The Rise of Conservative Think Tanks:
The Debate Over Ideas, Research and Strategy in Public Education Policy

by

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Abstract

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This research considers the rise of conservative think tanks in the United States over the past thirty years and explains their ability to insert themselves into education policy debates. Despite the rapid growth of think tanks and arguments made by scholars, politicians, and media about their increasing power, few case studies have been conducted on how think tanks actually exercise that power. This study is based on data drawn from a content analysis of think tank websites and publications; thirty-eight interviews with staff members of think tanks, advocacy organizations, and university based education policy institutes; and a media analysis using the LexisNexis® database. This dissertation argues that conservative thinks have served as institutions from which conservative ideas can be cultivated and expressed to the public and to policy makers. The growth in conservative think tanks and their education policy divisions has been a direct result of an elite policy planning network that sought to marginalize progressive policy consultants, schools of education, and academic research more generally. The parameters of education policy debates have largely been influenced by neoconservatives, business elites, and centrist Republicans and Democrats. These groups have successfully changed the education discourse away from an equity and access paradigm to one of accountability and standards. The most clear and significant finding

of influence has been the representation of conservative think tanks in education topic media stories. This has occurred in spite of the fact that as a whole, these institutions produce little research and receive far less foundation funding for education projects than do centrist and liberal think tanks. The significance of this research speaks to the marginalization of academic researchers and brings into question a larger issue of the relevancy of applied social scientific research in today's political arena.

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Introduction

This research considers the rise of conservative think tanks in the United States over the past thirty years and explains their ability to insert themselves into education policy debates. Despite the rapid growth of think tanks, and arguments made by scholars, politicians, and media about their increasing power, few case studies have been conducted on how think tanks actually exercise that power. Although think tanks have been concerned with issues such as foreign policy, defense, and social policy dating back to the early 20th century, education policy didn't become a focus of many think tanks until the release of the *Nation At Risk Report* by the U.S. Department of Education in 1983. The emergence of education as a national policy concern coincided with a larger politically conservative movement in America, and the growth of institutions that shaped that movement. As education became defined as a national crisis, so too did the need for think tanks to shift greater focus and emphasis towards research and analysis about public education.

This dissertation argues that conservative thinks have been successful and important institutions for the conservative movement in America. They have served as institutions from which conservative ideas can be cultivated and expressed to the public and to policy makers. Although think tanks have existed since the early 20th century, the "advocacy think tank" has been used most successfully by the conservative movement since the 1970's to attack progressive social policy and shift the parameters of policy debate to the support of less government, lower taxes, family values, interventionist foreign policy, and free markets. At the same time, the conservative movement, aided by its think tanks, has diminished the role of academic researchers and scholarly experts as

consultants to public policy. University research and expertise on matters of social, economic, and political matters has in recent decades been marginalized by high profile conservative think tanks.

The efficiency, political savvy, and advocacy of such think tanks is evident by their ability to develop relationships with members of congress and the senate, and provide on-time digestible policy briefs. Conservative think tanks also have developed sophisticated public relations departments that allow for their experts to be quoted in newspapers and appear on radio and television news programs. Conservative think tanks have made considerable strides in terms of influence. Many are on par, in terms of media recognition, with well funded, long standing research think tanks like the Brookings Institute, RAND Corporation, and the Urban Institute. This has occurred despite the fact that conservative think tanks are largely interested in promoting a given philosophy, perspective, or set of policy ideas, and for the most part do not serve as centers for original social scientific research.

Historically, education policy has been an issue largely identified with the Democratic Party, with teachers' unions and professional education organizations, as well as with experts and researchers whose pedagogical persuasion tended to be liberal. Although a progressive educational philosophy was never uniformly practiced or adopted by local school districts during the 20th century, education still remained largely associated with liberal policy prescriptions at the federal level. The most significant federal action began with the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision. This was followed by the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act in 1965, which provided federal aid to public education, and directed money towards low income

children through programs such as Title I and Head Start. The 1970's brought about a series of court cases leading to the implementation of desegregation and bussing plans in cities across the U.S. The growing federal role in education was further bolstered when in 1979 President Jimmy Carter created the Department of Education, a cabinet level position with its own secretary that worked closely with the Office of Civil Rights.

Given the history of education policy and its association with the Democratic Party, during the 1970's, education was seemingly one of the policy areas where the conservative movement in America would have the most difficult time penetrating and influencing debates. In contrast to other issues dominated by conservative discourse such as foreign policy, defense, and crime, education policy's affiliation with the Democratic Party was largely bolstered by the strength of teacher's unions, which could not be broken by sending jobs overseas. Additionally there was a continued emphasis on progressive pedagogy as taught in schools of education across the country.

Republicans were able to capitalize on the civil unrest and racial tension over desegregation, gaining support from white voters, particularly in the South, who had been a mainstay for the Democratic Party for decades. A growing conservative movement in America, bolstered by big business and various conservative institutions, including think tanks, would ultimately be successful at shifting educational debate away from the sole purview of the Democratic Party and into a discourse that was no longer focused on access and equity but on standards, assessment, and markets.

Four broad political developments are often cited as contributing to the dramatic post-1970 growth in conservative think tanks: the expansion of business in politics, the rise of neo-conservatism, a new paradigm of neoclassical or neoliberal economics, and

the political mobilization of fundamentalist Christians (Rich 2004). This dissertation argues that the shift in education policy at the federal and state level over the past twenty years has been most heavily influenced by the rise of neoconservatism and its success at shifting the educational paradigm away from discussions of racial and economic inequality, increased funding, and access, to a discourse of standards, testing, and the privatization of the public system.

While traditional conservatives have opposed the expansion of government oversight, particularly at the federal level, neoconservatives have been more open to gaining political influence through existing bureaucratic structures and the education policy apparatus. They have done this in conjunction with the business world, which has profited from the "problematizing" of the American education system and the need for private sector consultants and products to fix it. Examples of high profile neoconservatives include Diane Ravitch and Chester Finn, who have been in favor of increased testing, a reassessment of the content of textbooks, and a movement towards national standards and curriculum. Neoconservatives have also been critical of teacher's unions and the perceived failures of liberal-progressive education, perpetuated in their view by schools of education.

A second influential group within the conservative movement includes more traditional conservatives and libertarians who are steadfast in their call for the elimination of the Department of Education. Ideally they seek to move away from what they refer to as "government schools," and towards a completely free market system of education. This philosophy has been exemplified by the writings of economist Milton Friedman, who set forth an agenda to privatize the public school system in his book *Free To*

Choose, first published in 1980. This faction of the conservative movement has been in agreement with neoconservatives on issues of school choice, vouchers, and anti-unionism. However disagreement between the groups exists when it comes to the role of the State in matters of education policy.

A third faction of the conservative movement, comprised of fundamentalist Christians, have most notably become involved in education matters pertaining to the separation of church and state, prayer in the public schools, and abstinence-only sex education programs. This group has served as a base for the Republican Party and has overlapping interests with both neoconservatives who seek to control the content of textbooks, and libertarians who support the use of vouchers to pay for private school tuition.

This dissertation argues that the pattern of growth for conservative think tanks and their success at shifting the parameters of education policy debate, have been a result of a well planned elite policy-making network. Conservative think tanks have not simply grown as institutions operating within a pluralist society where ideas are democratically represented by various interest groups. Instead, conservative think tanks were consciously and deliberately established to both counter and quell the ideas of liberal-progressive scholars.

Conservative think tanks at both the state and federal level have become central for expressing the views and policy initiatives of all factions of the conservative movement. While the number of conservative think tanks involved in education policy debates has increased dramatically over the past fifteen years, little is known about what makes them influential and how they have been able to insert themselves into policy

debates. My dissertation examines this issue by tracing the historical trajectory of conservative think tanks and by using quantitative and qualitative data to explore the following questions:

1. What accounts for the historical rise of conservative think tanks, their influence in education policy debates, and success in creating institutions to oppose academic researchers? (Chapter 1)

2. How has the landscape of education policy debates changed over the past thirty years, and what role have think tanks played in this process? (Chapter 2)

3. How can think tank influence be measured? What theoretical perspectives are applicable to studying this influence? What role do think tanks play in the education policy-making process? What has been the pattern of historical growth for ideological think tanks engaged in education policy debates? (Chapter 3)

4. How is the work of think tanks in education funded? What has been the pattern of philanthropic giving to think tanks? What type of education work is being funded by foundations? (Chapter 4)

5. How successfully have conservative think tanks been in using the media to influence education policy debates? (Chapter 5)

6. What have been the parameters of education policy debates in Washington, DC? What groups have had the most influence in shaping the agenda? (Chapter 6)

7. What are the differences between think tanks and universities when it comes to education policy research? How have debates between education experts played out in the media? (Chapter 7)

Chapter 1

The Historical Growth of Conservative Think Tanks

This chapter provides a brief discussion of early American think tanks and describes the social, political, and economic factors that ultimately contributed to the emergence and growth of distinctively *conservative* think tanks. One of the primary forces behind the conservative movement in America was the Post WWII shift away from Keyensianism and towards neoliberal economic theory. A second force has been the influence of neoconservatism in shifting and redefining the terrain of policy debates. This chapter describes how these two forces, along with a growing hostility among conservatives towards academia beginning in the 1960's, ultimately shaped the creation and expansion of conservative think tanks in America after 1970. Along with the growing number of conservatively-oriented advocacy think tanks, came a shift in the nature of the "expert" in policy discussions, from a field once dominated by academic researchers to one increasingly patrolled by savvy political advocates. I describe how these well planned initiatives were led by elite actors and elite institutions whose intent it was to shift the terrain of education policy debates away from the domain of the liberal progressive wing of the Democratic Party, and away from schools of education and teacher's unions toward the Republican Party, corporate involvement, and free markets. This chapter sets the stage for a subsequent discussion in Chapter 2 of how education policy in the late 20th century came to be shaped by conservative think tanks drawing both liberal Democrats and traditional conservatives to a right of center education platform largely influenced by neoconservative principles.

Brief Discussion of Early American Think Tanks

Prior to 1970, there was little if any conservative presence among American think tanks. The emergence of conservative think tanks wouldn't come until after 1970. However it is important to sketch the early think tank landscape that preceded the conservatives' arrival. Dominating the policy world of the early 20th century were non-ideological think tanks such as the Russell Sage Foundation (1907), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (1910), Brookings Institute (1916), National Bureau of Economic Research (1920), Bureau of Governmental Research (1932), and the RAND Corporation (1946). Political scientists argue that throughout most of the 20th century, experts from these think tanks remained objective scientists, although their findings may have been used by others for political purposes (Rich 2004). The idea that academics could study society and make policy recommendations as neutral experts grew out of the 19th century belief in the objectivity and political neutrality of social science.

