and know that they can have a lot of their needs met...I think it’s been a good thing for everyone all around.” For this particular person, the improvement has occurred due to collocation. “Having all our agencies within one building, gaining support from one another and being able to share frustrations and successes and helping each other out—The whole one-stop thing is what makes it work.” (Teacher)



# Implications: For Practice

- Maintain a focus on core values by adapting practices and policies in ways that complement rather than compete.
- Participate in policy formation through advocacy, action, knowledge generation, and self-education.



# Implications: For Policy

- Importance of clarifying the relationships between policies and larger system goals; consider what is gained and what is lost
- Acknowledge the key relationship between policy implementation and professional development
- Improve working conditions



# Implications: Policy (cont.)

- Improving learner outcomes is a resource issues at least as much as a policy issue



# Implications: For research

- What are the improved teaching opportunities and what are the detractions as a result of policy decision?
- What is the relationship between different approaches to implementation and learner outcomes?



# Contact information

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Thank you for your interest and feedback!