

## Reading Tips and Study Questions: Session Four

### Required reading:

1. **READ. (Case) Jal Mehta**, "The Causes and Consequences of Policy Paradigm Shift: American Education Policy, 1980-2001," Working paper, Harvard University (February 2007).
2. **READ. Deborah Stone**, *Policy Paradox and Political Reason* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1988), pp.108-137, 148-165.
3. **READ.** Pp.264-272 in **Donald Schön**, "Generative metaphor: A perspective on problem setting in social policy," In *Metaphor and Thoughts*, edited by A. Ortony (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1978).
4. **READ. Noam Schelber**, "Wooden Frame: Is George Lakoff Misleading Democrats?" *The new republic* (May 17, 2005).
5. **SKIM.** Material at The Frameworks Institute [www.frameworksinstitute.org](http://www.frameworksinstitute.org)

### Further reading (online but not required)

6. Ryan and Gamson, "The Art of Reframing Political Debates," *Contexts* 5(1): 13-18 (2006).
7. Matt Bai, "The Framing Wars," *NY Times Magazine* (2005).
8. Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993), pp.25-38, 83-89.
9. Donald Schön and Martin Rein, *Frame Reflection* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), especially chapter 2.
10. James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, "The Logic of Appropriateness," in Martin Rein et al., editors, *The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy* (Oxford, 2006).

### Tips and questions

**Reminder: your brief problem statement is due at 5PM on class day, 2/28, posted to the course website.** Full instructions are there, too.

Last week's discussion focused on how the policy process gets structured and how dynamic the relationships really can be among decisionmakers'

preferences, problems that appear and re-appear, and ideas that are “pitched” and re-pitched as solutions over time. We also explored how these features can vary across nations (and noted that variation is an issue *within* nations as well, especially in big, regionally diverse nations). Finally, using Mark Moore’s chapter, we also began to pursue the question of which kinds of ideas fare well in the public arena (“which ideas become *public* ideas”). This week’s material takes us substantially deeper into that latter realm, beginning with a focal case to be presented by guest speaker **Jal Mehta**. Jal is a postdoctoral fellow at the Harvard Graduate School of Education as well as an alum of this course. His provocative new paper is based on his dissertation research, completed over the last few years.

Stories and symbols matter, and so do larger paradigms and frames that shape people’s understandings of issues, events, and stakes. These are major reasons that knowledge, including research-based knowledge, *can* be so influential. But ideas aren’t everything. There are limits to the power of ideas alone to overcome institutional barriers, disengagement, or well-organized political opposition. We want to more rigorously explore the power of ideas but keep the limits in mind as well.

1. According to **Mehta**, what were the most important responses to the *Nation at Risk* report? What key factors shaped the shift in paradigms in American education policy? Pay particular attention to the evidence Mehta presents to persuade us (a) that *there was* a paradigm shift or shifts; and (b) that the shifts were or are *consequential*.
2. What favorite “causal stories” does **Stone** suggest are employed in the political arena? Why do political actors choose those?
3. According to **Schön**, what is the role of metaphor in problem-setting and problem-solving? (Focus on the squatter settlement and Boston cases.)
4. Ideas that are about ideas—e.g., frames and the strategy of “re-framing” political debates—have become “hot” in American politics, particularly on the Left, in recent years. Read **Schelber’s** magazine piece on frame guru George Lakoff, and skim the material at [www.frameworksinstitute.org](http://www.frameworksinstitute.org) for a look at some recent efforts to tell stories differently.

**Further reading** (recommended only):

These may be useful now or as you prepare your own case paper or first-year paper.

5. Why is reframing limited as a political strategy, according to **Ryan and Gamson**?
6. Does the **Baumgartner and Jones** model of policy agendas complement or conflict with Kingdon’s model of multiple streams? What is the former

most and least persuasive about? How does it deepen the Ryan-Gamson critique of reframing as a political strategy?

7. What is the difference between an institutional and a rational analysis, according to **March and Olsen**? What exactly is a “logic of appropriateness”?