Improving society through social scientific inquiry was also backed by Progressive Era reformers of the early 20th century who established philanthropic endowments for such institutes and pushed for government to address many of the social ills of the day. For example, in 1907 the Russell Sage Foundation convened academics and social policy experts to address "the underlying concept of creating knowledge for social betterment (O'Connor 2007, p. 1)." At the turn of the century, an increase in advanced degrees, professional conferences, licensure, and use of technical language, also contributed to the growing authority of experts. Professors were increasingly appointed to commissions and y boards and guided reform to address social problems. These "scientific reformers" were often joined by business interests in an attempt to

direct government management away from the corrupt machine politics of the time and towards rationality, efficiency, and political order (Critchlow 1985; Ricci 1993).

Politicians had also become concerned with the role of the scientific reformer. Early in his career, Woodrow Wilson, who would become president from 1913-1921, taught at Princeton University. He discussed with his students the need for educated people to go into government. However during his presidency, Wilson came to believe that an increasing government bureaucracy of experts could alienate the working class voter, and cause the electorate to question whether policy decisions were being made by their elected officials or by a cadre of experts (Smith 1991a).

Despite Wilson's concerns, the influence of the expert continued to grow, along with the expansion of the federal government, its specialized agencies, and bureaucratic structure. In 1927, industrialist Robert S. Brookings merged three established institutions, the Institute for Government Research, the Institute of Economics, and the Brookings Graduate School of Economics and Government, into one – The Brookings Institution. Initially supported through philanthropic donations from the Carnegie Corporation and the Rockefeller Foundation, Brookings was staffed by economists and political scientists (Critchlow 1985). Recognized by President Calvin Coolidge for his support of applying science to government, Robert L. Brookings, "set out to establish a center that would bring social scientists and policy makers together so that a scientific approach might be applied to government management, budgeting and spending (McGann 1995, p. 47)."

Over the course of the next two decades, the federal government expanded and so did federal expenditures, going from 6.4% of the GNP in 1932 to 25.1% of the GNP in

1942 (Ricci 1993). In 1945, Vannevar Bush, the head of the Office of Science Research and Development issued a report to President Roosevelt stating, "since health, well-being and security are proper concerns of government, scientific progress is, and must be, of vital interest to the government (Dickson 1972, p. 11)." During this time, the then President of the Brookings Institution, Harold Moulton, was critical of New Deal Legislation, which he thought centralized government authority and threatened free enterprise. Despite this critique, several Brookings scholars assisted in setting up such agencies as the social security administration and examined social and economic causes of the Great Depression (Smith 1991b).

Following WWII, think tanks increasingly benefited from government funded research, as well as from philanthropic endowments. The U.S. government's funding of research and development (R&D), science and technology, grew in conjunction with cold war threats, the push for U.S. military supremacy, the race to put the first man in space, and the demand for vaccines, computers, and other technological advances. Funding went largely to private industry and corporations, then to the universities, with some government contracts going to think tanks like the RAND Corporation that specialized in military technology. The rise in power of such think tanks, along with other R&D firms, led to such organizations being referred to as the "shadow government:" individuals and organizations not elected by the voters, but behind the scenes and central to the policy making process (Dickson 1972; Guttman and Willner 1976; Orlans 1972).

In the early part of the century, two conservative think tanks that today focus on education policy came into existence: the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace (1919) and the American Enterprise Institute (1943). In 1919 President Herbert

Hoover pledged $50,000 to Stanford University, recognizing the need for data collection on U.S. and European political, social, and economic issues. Supported by grants from the Rockefeller Foundation and Carnegie Corporation, the Hoover Institution was considered one of the first "Cold War" think tanks, studying the Soviet Union and other foreign nations throughout the 1950's (Dickson 1972; Guttman and Willner 1976; Smith 1991a). Although it operates on the campus of Stanford University, the Hoover Institution is considered autonomous, making it more akin to an independent think tank. In 1960, the Hoover Institution took a more direct conservative stance following a statement by its then elderly founder President Herbert Hoover,

> The institution's research and publications must demonstrate the evils of the doctrines of Karl Marx – whether Communism, Socialism, economic materialism or atheism – thus to protect the American way of life from such ideologies, their conspiracies, and to reaffirm the validity of the American system (Smith 1991a, p. 186).

A faculty committee at Stanford protested Hoover's statement, declaring that it "violated the basic principles of scholarly investigation (Smith 1991a, p. 186)." This controversy contributed to the Hoover Institution's separateness and independence from university governance and oversight. Today, Hoover is one of the few conservative think tanks to be based at a university with a full staff of academics in their education division, mostly economists. This division of Hoover focuses on "education policy related to government provision and oversight versus private solutions—both within and outside the public school system—that stress choice, accountability, and transparency (Hoover Institution 2006)." Hoover's education policy scholars - - economists John E. Chubb and Terry Moe - - are best known for *Politics, Markets and America's Schools*, a pivotal book

among school choice movement activists, which argued that government is the source of education's problems, and that markets are the solution (Chubb and Moe 1990).

The second early conservative think tank, the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research (AEI) was founded in 1943, by Lewis H. Brown, president of the Johns-Manville Corporation. In its early years, AEI received little recognition in the policy world, until 1953 when A.D. Marshall, the CEO of General Electric took over and hired several prominent economists and consultants, including Milton Friedman. Also hired as Vice President, was William J. Baroody, who advised Barry Goldwater in his campaign for president. Concerned over the lack of conservative ideas in politics, Baroody argued "there was no real debate; free-market ideas and the concept of limited government had no defenders in Washington (Smith 1991a, p. 177)."

With no endowment, AEI raised money during the 1970's from corporations represented by the Business Roundtable. Ricci (1993) argued that "AEI offered a middle-of-the-road sort of conservatism, propounded especially by neoconservatives and funded mainly by older corporations and foundations that endorsed moderate Republican sentiments (Ricci 1993, p. 161)." Today AEI's Director of Education Policy Studies is Frederick M. Hess, who is also the editor of the conservative publication *Education Next*. His first book, *Spinning Wheels*, published in 1998, set him apart in many ways from the researchers traditionally located at schools of education, as Hess noted in an interview:

> My book, *Spinning Wheels* was seen by some in the education community as a hostile book, because it suggested that the politics of reform rendered most of the popular efforts ineffective (Rick Hess, American Enterprise Institute).

The Shifting Economic Influence Behind the Creation of Conservative Think Tanks

The idea that conservative think tanks could be used as vehicles for expressing conservative ideas and building a conservative movement can trace its roots back to classic liberal economic philosophies revived by economists such as Frederick Hayek and Milton Friedman in the early 20th century (Yergin and Stanislaw 2002). In 1944, economist Fredrick Hayek published his critique of socialism in *The Road to Serfdom*. Hayek was critical of government planning and thought it led to dictatorship. He argued that collectivism was inherently totalitarian and that "the rise of fascism and nazism was not a reaction against the socialist trends of the preceding period but a necessary outcome of those tendencies (Nash 1998, p. 3)."

Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* was reproduced in short form all over the world. After reading a condensed version reprinted in *Reader's Digest*, Anthony Fisher, a former member of the British Royal Air Force and an entrepreneur, went to the London School of Economics to speak with Hayek (Blundell 2003). Kirk Johnson, Senior Policy Analyst of the Heritage Foundation discusses the significance of this in an interview.

> Sir Anthony Fisher, a British Industrialist, wanted to do something for King and Country, or I guess Queen and country, and he said to Friedrich Hayek, "I'm thinking about running for the House of Commons and doing it that way." Hayek said, "don't do it, fund an independent research organization." That is how the Center for Economic Affairs was started. That got a lot of people thinking about the role of the independent research and policy making organization. Brookings has been around forever, we've [The Heritage Foundation] been around for 32 years. That is how we got the ball rolling. Our star really rose quite a bit during the Reagan years (Kirk Johnson, Heritage Foundation).

In his efforts to revive economic liberalism, Hayek created the Mont Pélerin Society in 1947, an international group of neoliberal scholars (Blundell 2003; Nash 1998; Yergin and Stanislaw 2002). Dan Lips, Education Analyst for the Heritage Foundation noted in an interview the importance of the Mont Pélerin Society for the inception of conservative think tanks.

> They had this meeting in Switzerland, and they decided that we needed to create institutes to carry the torches of these ideas through what had been a long winter where classical liberal ideas had not been heard. Out of that we got the Institute for Economic Affairs in London, which ended up becoming Margaret Thatcher's Idea Factory, the American Enterprise Institute here, and the Chicago School where Milton Friedman was. I definitely think that the Mont Pélerin Society achieved their goal. The group still meets today, people like Dr. Fulner of Heritage are still members. I think that their mission 60 years later has very much been achieved, in that these institutes are really leading the way in shaping these ideas, and in some cases leaving academia far behind (Dan Lips, Heritage Foundation).

The creation of the Mount Pélerin Society and the establishment of early conservative think tanks sparked the beginning of a movement away from the paradigm of European Keynesianism, which argued that income distribution depended significantly on institutional arrangements. Keynesianism emphasized that "not only do a factor's relative scarcity and productivity matter, but so too does its bargaining power, which is impacted by institutional arrangements" (Palley 2005, p. 21). As such, unions, the minimum wage, and government protections are recognized as part of economic activity. In contrast to this, neoliberal economic theory asserts that "the market ensures that factors of production are paid what they are worth, thereby removing the need for institutions of social protection and trade unions" (Palley 2005, 23).

Once marginalized even within the field of economics, by the late 20th century, the Institute for Economic Affairs (IEA) had grown to prominence and recognition, especially with Frederich Hayek being awarded the Nobel Prize in economics in 1974, followed by Milton Friedman being given the award in 1976 (Blundell 2003; Yergin and Stanislaw 2002). IEA also became the model for future conservative think tanks. Two resources were created to aid classical liberal, free market entrepreneurs who wanted to set up their own think tanks, the Atlas Economic Research Foundation and the Economic Freedom Network.

Neoliberal economic theory was not only central to the creation and growth of conservative think tanks in general, but also more specifically established the groundwork for today's market driven conservative education policy positions: proposals for the privatization of public schools, through school choice and voucher plans. During the course of my interviews with conservative think tank scholars, I was frequently referred to Milton Friedman's book, *Free To Choose*. First published in 1980, Chapter 6 of this text, titled "What's Wrong with Our Schools?" outlines the need for a move away from "government schools" and toward consumer choice.

Friedman views students and their parents as consumers, and teachers and administrators as providers of educational services. He argues that professional educators, administrators, and unions have taken control away from the hands of parents and their interests are inevitably based in preserving their jobs through increased centralization and bureaucratization of the public schools. Friedman outlines a plan for vouchers, but argues that ideally this would only be a first step in a movement away from

tax supported public schools and towards direct parental financing of K-12 education (Friedman and Friedman 1980).

Today there are a vast number of conservative and libertarian think tanks that support Friedman's philosophy and the move toward the marketization of the public education system. Friedman and his wife went on to establish the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation, which along with a number of other advocacy organizations like the Center for Education Reform, promotes school choice as a means to ameliorating a myriad of perceived problems with public education. Joined by over forty-five state-based conservative and libertarian think tanks, the school-choice movement participates in grassroots organizing, the tracking of legislation and pending court cases, and publicizes research in support of charter schools and vouchers.

Social and Civil Unrest: The Call for the Conservative Movement to Respond

Along with the push from liberal economic theorists to create institutions from where free market ideas could influence public policy, another socially and politically conservative movement emerged during the 1960's and 1970's that sought to use think tanks as vehicles for conservative change.

By the mid 1960's with criticisms over the Viet Nam War, growing poverty and racial tensions in urban cities, the tide had turned away from government military contracts and towards a focus on domestic issues. The Great Society era of the Johnson administration sought out experts at universities and think tanks to author commissioned studies to examine issues such as urban poverty and housing, race relations, and crime (McGann 1995). The University of Wisconsin's Institute for Research on Poverty founded in 1966, and the Urban Institute, founded in 1968, emerged as think tanks

engaged in systematic research on poverty (Dickson 1972; Guttman and Willner 1976; Orlans 1972).

Beginning in the late 1960's the word "neoconservative" became more pronounced in political circles and within conservative think tanks. The term initially was associated with former New Deal Democrats, socialists, trade-union supporters, and anti-communists, who in their later years, during the decades of the 1970's and 1980's, found themselves in conservative and Republican circles, while others remained Democrats influencing the party from a more conservative business perspective. Although focused on a strong military and interventionist foreign policy strategy, neoconservatives have also involved themselves in domestic policy. During the 1960's and 1970's, neoconservative arguments of what was wrong with America centered on government's regulation of business, questions over the real benefits of welfare, and a concern over anti-authoritarian attitudes represented by the New Left, attitudes that questioned traditional institutions and authority and resulted in student rebellions and urban riots (Ricci 1993; Steinfels 1979).

During this time leading intellectuals and public figures, such as Robert Nisbet, Norman Podhoretz, Nathan Glazer, Daniel Bell, and James Q. Wilson came to be associated with neoconservatism. Supporters of neoconservatism wanted to defend their strain of liberal politics from what they saw as radical attacks from the counterculture or "New Left" of the 1960's, a group that critiqued capitalism and protested America's military intervention overseas. Neoconservatives aligned themselves with big business, and many had ties to think tanks studying foreign policy and defense, in particular, RAND, the Hudson Institute and American Enterprise Institute. Their ideas were

published in periodicals such as *Commentary* and *The Public Interest*, both edited by Irving Kristol, who became a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute along with Michael Novak and Seymour Martin Lipset (Nash 1998; Smith 1991a; Steinfels 1979). Although initially strange bedfellows, neoconservatives and corporations came to align themselves. As Steinfels (1979) notes, "business, long unhappy about the relative lack of ideological support it receives from the academy, has welcomed the neoconservatives enthusiastically (Steinfels 1979, p. 10)."

The characterization by conservatives of college professors as "radical" and of most universities as places inhospitable to conservative ideas, would continue for decades to come. Neoconservatives were fearful that the ideas of the radical Left were overtaking their form of liberalism, making their way not only into the minds of college students, but into mainstream media and government policy. This was the impetus for the creation of conservative think tanks to act as institutions where policy could be informed by "experts" from a more business oriented perspective.

In 1974, sociologist Charles Kadushin, published a book, *The American Intellectual Elite*, to give a history and systematic analysis of the leading elites of the late 1960's. Kadushin's sample was largely drawn from twenty leading intellectual journals, like the *New Yorker, New Republic, Commentary, the Nation, Atlantic, American Scholar,* and the *Public Interest*. His sample included frequently occurring authors from several fields, who published in these journals between 1964-1968. In contrast to conventional wisdom, Kadushin found that only 40% of these intellectual elites were professors, while 40% were editors or staff of leading journals, and the remainder had various positions as free-lance writers, poets, and novelists (Kadushin 1974).

Included in Kadushin's list of the top thirty most prestigious contemporary intellectuals were neoconservatives such as Daniel Bell, Irving Kristol, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Norman Podhoretz, James Q. Wilson, Seymour Martin Lipset, Robert Nisbet, and Nathan Glazer (Kadushin 1974). According to Steinfels (1979) count, one out of every four intellectuals on Kadushin's top thirty list were neoconservatives.

It is undeniable that the intellectual elite of the time was overwhelmingly liberal, however it would be inaccurate to say that the most powerful intellectual elites appearing in popular media of the day were Leftist radicals. Kadushin notes that much of the discontent and radicalism of the 1960's, although located at the universities, was not reflected in the intellectual elite. He writes,

> despite their apparent alienation in the sixties, most of the elite American intellectuals were simply too well off and too enmeshed in the daily routines of bureaucratic life to qualify as highly alienated and this embeddedness may have affected their style of thought (Kadushin 1974, p. 356).

The critique of the 20th century liberal intellectuals by conservatives actually began decades prior to the social and political upheavals of the 1960's and 1970's. Russell Kirk, a political theorist, was a highly influential figure in the revival of the conservative movement and its critique of the political Left. He is best known for his book, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot*, published in 1953. Kirk sought to reinvigorate and call attention to the history and development of conservative intellectual thought and its philosophical grounding. Kirk's focus, unlike the neoliberals, was not on market mechanisms or economics, but on the belief that conservative ideas had been overshadowed by liberals who had equated their world view with what it meant to be an

"intellectual." Kirk thought it imperative that the 20th century conservative be concerned with,

> the problem of leadership, which has two aspects: the preservation of some measure of reverence, discipline, order, and class; and the purgation of our system of education, so that learning once more may become liberal in the root sense of that word. Only just leadership can redeem society from the mastery of the ignoble elite (Kirk 1995, p. 472).

Kirk found exceptions to this intellectual critique in the publications of sociologists like Robert Nisbet, whose work is largely affiliated with the views of neoconservatives. Kirk said of Nisbet, "he seeks to save the concept and the reality of community, and to rescue sociological speculation from its infatuation with Benthamite[1] dogma and method (Kirk 1995, p. 482)." Kirk's overall disillusionment with academia would become a critical theme well into the late 20th and early 21st centuries among members of conservative think tanks, many of whom find the university to be inhospitable to their ideas. In an effort to reach the public, in 1955 Kirk and William F. Buckley, Jr. founded the *National Review*, a politically conservative magazine.

Neoconservatives would end up becoming one important component of a larger conservative movement that gained momentum with the establishment of several conservative think tanks in the early 1970's, incorporating their ideas, particularly their support for business and disillusionment with the Left wing contingent of the Democratic party. Intellectuals themselves, many who held government positions and advised presidents and cabinets, neoconservatives had harsh words for the New Left and its members.

[1] A reference to Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), British social reformer and proponent of utilitarian thought, liberalism, separation of church and state, animal rights, women's rights, and the abolition of slavery.

> Both neoconservatives and liberals have branded each other as renegades. Neoconservatives believe that liberals have abandoned their principles for the elixir of Youth and Revolution; liberals think that neoconservatives have become apologists for their own newly acquired privileges (Steinfels 1979, p. 22).

In terms of policy, neoconservatives were critical of some Great Society programs, while acknowledging the success and accomplishment of others. By the early 1970's, debates over whether education programs like *Head Start*, equitable funding, and school desegregation were working to lesson the black-white achievement gap ensued. The expansion of government funding to alleviate poverty and rectify social and racial injustice, along with the defeat of Barry Goldwater by Lyndon Johnson in 1964 years earlier, further spurred on an already growing conservative movement in America. When it came to education, neoconservatives were critical of the expansive role the federal government took during the Johnson administration, particularly the federal funding mandated by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Citing the highly publicized Coleman Report, James Q. Wilson offered his assessment of the direction education policy should take.

> Everyone values education, but liberals have customarily thought that more of it could be obtained by spending more money on it; neoconservatives think the data show that there is little or no relationship between spending and achievement (Wilson 1996, viii).

Critiques of the expanding role of the federal government and whether increased spending on education alone could improve academic achievement would ultimately become two of the most debated issues over the next twenty-five years, lasting well into the George W. Bush presidency, in both the education community and conservative think tank circles.

Conservatives Join Forces to counter the Left

The neoconservative movement, a greater presence of business influence in politics, along with the emergence of neoliberal economic thought, coalesced in the 1970's and contributed to what would become a burgeoning industry of conservative think tanks. The neoliberals had already been pushing for the creation of conservative think tanks since the founding of the Mont Pélerin Society in 1947, and by the 1970's the concerns of the business community and neoconservatives had grown over what they saw as a Leftist agenda being adopted into public policy.

In many respects, conservative think tanks were established as institutions to counter many of the ideas, pedagogy, and philosophies of the academy and mainline think tank consultants, who often recommended investing in government programs as a means to address social inequality. Conservative think tanks sought to replace this paradigm with market oriented approaches to solving social problems.

On August 23, 1971, prior to his nomination to the Supreme Court, Justice Lewis F. Powell wrote a memorandum to Eugene B. Sydnor, Jr. who became chairman of the Education Committee of the National Chamber of Commerce. In the memorandum, originally marked "confidential," Powell outlines his concern over what he sees as an attack on the American free enterprise system.

The sources of the attacks were the Communists and New Leftists. Powell noted the lack of conservatives and moderates on college campuses was due to the fact that "social science faculties tend to be liberally oriented." He suggested that "the Chamber should consider establishing a staff of highly qualified scholars in the social sciences who do believe in the system." Other suggestions included the creation of a speaker's bureau,

the evaluation of textbooks that were "re-written" by supporters of the civil rights and labor movements, equal time on campus, the balancing of faculties, and building relationships with graduate schools of business. In terms of public outreach, Powell suggested the use of television, radio, paid advertisements, scholarly journals, books, paperbacks, and pamphlets (Powell August 23, 1971).

The concerns of Powell were repeated throughout the 1970's by several factions of the conservative movement. William E. Simon, Secretary of the Treasury during the Nixon administration, like Powell, outlined his concerns over the direction the nation was taking. Simon suggested that what was needed in America was a powerful counterintelligentsia, a "New Class" dedicated to liberty and the idea of a meritocracy. He thought that, "the most brilliant and dedicated intellectuals of the Right are classical liberals, adherents of limited government and a minimally regulated free market economy, and are totally aware of the unbreakable link between political and economic liberty (Simon 1978, p. 223-224)." Simon proposed the need for three parts of the conservative movement to join forces to counter the New Left. First, the classical liberals, also referred to as neoliberals and sometimes libertarians. Second, the neoconservatives, whom Simon disagreed with on some points, but viewed as allies when it came to their support for capitalism. And third, the world of business, which Simon argued needed to fight for free enterprise through public education projects and high powered advertising campaigns.

Like Powell, Simon thought that there was a need for independent organizations to finance conservative scholars and reach the public,

> There are few voluntary institutions in America today that are organized to finance intellectuals who fight for economic, as well as political liberty. Most private funds - inevitably from business itself - flow ceaselessly to the very institutions which are philosophically committed to the destruction of capitalism. The great corporations of America sustain the major universities, with no regard for the content of their teachings. They sustain the major foundations which nurture the most destructive egalitarian trends (Simon 1978, p. 228).

The calls to action from all factions of the conservative movement were echoed by Irving Kristol who argued in the *Wall Street Journal* and *Public Interest* that,

> if business wanted market logic to regain the initiative, it would have to create a new class of its own – scholars whose career prospects depended on private enterprise, not government or the universities (Easterbrook 1986, p. 67).

The concerns of conservatives led to action and contributed to what over the next thirty years would be the establishment of dozens of conservative think tanks, as well as smaller state-based think tanks, whose common mission it is to promote free markets and limited government. Simon himself went on to become head of the John M. Olin Foundation, which today funds several conservative think tanks. In terms of a focus on education policy, prior to 1970, there were just four conservative think tanks in existence that today focus attention on education issues: The Hoover Institution, the American Enterprise Institute, the Hudson Institution, and the Reason Foundation. Between 1970 and 1980 this number grew by five with the addition of the Heritage Foundation, Rockford Institute, Cato Institute, Manhattan Institute, and Pacific Research Institute. All would eventually develop an interest with education policy issues. The 1980's and 1990's brought about an explosion of conservative think tanks with a focus on education

policy. By 2006, there were fifty-six conservative think tanks in the United States with education policy divisions.

Chapter 2

Think Tanks and a Shift in the Education Policy Paradigm

As discussed in Chapter 1, the rapid growth of conservative think tanks post 1970, and the expression of their views in policy circles, was largely fueled by two conservative ideologies – neoliberalism and neoconservatism. Both have shifted views of the Republican and Democratic parties, resulting in education policy debates now taking place mostly in a Right of center continuum. This chapter discusses the shift away from educational concerns about equity and access that influenced federal education policy during the 1960's and 1970's; and towards the outputs and assessment paradigm that emerged following the 1983 release of *A Nation At Risk*. The shifting parameters of debate are described in light of the growing influence of conservative think tanks during this period. This chapter argues that neoconservatives, joined by various business groups, and Right-of-center Democrats, became the most influential group in influencing education policy debates. This occurred in spite of traditional conservatives on one end and progressive Democrats on the other, protesting various aspects of federal education policy during the Bush I, Clinton, and Bush II presidencies.

One influential group within the conservative movement encompasses more traditional conservatives and libertarians who are steadfast in their call for the elimination of the Department of Education. Ideally they seek to move away from what they refer to as "government schools," and towards a completely free market system of education. This philosophy has been exemplified by the writings of economist Milton Friedman. This faction of the conservative movement has been in agreement with neoconservatives on issues of school choice, vouchers, and anti-unionism. However disagreement occurs

between the two groups when it comes to the role of the State in matters of education policy. Historically, the traditional conservative group has compromised with the neoconservative faction of the Republican party, however it has never been in full support of a strong role for the federal government in education matters.

While traditional conservatives have opposed the expansion of government oversight, particularly at the federal level, neoconservatives have been more open to gaining political influence through existing bureaucratic structures and the education policy apparatus. They have done this in conjunction with the business world, which has profited from the "problematizing" of the American education system and the need for private sector consultants and products to fix it. Neoconservatives have also been critical of teacher's unions and the perceived failures of liberal-progressive education, perpetuated in their view by schools of education.

The Heritage Foundation, Education Policy, and the Reagan Administration

The Heritage Foundation is probably the most recognizable and certainly the best funded conservative think tank in America today. Heritage was created to serve as "a talent bank for Republicans in office, a tax-exempt refuge for them when out of office, and a communications center for Republican thinkers across the nation (Edwards 1997, p. 5)." Although established in 1973, the Heritage Foundation was not heavily involved with education policy until the Reagan administration. The early 1970's generated controversies over busing and desegregation. At the time, President Nixon's policy efforts included federal funding to assist with desegregation efforts, but at the same time Nixon offered legislative proposals to keep white children from being bussed and school districts from being sued for non-compliance. Advised by Daniel Patrick Moynihan,

Nixon also created the National Institute of Education (NIE) to conduct research and gather data, one of many federal data collection agencies that would grow along with the federal role in education. Nixon proposed a policy to restructure federal education funding by giving block grants to the states. The idea went nowhere at that moment, but was later embraced in future education debates by both conservative think tanks and Republican legislators. Additionally, Nixon funded a program to study a public school voucher program in San Jose, California. Although it was not renewed, the issue of school vouchers remains a cornerstone of conservative think tanks' agenda for education (Cross 2004).

In 1979, just two years prior to Ronald Reagan taking office, President Jimmy Carter had created the Department of Education, a cabinet level office with its own secretary. Prior to that time, the Office of Education was part of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW). The creation of the Department of Education was widely supported by the National Education Association (NEA), a teacher's union, who endorsed Carter for president. Worried that the NEA would have an inside track and receive special treatment by the president, initial criticism of the Department of Education came from the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) as well as organizations representing Catholic schools. Conservatives also criticized the creation of the Department arguing that the federal role in education was already too intrusive and overstepped state and local rights over education. Further expansion of the federal role, conservatives believed, had led to more bureaucratization and court involvement (Cross 2004; McGuinn 2006).

These criticisms of the Department of Education were echoed by the Heritage Foundation and included in *Mandate for Leadership* published in 1981. This text, sometimes referred to as the "blueprint of the Reagan administration," was created to outline a conservative agenda, should a Republican be elected to the presidency. The report stated:

> In principle, the Department of Education should be abolished as a Cabinet department. But the authors of this report take the position that the status of the agency as a Cabinet department is less critical to a new administration than the overhaul of federal education policy (Docksai 1981, p. 166) .

It is not known specifically from the above statement why the Heritage Foundation Report did not more forcefully recommend that the Department be abolished. Possibly it was the idea that eliminating such a cabinet position may not be politically feasible, and that keeping such an office could allow a Republican president to dismantle the federal education policy already put in place.

In its report, the Heritage Foundation argued for a shift in education decision making back to the state and local levels, a reduction in the size and budget of the Department of Education, and revisions to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the Higher Education Act. Heritage recommended the Department of Education to return to the traditional duties of "1) information gathering and dissemination; 2) consultation and technical assistance in dealing with on-site teaching problems; and 3) educational research and development (Docksai 1981, p. 164)."

In terms of activities of the Department, the Heritage Foundation found the involvement of the Office of Civil Rights within the Department of Education as "destructive to federal-state relationships in educational policy" (Docksai 1981, p. 165).

Additionally it was suggested that the Title I program, which distributed funding to low-income school districts, should be administered through a voucher system, where parents would be given a voucher to be used for either public or private education. The Heritage Foundation publication notes, "if this proposal passed, it would make it impossible for anyone to accuse the Administration of middle-class bias in its advocacy of private school tuition tax credits" (Docksai 1981, p. 177).

Heritage also criticized the Women's Education Equity Act, stating that it should be abolished, based on the idea that funded programs were "more in keeping with extreme feminist ideology than concern for the quality of education" (Docksai 1981, p. 179). Additionally, the report dedicated considerable time to critiquing the Title VII Spanish/English Bilingual Education Program. Heritage argued that this program was ineffective, citing portions of a report by the government funded think tank, the American Institutes of Research (See Danoff 1978). On bilingual education, Heritage concluded, "there is nothing wrong with people trying to maintain their culture but they should be in charge of doing it – not the federal government" (Docksai 1981, p. 186).

Although citing the report by the American Institutes of Research, the Heritage Foundation stated that "federally funded research at best has been spotty and inconclusive and at worst have been programs for indoctrinating students in ethical relativism and social determinism" (Docksai 1981, p. 165). Many of the criticisms raised by the Heritage Foundation publication are still made today by conservative political leaders and think tank experts, in particular, the idea that during the 1960's and 1970's, public education had become polluted with liberal philosophies and pedagogies (See Ravitch 2001). Throughout the report there is reference to the replacement of traditional

textbooks, curriculum, and teaching techniques with the ideas of liberal-left education activists, cultural relativism, and humanistic and psycho-social educational agendas. The Heritage Foundation argued,

> During the past 15 years, there has been a concerted nationwide effort by professional educationalists to turn elementary and secondary school classrooms into vehicles for liberal-left social and political change in the United States (Docksai 1981, p. 187).

In summarizing the report, it is not surprising that *Mandate for Leadership* insists upon a less intrusive and minimalist role for the federal government in education policy. The 1981 report viewed most federal education programs not only as ineffective, but also as a financial and administrative burden to state and local school districts, deeming such federal programs - counterproductive. The Heritage Foundation emphasized the cooperative not coercive relationship that should take place between the federal and state government when it comes to education policy. In citing the deficiencies of federal policy at the time, Heritage noted that federal grant programs,

> make it possible for the federal government to influence to an enormous extent the policy and practice of public education, even though the government contributes no more than 7 percent of the funds that pay for public elementary and secondary education (Docksai 1981, p. 172).

The Reagan Administration

Not long after *Mandate for Leadership* was made available to Republican Party strategists, Reagan was elected. Reagan's agenda for education was much in line with the Heritage Foundation report and was based on "eliminating the federal department, consolidating programs, and reducing spending (Cross 2004, p. 75)." Against the recommendation of the Heritage Foundation, a moderate conservative, Terrel Bell, was

appointed by Reagan as the Secretary of Education. Republican insiders showed little support for Bell's ideas. Not long after the appointment, Reagan proposed in his 1981 address to the nation that the Department of Education be eliminated as a cabinet department in order to reduce the federal budget (Cross 2004; Lugg 2000; McGuinn 2006).

Secretary Bell thought that federal guidance *was* needed in education, and ultimately ensured the Department of Education's survival after convening a Blue Ribbon Commission of educators and business leaders, (later named the National Commission on Excellence in Education) that produced the *Nation At Risk Report* (Lugg 2000). Bell however, was not a federalist. He argued that the federal government should not mandate curriculum and standards and later emphasized the need for state government to take a leading role in education reform. Bell was in some ways able to compel this change, against the wishes of several governors and state legislators, by publishing state by state comparisons of data on educational achievement, teacher salaries, dropout rates, and per pupil expenditures, referred to as the "Wall Chart"(Cross 2004).

The *Nation At Risk Report* brought attention to a perceived crisis in both K-12 and college education in the United States. It was reported that American students were falling far behind their counterparts in other nations, such as Japan, Germany, South Korea, and the Soviet Union, particularly in the areas of math and science. The importance of maintaining economic competitiveness in a global economy was also emphasized. The report states,

> the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and as a people (United States National Commission on Excellence in Education 1984, p. 5).

This single report defined education as a national crisis at the same time that Reagan was contemplating doing away with the Department of Education all together. Moderate Republican s to the president suggested that he endorse the report, while Ed Meese, one of the most conservative members of his cabinet, suggested that Reagan denounce the report. Eventually the report was presented to the press at a Rose Garden Ceremony, Reagan "praised the report for its call to eliminate the Department of Education and for its support of vouchers, tuition tax credits, and school prayer, none of which the report actually endorsed (McGuinn 2006, p. 43)." Despite its misrepresentation by Reagan to the media, the attention the report received contributed to increased public awareness, putting education on the map as a top political concern among Americans. Two national public opinion polls taken in 1987, indicated support for more federal education spending and for the federal government to require states to meet national education standards (McGuinn 2006).

Reagan, and his second Secretary of Education, Bill Bennett, continued to promote a limited role for the federal government during Reagan's second term. However, the release of *A Nation At Risk*, not only set in motion increased public awareness, but a growing number of interest groups that sought to preserve reform efforts at the state and national levels. During the 1980's, state governors and legislators increased education budgets, and put through thousands of educational reforms, built around the education excellence movement and standards-based reform. Despite the

Republican position of a limited federal role in education, Bennett was very visible as a cabinet member, and used his post as a "bully pulpit" bringing even further attention to the issue of education reform. Bennett contributed to the standards movement through his efforts to improve the availability and accuracy of educational statistics, by convening a commission to review and expand the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to all fifty states (Cross 2004; McGuinn 2006).

Despite Reagan's cutbacks in federal education spending and his dismantling of some federal education programs, ultimately he was unable to gain public and political support to eliminate the Department of Education, as many conservatives and conservative think tanks had hoped. The Reagan administration and the larger conservative movement in America however was successful at shifting the terms of the debate, characterizing old liberal Democrat policies of the New Deal and Great Society eras as outdated and unsuccessful. The Reagan era coincided with a shift away from Keynesian economic policy and towards one that embraced unregulated free markets, referred to at the time as "Reaganomics." The influence of neoconservative ideas and business interests in politics rose during the 1980's and was accompanied by a shift within the Democratic Party to a more centrist platform.

The old educational paradigm, where the federal government's role was focused on providing equal access to schools and greater funding for disadvantaged students, shifted to a new educational paradigm focused on oversight and accountability. The viability and effectiveness of the old "equity" or "input" model of the federal government was brought into question during the 1980's by conservatives who deemed most educational spending by the federal government, ineffective, citing stagnant or declining

test scores, which ultimately gave way to an emerging "accountability" or "output" model of education (Cross 2004; McGuinn 2006). Several scholars and teacher's groups have questioned the reliability and validity of the accountability argument, particularly the policies involving standardized testing (See Kohn 2000; Meier 2004; Sacks 2001), while others have argued that federal education funding alone could barely begin to address the economic and social inequalities in the larger society that account for a continued achievement gap (See Rothstein 2004). Despite such critiques, the accountability or standards movement, which in small part had begun during the Reagan administration, continued throughout the Bush I and Clinton presidencies, and grew tremendously under the presidency of George W. Bush.

Bush I and the beginning of the standards movement

The George H. W. Bush presidency (1989-1993) brought about a continued focus on standards and testing, despite critiques from both Republicans and Democrats. Bush declared himself to be an "education president," recognizing the increasing profile education was receiving as a top domestic policy issue following the release of *A Nation At Risk*. Some Republicans feared that increased attention by the president to education standards would inevitably lead to a greater federal role; while some Democrats, with the support of teacher's unions, feared that increased assessment would become intrusive, punitive, and unfunded. Democrats had dominated education as an issue and had received considerable support from both middle class suburban and urban minority voters. Some Republican supporters saw the need for a shift. Chester Finn, who worked in the Department of Education during both the Reagan and Bush presidencies, brought attention to this issue. In a 1986 *National Review* article he wrote,

> For conservatives to abandon the effort of systematic inquiry into education or the dissemination of sound educational ideas is to leave the field firmly in the possession of the colleges of education, the NEA, the American Association of School Administrators, and other bastions of liberal establishmentarianism. Whatever our differences about how to repair the education system, the most shortsighted strategy imaginable would be to withdraw all our explorers from this alien territory and turn it back over to the indigenous population (McGuinn 2006, p. 54).

Today Chester Finn is President of the conservative Fordham Foundation as well as a fellow at the conservative Hoover Institution. His statement would foreshadow a struggle that would continue within both Republican and conservative think tank circles over the next two decades – particularly the recognition of the political need to be identified as a group concerned with education policy, at the same time balancing traditional conservative and libertarian principles, which abhor big government and federal intrusion into state matters.

George H. W. Bush's efforts in fact were in line with what Finn wrote, although President Bush made sure to declare throughout his presidency that the federal role in education was to be one of leadership and not intrusion. His role as the self-declared education president began when he convened an education summit in 1989, in Charlottesville, North Carolina. That summit included a number of education experts, business leaders, and governors. Playing a primary role in the summit was then Governor Bill Clinton of Arkansas, who along with other "education governors" pushed for and produced a set of national education goals for the country and voluntary national standards to be met by the states. Support for national tests actually emerged from two y committees to Bush, one run by Aluminum Company of America CEO, Paul O'Neill, the

other an education committee chaired by former Republican Governor, Thomas Kean. In Bush's second term, Lamar Alexander was appointed Secretary of Education and worked along with several education experts on standards based reform, including Chester Finn and Diane Ravitch, Assistant Secretary of Education to Bush, today a fellow at both Brookings and the Hoover Institution. Ravitch oversaw the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), which gave grants to education organizations to develop standards in various academic subjects. With the aide of his s, Bush proposed the National Council on Education Standards and Testing Act, as well as the *America 2000* legislation, which created several education initiatives, including national standards (Cross 2004; DeBray 2006; Jennings 1998; McGuinn 2006).

As outlined in Chapter 1, a greater influence of business in politics post-1970 is one of several factors that contributed to the growth in conservative think tanks. Heeding the call of the Justice Powell memo a decade earlier, by the 1980's and 1990's business and capitalist interests had inserted themselves into a series of domestic policy issues - including welfare, social security, and education. More business leaders became concerned with education policy. Groups like the Business Roundtable, National Alliance of Business, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, had joined forces with the National Governors Association, and other leading politicians and experts to shift emphasis in education to "outputs" and "results" (Jennings 1998).

George H. W. Bush had specifically met with the Business Roundtable, asking them to partner with their local governors to assist with education reform efforts. One result of Bush's push for business involvement in education was the creation of the New American Schools (NAS) Corporation. NAS established a private-public partnership

between business leaders and public schools, still in existence today, where funding is provided to private and non-profit organizations to conduct research and develop and implement school reform initiatives. In the past, funding from NAS has gone to think tanks such as the RAND Corporation and university based policy centers, such as the Center for Policy Research and Education (CPRE). More recently NAS has become part of the American Institutes for Research, a government funded think tank (Cross 2004, www.naschools.org, www.air.org).

Ultimately President Bush was unsuccessful with his *America 2000* legislation, not able to get it by Republicans who disagreed with the increased federal role; and Democrats who were critical of the predictability of test scores based on socio-economic status, insisting instead upon "opportunity to learn" standards. Additionally unions argued against aspects of the legislation that proposed vouchers and private school alternatives. Although *America 2000* was defeated, Bush was successful in passing the National Council on Education Standards and Testing Act (Jennings 1998).

The Clinton Years – centrist and conservative think tanks emerge as bigger players

Despite President Bush's failure to pass the *America 2000* legislation, he had tapped into a movement already well underway in the states, supported by Governors and business leaders, pushing for standards tied to assessment. Once again, the media attention garnered by Bush's focus on education was in line with continued public pressure for a strong federal role in reforming education. The Clinton administration was able to build on that momentum and the bipartisan support standards had already received during the Bush administration. Similar to earlier education agendas shaped by conservative think tanks, President Clinton's education policies were in part shaped by

two centrist think tanks, the Center on Education and the Economy and the Progressive Policy Institute. The Center on Education and the Economy made several recommendations to the Clinton administration based on a study funded by the Carnegie Corporation. They focused on an international comparison between the United States and other countries, as the President of the Center on Education and the Economy, Marc Tucker noted to me in an interview.

> All of the countries we studied were different, countries as different as Japan and Sweden, Singapore and Germany, but the basic structures of their educational systems were all similar, each to the other, but all very unlike the United States. They all had systems that were based on explicit standards of achievement at the national level. They all had national systems of tests and examinations. They all had curriculum frameworks that specified topics to be studied in each grade level in each of the required subjects in the curriculum (Marc Tucker, President of the National Center for Education and the Economy).

Tucker's recommendations for the Clinton education agenda became controversial after he included them in a personal letter he wrote to Hillary Clinton that was made public. Today the letter is still posted on several conservative think tank websites and stands in the Congressional Record. Although some criticisms of Tucker's plan came from liberal and progressive groups (See Emery and Ohanian 2004), the primary criticisms came from conservative think tanks. The latter involved highlighting both the comprehensive and vocational nature of the recommendations, in particular a system coordinated by labor market boards, the idea of job matching, and the collection of student data. Education Watch, a division of the conservative think tank Capital Research Center, argued that the plan would:

> change the mission of the schools away from teaching children academic basics and knowledge so they can make their own life choices, and toward training them narrowly in specific job skills to serve the global economy in jobs selected by workforce boards (Capital Research Center Education Watch (formerly the Maple River Education Coalition)).

The Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) also played an important role in setting the agenda of the Clinton administration. Created in 1985, the DLC "seeks to define and galvanize popular support for a new public philosophy built on progressive ideals, mainstream values, and innovative, non bureaucratic, market-based solutions (Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) 2006)." Andy Rotherham, a research fellow of the DLC's think tank, the Progressive Policy Institute, became an education to Clinton. Often referred to as the "third way," the centrist, sometimes conservative leaning DLC sought to draw distinctions between Clinton's agenda and the more liberal wing of the Democratic Party. Despite criticisms from conservatives, much of the legislation proposed by Clinton in *Goals 2000*, was similar to that of Bush in terms of national goals and standards. However Clinton differed in his support for increased federal funding and his stand for public school choice, but against private school choice and vouchers. Additionally Clinton's Secretary of Education, Richard Riley, recommended standards based reform for Title I funding, arguing that all school children should be held to the same standards. A RAND report that came out at the time concurred with Riley's plans for Title I, indicating that the same standards and tests should be administered to all students regardless of Title I status (Cross 2004; DeBray 2006; McGuinn 2006).

At the same time Clinton was gearing up for the *Goals 2000* legislation and the reauthorization of ESEA (Improving America's Schools Act), a group of Republicans in

Congress once again called for the elimination of the U.S. Department of Education. Congressional Republicans fought against Clinton's standards-based reform; however it had already gained momentum with Governors, the business community, and the public. The business community continued to play a strong role in education during the Clinton presidency, and was represented by the Business Coalition for Education Reform, which included the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Alliance for Business, the Business Roundtable, the National Association of Manufacturers and the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (Cross 2004).

In 1996 when Bob Dole ran against Clinton for the presidency, his campaign ran on the platform that the Department of Education should be eliminated. However following Dole's loss, Republicans realized that in the future it would be difficult to sway public support, particularly among suburban and women voters, away from a national role in education policy. Calls to the get rid of the Department of Education and drastically reduce the federal role no longer seemed feasible (DeBray 2006). As Krista Kafer, former education analyst for the Heritage Foundation noted,

> Public opinion really drove the Republican shift. Some politicians who know in their heart that school vouchers are right still won't support them because they fear public opinion. That's why politicians stopped talking about abolishing the Department of Education and supported throwing more money at education. All of the polling coming back to Republicans was supportive of testing and accountability, they did what was good for them (McGuinn 2006, p. 133).

In addition to the shift away from the equity framework for federal involvement in education policy since the Reagan administration, the 1990's also signified a shift in the way that politics was done in Washington. Debray (2006) describes this shift as

going from an “iron triangle” model of politics to an “interests networks” model of politics. The iron triangle theory of interest groups, predominant in the 1960’s and 1970’s suggested that a long term stable political alliance existed between three groups: a government agency, congressional committees, and a coalition of interest groups. In the case of education this would mean the Department of Education; the U.S. Senate and House of Representative Committees on Education; teacher’s unions, professional education groups, and various education advocacy organizations. The interest networks model of the 1980’s and 1990’s is described as more fluid and “made up of looser, more temporary coalitions of interest groups that work together on particular focused issues (DeBray 2006, xiii).”

During Clinton’s second term in office, with a Republican Congress and Senate, a number of think tanks and advocacy organizations became larger players in education policy debates and in the 1999 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Three think tanks, the conservative Fordham Foundation, the centrist Progressive Policy Institute, and centrist Brookings Institution met that year to discuss barriers to education reform. Additionally, with failed attempts to eliminate the Department of Education, conservative think tanks seemingly began to take heed of what Chester Finn had written back in the mid 1980’s about the need for conservatives to get in the game of education. Several conservative think tank alliances emerged, for example the Heritage Foundation, Manhattan Institute, and Empower America began mobilizing around a conservative policy agenda (DeBray 2006).

In the House of Representatives both the Fordham Foundation and Heritage Foundation pushed for the elimination of categorical programs and the adoption of

market-based initiatives for education. This group of conservative think tanks backed *Straight A's*, a report written by Chester Finn, who at the time was both President of the conservative Fordham Foundation and a John M. Olin Fellow at the conservative Manhattan Institute. Finn testified in front of the Committee on Education and the Workforce about his proposal in May 1999, noting that unlike past block grant proposals, *Straight A's* would include a component of accountability, which would, "reward (with continued freedom and perhaps a funding bonus) those states that succeed in lifting student achievement" (Finn Jr. May 20, 1999).

The second report coming out of the Fordham Foundation and Manhattan Institute was "New Directions: Federal Education Policy in the Twenty-First Century." This report included a collection of writings from education experts, including Diane Ravitch, a fellow at both the Manhattan Institute and Brookings Institution at the time, and Paul T. Hill, also a fellow at the Brookings Institution at the time. Today Hill is also a visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution and runs the Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington. The report's focus was to rethink the federal role in education, suggesting that Title I funds should be made portable, essentially traveling with the student to the school; that professional development for teachers as it currently exists does not work, and that federal funding should be provided with fewer strings (Chester E. Finn Jr. and Marci Kanstoroom 1999).

Another important conservative coalition founded in 1999 was the Koret Task Force based at the Hoover Institution and funded by a $1.5 million dollar grant from the Koret Foundation. Members include several Hoover fellows: John E. Chubb, Chester E. Finn Jr., Eric Hanushek, Paul T. Hill, E. D. Hirsch, Caroline Hoxby, Terry Moe, Paul E.

Peterson, and Diane Ravitch. Koret Task force members often contribute to the periodical *Education Next: A Journal of Opinion and Research,* whose editor is Frederick M. Hess, of the American Enterprise Institute. The Koret Task Force has published several reports and books on various education policy topics, including school choice, testing and accountability, and school reform.

In addition to the increasing presence of conservative think tanks in education policy circles during Clinton's second term, there were also many conservative advocacy organizations mobilizing along side them. Excellence for Parents, Children, and Teachers, also known as the EXPECT Coalition, founded in 1998, received support from several conservative think tanks - the Heritage Foundation, Education Policy Institute, Cato Institute, Empower America, and the Lexington Institute; and several conservative advocacy organizations - Concerned Women for America, the Traditional Values Coalition, The Eagle Forum, the Christian Coalition, the Republican Jewish Coalition, and the American Association of Christian Schools (DeBray 2006; McGuinn 2006). The coalition focused on the perceived barriers that unions pose to education reform, something that Charlene Haar, President of the Education Policy Institute wrote a book on in 1996 titled, *The NEA and AFT, Teacher Unions in Power and Politics*. The establishment of the Education Policy Institute, as Haar noted to me in an interview, was "looking at policy issues from the standpoint of union obstruction and union reaction (Charlene Haar, President of the Educaiton Policy Institute).

This newly formed group of conservative think tanks and advocacy organizations, along with conservative members of the National Governor's Association were able to make inroads into federal education policy talks. With some success they had shifted

education away from the sole purview of the Democratic Party. Conservative think tanks began to label Democrats and organizations that continued to support a more "equity" approach to federal education policy as the "status quo" or "establishment." In an interview with Chester Finn, when I asked him about opponents to his policy reform efforts, he responded,

> Mostly the status quo. It is not so much people advancing other reform ideas. It is people who want to keep things pretty much the way they are, that includes what Bill Bennett used to call "The Blob" and what many people call the "education establishment" - those tend to be associations of teachers and administrators, the NEA, American Association of School Administrators, National Association of State Boards of Education, and so forth. These are people whose members we want to influence the thinking of, but whose natural tendencies as organizations is to maintain something very close to the status quo (Chester Finn, President of the Fordham Foundation).

During the period leading up to reauthorization of ESEA, bi-partisan discussions took place led by Democratic Senator Joseph Lieberman and Republican Senator Slade Gorton. Included in the talks were two conservative think tanks, the Heritage Foundation and the Fordham Foundation, and the centrist Progressive Policy Institute of the DLC. Also included was the Education Trust, a centrist education advocacy organization that would later play a key role in the NCLB legislation of the George W. Bush Presidency, and the Education Leaders Council, a group of conservative governors. The efforts of the group were to find a compromise for the reauthorization of ESEA. The compromise however was not between liberal-progressive factions of the Democratic party and conservative Republicans. Instead it was shaped largely by neoconservatives and centrist Democrats.

The Republicans had presented *Straight A's* (the Academic Achievement for All Act) put together by Chester Finn's group and supported by a coalition of conservative think tanks and advocacy organizations; while Democrats had presented The *Three R's* (the Public Education Reinvestment, Reinvention, and Responsibility Act), presented by Democratic senators Joseph Lieberman and Evan Bayh. The bill was heavily influenced by a report titled "Toward Performance-Based Federal Education Funding," written by Andy Rotherham of the DLC's Progressive Policy Institute (Cross 2004; DeBray 2006; McGuinn 2006).

Both the *Three R's* plan and *Straight A's* plan overlapped in their emphasis on standards and accountability. While *Straight A's* emphasized federal block grants and flexibility to state and local districts, *Three R's* emphasized spending increases, accountability for poor school districts, and the elimination of many targeted federal programs. Despite the move to the center by both the Republican and Democratic parties, neither proposal could get enough support from both congressional and senate committees and stalled. For the first time since its initial passage during the Johnson Administration in 1965, ESEA was not reauthorized (Cross 2004; DeBray 2006; McGuinn 2006).

George W. Bush, NCLB, and the continued influence of the neoconservatives

Despite the failure of both *Straight A's* and *Three R's* at the end of the Clinton presidency, components of both proposals would be incorporated into upcoming legislation. On his second day in office, President George W. Bush presented a general blueprint to Congress outlining what he wanted to be included in the reauthorization of ESEA. Education proposals had already been prepared by Sarah Yousseff, former staff

member of the Heritage Foundation, Sandy Kress of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), Margaret LaMontagne, Bush's chief education policy in Texas, and Reid Lyon, an expert on reading at the National Institute of Child Health and Development. The proposal included annual tests in grades 3-8 in order to receive Title I funding; public and private school vouchers for disadvantaged schools that failed to make progress over a three year period, grants for scientifically-based reading programs in K-2; greater flexibility for the states in their use of federal dollars for teacher training; the ability to waive regulations placed on grant programs if schools agreed to five-year performance standards; monetary bonuses for closing the achievement gap and financial punishment for failing to meet performance standards (Cross 2004; DeBray 2006; McGuinn 2006).

Although some Republicans, who had a slight majority in the House and Senate pushed for a solely Republican bill that argued for block grants and vouchers, Bush at the time chose to approach the legislation with "bi-partisan centrism." Along with Republicans, Bush invited two centrist Democrats, Senators Lieberman and Bayh, the authors of *Three R's*, as well as liberal Democrat, Congressman George Miller, who had previously shown strong support for standards, to Austin, Texas to speak about the plan. Initially excluded was ranking liberal Democrat Ted Kennedy, who later was incorporated into the negotiations. Kennedy ended up making various concessions on testing and assessment, but was able to negotiate for increased funding and the elimination of vouchers (Cross 2004; DeBray 2006; McGuinn 2006).

Liberal Democrats continued to strongly oppose vouchers, increased assessment, national tests and curriculum mandates, while more traditionally conservative Republicans were also concerned about federally mandated tests, in addition to increased

spending and the growing federal role in local education matters. Both ends of the political spectrum ironically had similar criticisms of the overarching mandates of the proposed legislation, but for very different reasons. Both groups of dissenters had their voices quelled by more centrist components of both parties.

The Left wing of the Democratic Party along with teacher's unions, were pulled into compromises by centrist Democrats. These groups also feared that if they clung to the old equity model of federal education, and didn't accommodate to increased standards and accountability, the public system could be at risk of falling into the hands of free-market initiatives and privatization. Traditionally conservative Republicans, some of whom had called for the elimination of the Department of Education just five years earlier, kept quiet on the issue, going along with the first Republican president in eight years. Many compromised. At least federal dollars would be tied to performance outcomes, and underperformance could be used as a rational for cutbacks in the future. Concerns over increased testing, standards, and accountability from both liberal-progressive Democrats and traditionally conservative Republicans were further silenced by the lobbying efforts of business groups such as the National Alliance of Business, and the Business Coalition for Excellence in Education, who argued that tests were necessary for the improvement of the U.S. workforce (Cross 2004; McGuinn 2006).

The bill to reauthorize ESEA was passed by both the House of Representatives and Senate during the Spring of 2001. It was titled "No Child Left Behind (NCLB)" by the Bush White House. The title of the bill is said to have come from a phrase originally coined by the Children's Defense Fund but usurped by the Bush Administration. Further debates ensued over the feasibility of schools to meet the standards, and the idea of

national tests, when the bill went to the appropriations committee. However the events of September 11th and efforts by Congress to show unity on the education bill allowed for successful passage through the appropriations phase. The bill was officially signed into law on January 8, 2002 and will be up for reauthorization in 2008 (McGuinn 2006).

The testing component of NCLB, mandates yearly tests, created by individual states, in English and Math for students in grades 3-8. An additional sample of students in every state, are required to take the 4th grade and 8th grade NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) tests in reading and math. The legislation also requires report cards on academic achievement at the local and state level (U.S. Department of Education Office of the Under Secretary 2002).

The school choice component of the legislation involved public school choice for students in failing schools. However in August 2006, Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, proposed a national voucher program for schools with persistent failure under the NCLB mandates (Education Week, August 2006). The federal support for both vouchers and charter schools has been at the forefront of what the education policy divisions of many conservative think tanks have argued is needed to reform the public school system.

Despite its passage, NCLB has not been without its critics, including politicians, teacher's unions, liberal/progressive think tanks, local school districts, and parents. One of the primary criticisms is that it is an "unfunded mandate," the provisions of which are too demanding for local school districts and states to meet without proper funding. Other criticisms come from the idea that the tests have driven negative changes into the curriculum, such as "teaching to the test" and have little reliability and validity when it

comes to truly measuring student learning. Also, the standardized testing industry and private consultants have been under fire, as they continue to grow and profit from public school tax dollars.

Criticisms have also come from traditional free market conservatives whose neoliberal economic philosophy emphasizes a minimal role for the state, and in theory would like to leave all policy areas to be determined by markets. What is interesting is that one of the criticisms that Heritage made of the Department of Education in 1981, has become a criticism of the Department of Education by the political Left in 2006. Fifteen years later, the Heritage Foundation may never have anticipated the changes that would have taken place with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, today referred to as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Critics argue that in many ways the NCLB legislation of the George W. Bush Presidency may be the most overarching federal mandate of public schools since the passage of ESEA in 1965. Beginning with the 2005-2006 school year, states have been required to test students in reading and math every year in grades 3-8 (U.S. Department of Education Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings November 10, 2005).

The neoliberal and neoconservative agenda is not something only found in conservative political circles, but in centrist Democratic Party ones as well. As noted throughout this chapter, the business community represented by the Business Roundtable increasingly worked in tandem with both conservative and centrist think tanks and advocacy organizations to move federal education policy from an input or equity model to one of accountability and outputs. Beginning in the 1990's with the Bush I and Clinton administrations, schools were more readily looked at in terms of a corporate

model of education. This occurred at the same time that for-profit corporations were increasingly taking over and managing charter schools, supported by public tax dollars (Emery and Ohanian 2004). In terms of education policy, neoconservatives have indeed been the most influential faction of the conservative movement, aided by think tanks and the efforts to shift the parameters of policy debates.

Conclusion

There has been a massive shift in the position of the political Right concerning public education during the decades following the 1960s. Up until that time most political conservatives had opposed federal involvement in education. Decentralized public education - state and community control - had allowed racial segregationists to dominate in American schooling, and the early efforts of the federal government and federal courts to enforce civil rights laws in education was opposed by the political Right. But after President Reagan came to power the Right found itself in the odd position of having the potential to wield power in an arena where it had long opposed federal power. Over time, the temptation to use this federal power to forge a more conservative educational agenda won out over the conservative reluctance to accept and embrace federal power.

Though this debate still continues within the political Right, a series of events, some fortuitous and some championed by Democrats as well as conservatives, drew more and more conservatives into the federal education policy arena. The prospect that public education could be privatized, that the influence of education unions could be erased, and that public funds might be usable for private education was irresistible, particularly to the neoconservatives. The appeal of managerialist or business thinking - that schools could

be treated just like businesses, with measurement of outcomes and adopting incentives for better performance, also appealed to that wing of conservatives who wanted to improve public education. The possibility that standard setting and assessment would reveal the failures of public education and turn the general public against the status quo was also appealing. These new interests, combined with increased funding for conservative think tanks that championed the cause, led to a massive paradigm shift in American education policy over the ensuing decades. That shift embraced charter schools, standards, assessment, and school choice.

Chapter 3

The Growth of Think Tanks and their Influence

This chapter begins with a discussion of the measurement of think tank influence, the influence of social scientific research more broadly, and theoretical approaches to studying think tanks. Data are then presented on the growth of think tanks, based on ideology, in the United States, and more specific patterns of growth for think tanks with education policy divisions. It also draws on interviews with think tank experts and their views on the changing landscape of the think tank world and education policy research.

Measuring Influence

Measuring the influence that think tanks have on the education policy making process is not simple or direct. The policy making process is complex, involving a multitude of organizations attempting to affect policy, with think tanks being just one. As Stone (1996) notes,

> The influence of think-tanks is diffuse, variable, fluid, intangible and usually ephemeral. It is not a quantifiable power that policy institutes wield. Nor is it the case that all institutes at some point in their existence exert political influence (Stone 1996, p. 3).

The potential influence of think tanks is also limited by the fact that, unlike other organizations, think tanks are restricted from making campaign contributions or endorsing candidates and legislation. In the world of education, think tanks find themselves alongside dozens of advocacy and grassroots organizations, unions, business coalitions, professional organizations, school boards, and parent-teacher groups, all trying to affect the direction that policy takes. Describing the role that think tanks play in the policy making process is much easier than measuring how and to what extent their efforts

actually influence or impact upon a debate. Despite these challenges, this research sets out to measure the influence of think tanks by doing the following:

1. Documenting and measuring the growth of think tanks doing education policy work based on ideology. (Chapter 3)

2. Tracing the patterns of funding by foundations to education work at think tanks. (Chapter 4)

3. Tracking and measuring the media impact of think tanks on education topic stories in newspapers, and on radio and television programs. (Chapter 5)

4. Exploring the changing nature of think tanks, ideological debates over education policy, and the changing role of researchers to advocates. (Chapter 6)

5. Measuring the impact and media presence of individual education experts from think tanks, advocacy organizations, and universities. (Chapter 7)

The growing number of think tanks, particularly conservative ones, has been assumed to be an indicator of influence by media watchdog groups, politicians, and journalists. However the proliferation of think tanks alone is not necessarily indicative of influence. Certainly the number of conservative think tanks that were founded after 1980, particularly at the state level, has skyrocketed, with relatively few liberal think tanks being founded during this same period. These conservative think tanks have been assisted by foundations and organizations like the *State Policy Network*, and have become a part of a larger coalition of organizations that has made up the conservative movement. However to date there has been little effort to assess the influence think tanks exert in those policy debates.

Second, funding is often used as a proxy to indicate power and influence. Funding certainly makes a significant impact on a think tank's capabilities. However the *use* of funding seems to be equally important in determining a think tank's influence. For example, contract research think tanks, most of which are not identified with a particular ideology, tend to receive substantial funding to conduct evaluation studies. Their funding pays researchers and the costs associated with data collection, analysis, and travel. Sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars can be spent on such projects, with few individuals, apart from the contracting government agency, ever seeing the report's results or recommendations. Whereas a far smaller amount of money could be used by an advocacy oriented think tank to host breakfasts and lunches for policy makers or to train staff to develop policy briefs and present them to legislators days before a critical vote. Although this is an extreme comparison, the second circumstance may in fact have a more immediate and direct impact on the votes of Congress and the passage of legislation.

A third device used to measure influence is to track the number of media citations, radio and television appearances of think tank scholars. In fact, this is the most common way that think tanks, especially those concerned with marketing their ideas, measure whether or not they are impacting the debate. Recent citations in newspapers and op-ed's are often presented on think tank websites as evidence of this. The number of media citations by think tanks, particularly ideological ones that advocate for a particular policy stance, can certainly impact a debate and contribute to the cumulative exposure the public gets from a given perspective.

Fourth, the relationship of think tanks to policy makers is an essential element in understanding the influence these organizations have on the policy making process. This can be measured in two ways: A think tank's general mission and the importance in practice it gives to fostering relationships with policy makers. (The Heritage Foundation is one such think tank that was built upon this premise and continues to be involved in the day in and day out workings of Capitol Hill.) One can also document whether or not specific think tanks have been consulted in policy debates and if their proposals or ideas have been incorporated into legislation.

Additionally, key think tank scholars, both former and current have advised presidents and had their proposals incorporated into legislation by Congress. For example Chester Finn, president of the Fordham Foundation and a fellow at the Hoover Institution, during the 1980's served as staff assistant to President Reagan, and then went onto hold a post at the Department of Education during the George H. W. Bush presidency. Similarly, Diane Ravitch a scholar at both the Brookings Institution and the Hoover Institution, was appointed by Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton to serve at posts within the Department of Education.

Historically however, this involvement has been sporadic and inconsistent. It is not a given that think tanks will be consulted every time ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act) is up for reauthorization, nor is it true that if they are consulted, their ideas and agendas will be taken into consideration.

Other measures of influence include tracking the involvement of think tanks in policy debates. Rich (2004) measured influence by examining health care, telecommunications, and tax cut debates to determine the conditions under which think

tanks are likely to wield influence. He found that the freshness, timing, marketing, readability, and emergence of think tanks' proposals during the agenda-setting stage of a debate were important. The visibility and credibility of think tank experts in the media and their relationships with key policy makers also mattered. The existence of all these conditions did not of course guarantee direct usage of a think tank proposal, nor passage of legislation; however these factors did coalesce in instances where think tanks exhibited influence.

How Social Scientific Research Influences Public Policy More Generally

The relationship between social scientific research and government policy developed during the Progressive Era and reached its peak during the 1960's and 1970's. As noted in Chapter 1, both think tanks and universities became sites where studies were contracted and policy recommendations made. The difficulty of measuring the influence of social scientific research like this on policy has to do with the nature of the policy making process itself. For decades, the social scientific research produced by academic think tanks and universities has had to contend with a complex political system constrained by time, interest groups, public opinion, budgets, and ideological perspectives.

As early as the 1970's the ability of social scientific research to sufficiently affect public policy came into question. In 1974 at the request of the National Science Foundation, the National Research Council prepared a study of the use of social science research by the federal government. The study notes that in 1976,

> the federal government invested more than $1.8 billion in social research and development (R & D) – i.e., in research, statistics, evaluations, demonstrations, and experiments – relating to the identification and solution of social problems (The National Research Council 1978, p. 1).

The study highlights that not enough thought is given to the planning of federal R&D projects and the usefulness of the research to Congress. The study called for several multiyear projects coordinated to gain overall knowledge, rather than short-term and fragmented studies, in order for social science to have greater relevance. One commissioned paper of the report, authored by Lynn (1978), highlights how strict government oversight, management, and deadlines for research can be counterproductive, stating that valuable knowledge is often obtained through a "cumulative, iterative, time-consuming, and often inefficient process of investigation (Lynn Jr. 1978, p. 21)."

Other commissioned papers within that report, including one written by James Q. Wilson, were less favorable towards the potential applicability of long term knowledge accumulation in the social sciences. Wilson (1978) highlights the rejection of certain social scientific research (in particular Moynihan's study of black families) and the acceptance of the work of others (specifically Cloward and Ohlin's theory of delinquency). He argues that social scientific research often offers little more than "guesses, personal opinions, and political ideology under the guise of expert advice (Wilson 1978, p. 91)."

While scholars have analyzed the political processes that interfere with the dissemination of knowledge and its effect on policy (Condliffe Lagemann 1989), other research has argued that scientifically-based public policy is a myth and theoretical illusion altogether (Formaini 1990). Another view is that of Weiss (1977; 1986) who

argues that with rare exceptions, social scientific research does not have a direct or immediate effect on policy and instead, to the dismay of researchers, it is often ignored. However this is not to say that it has no effect. Instead the process is indirect and diffuse, and over time social scientific research has the ability to shift debates. Weiss refers to this process as "knowledge creep," arguing that a particular research finding must be repeated often and represented through multiple channels before policymakers will take it into consideration. The individual research report or even a set of published research studies are unlikely to have an effect until the general message has been repeated verbally and in print by advocacy organizations, interest groups, journalists, and other policy related organizations. Rarely can policy makers cite a particular research report and its source. However, they are able to accumulate repeated messages over time and formulate them into a converging theme.

This process is described by Weiss (1977; 1986) as the "enlightenment function" of social scientific research. This "enlightenment model" stands in contrast to what is considered the "conventional wisdom model," where researchers work within the constraints of the policy world, following the goals, values, and directives of policymakers to maximize the utilization of their research. Instead the enlightenment model:

> implies that research need not necessarily be geared to the operating feasibilities of today, but that research provides the intellectual background of concepts, orientations, and empirical generalizations that inform policy. As new concepts and data emerge, their gradual cumulative effect can be to change the conventions policymakers abide by and to reorder the goals and priorities of the practical policy world (Weiss 1977, p. 544).

If most social scientific research conducted at universities is likely to follow an indirect, diffuse and cumulative process of policy influence, is the same true for think tank research? What differentiates think tank research from university research is that many think tanks are set up to advocate for their research, through public relations units and congressional liaisons. This type of promotion and advocacy is most common at ideological think tanks, but certainly exists at non-ideological think tanks as well. Advocacy does not guarantee that the ideas of think tanks are incorporated by policymakers, especially if such ideas run counter to the dominant policy paradigm of the day. However, it does more readily allow think tank research and perspectives to be considered over the long course, as they become readily available and conveniently packaged for policy makers.

Although social scientific knowledge follows the pattern of a more diffuse and indirect path to effecting policy, "research has greater impact when it becomes part of advocacy for a preferred position (Weiss 1991, p. 37)." So when think tank research is no longer presented in abstract terms with complex results, and instead is streamlined into a seemingly logical policy argument in support of a particular course of action, it is more likely to get the immediate support of policy makers. What changes the landscape of "knowledge creep" and the potential "enlightenment function" played by think tanks in the political system, is the move away from their academic roots and towards ideological, non-research based advocacy over the past thirty years. Certainly ideas and knowledge can still build over a slow and cumulative process to bear upon educational policy debates, however more and more of the "knowledge" coming out of think tanks is ideologically rather than scientifically driven.

Theoretical Approaches to Studying Think Tanks

Think tanks figure into broader debates between pluralists and elite theorists about government control and policy making. Pluralists see think tanks as one among many forces that influence policy makers. Polsby for example states that think tanks "thrive in Washington because American government is so permeable, flexible, and pluralistic (Dye 1987, p. 170)." Elite theorists, however see think tanks as representing a highly undemocratic form of elite influence. Dye (1987) writes that think tanks are

> the central coordinating points in the entire elite policy-making process. The activities of the proximate policy-makers – the White House, Congress, the bureaucracy – are only the final, public phase of policy-making, which focus on the means rather than the ends (Dye 1987, p. 170).

Domhoff (2002) also argues that elites finance think tanks, serve on their boards, set their agendas, and incorporate these institutions into a larger policy planning network. Using network analysis, he outlines the interconnectedness and increasing influence of ultra-conservative groups, including conservative think tanks, post 1973 (Domhoff 2002). Similarly, Pescheck (1987) examined the actions of think tanks such as the American Enterprise Institute, Brookings Institution, the Heritage Foundation, and Institute for Contemporary Studies during the 1970's and 1980's, within the context of the interests of business leaders and elite actors. He argues that during these decades, think tanks were subject to increasing pressures from a politicized business community and elite actors to shift their focus toward "the breakdown of the post-1945 liberal capitalist order, and the changes in basic priorities and policies necessary to stabilize the political economy (Pescheck 1987, p. 4)." He notes that even the Brookings Institution as early as the 1970's began moving away from their support of Keynesian economic policies, shifting

their approach to fit within existing political arrangements and assumptions (Pescheck 1987).

Expanding on Gramsci's work, Levitas (1986) uses the concept of hegemonic ideology to describe the shift from Keynesian to neo-liberal economic theory, facilitated by such think tanks as the Institute of Economic Affairs, the Center for Policy Studies and the Adam Smith Institute. She argues, that "the New Right has adopted an explicitly ideological strategy and has been successful in mobilizing at least sufficient support from a range of social groups to remain in power (Levitas 1986, p. 11)." As such, conservative think tanks become part of the "ideological apparatus that constrains the parameters of ideas, debate and discourse in civil society and the state (Stone 1996, p. 33)."

The influence of think tanks on the policy process can be direct, but it is often diffuse and difficult to measure. In an attempt to overcome this tension, Stone (1996) employs a neo-pluralist concept of "epistemic communities" in order to study think tanks, their influence, and role in the political system. An epistemic community,

> is made up of a network of specialists from a variety of positions who share a common world view and seek to translate their beliefs into public policies and programmes. Think tanks represent one type of organization in which members of a community may be located (Stone 1996, p. 3).

Stone (1996) differentiates her concept of epistemic communities from elite and neo-Marxist theories that focus on groups who seek social and economic power. She argues that elite and neo-Marxist theories leave little room for agency and independence for think tanks as institutions that provide ideas and expertise. Although Stone does concede that think tanks, as part of epistemic communities, can use their knowledge and expertise in the service of corporate interests, she argues that epistemic communities can

also be independent and autonomous and even in opposition to the inner circle (Stone 1996).

In terms of this research, elite theory is helpful for describing the well-planned initiatives of several sectors of the conservative movement to create think tanks as locations where research can be conducted from a free market business perspective. The drastic growth in conservative think tanks measured and documented by this research, along with historical documentation indicating that this process did not happen organically, but instead through a well-planned and strategic initiative by several sectors of the conservative movement, is supportive of elite theorists' claims.

Despite the fact that on a micro level, competition can occur between think tanks, this pluralistic ideal is muted in practice. In my analysis of think tanks, I did not observe the democratic ideal of pluralism, one where various ideas were represented across organizations. Instead, with one exception, I found a common paradigm and framework within which education policy discussions are taking place – standards, testing, accountability, and support for charter schools. When differences did occur between think tanks, they focused on only two areas - the amount of money to be put into education, and whether voucher plans should exist within the public system. I was actually surprised at how little variation there was across think tanks, with policy ideas having only marginal variation.

The paradigm shift away from equity and toward accountability mirrors in some ways the larger movement in social policy away from the welfare state and towards privatization and personal rather than public provision. Schools as institutions have become islands, standing alone in a vacuum, solely responsible for ameliorating social,

economic, and racial inequality in the larger society. This focus, along with a more conservative movement to privatize the education system completely, is a move away from the responsibility of the state.

While a neo-pluralistic perspective is certainly useful for analyzing micro-level debates, one cannot ignore that such debates are occurring within a narrow framework, influenced by funding and the interests of elite organizations. The concept of a marketplace of ideas is overshadowed by the undeniable reality that elites shape the parameters of debate both through funding and media influence. This does not mean that there is no agency in the political system for social movements to affect a shift these debates – the success of the conservative movement over the last thirty years being a case in point.

The shift in education policy in the United States, largely articulated through think tanks, has also brought about a hegemonic ideology regarding the function of public education in a liberal democratic society. As evidenced by the subsequent chapters of this dissertation, the emerging policy paradigm, reiterated to the public through the media is that - "tests are good" "choice is good" "markets are good" "unions are bad" and "institutional racism and classism are myths."

The analyses presented below will suggest that Stone's (1996) complete separation of the concept of "epistemic communities" from theories that attribute policy directives to elite policy planning networks, is overstated. Although epistemic communities are complex and can be independent and permeable, they also can coalesce to serve the needs of elites who seek social control and economic power.

The Growth of Think Tanks and their Education Policy Work

There is no exact definition for "think tank." Academics who study think tanks differ in their definition and operationalization of the term. However most researchers define think tanks as independent, non-government, non-university based institutions that conduct policy research. As part of their 501(c)(3), non-profit, tax exempt status, think tanks are supposed to be non-partisan, and are prohibited from endorsing candidates or legislation.

Think tanks in the United States are guided by their mission statements and focused on either national, regional, or state issues. Varying widely in size and scope, think tanks can be run by a staff of two to five people on a small budget, or house dozens of researchers with a budget in the tens of millions of dollars. Single-issue think tanks dedicate all of their efforts to the study of one topic, be it foreign policy, welfare, or the environment. To date, there are ten think tanks in the United States that focus solely or almost exclusively on education policy: American Institutes for Research (AIR), Education Policy Institute, Educational Research Service, Education Sector, Fordham Foundation, Institute for Higher Education Policy, Institute for Research and Reform in Education, National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, National Center on Education and the Economy, and the Vermont Society for the Study of Education. The majority of think tanks however focus on multiple issues, having several divisions dedicated to specific research areas.

Think tanks differ in size, scope, and ideological orientation. McGann and Weaver (2002) outline four different "ideal types" of think tanks for categorizing these policy organizations: *academic, contract, advocacy,* and *political party* think tanks.

Often referred to as "universities without students" *academic think tanks* are largely staffed by individuals holding doctorate degrees, and have their agenda set by researchers and the foundations from which they receive funding. Examples of academic think tanks include the Brookings Institution and the National Bureau of Economic Research. *Contract research think tanks* are also staffed largely by Ph.D.s and their agenda is set by the agency that contracts their work, in many instances federal and state government. The nature of their work often involves the evaluation of existing policies and programs. Examples of contract think tanks include the RAND Corporation and the Urban Institute. Both academic and contract think tanks have a "muted ideology" and as such tend not to have a mission affiliated with a particular political perspective (McGann and Weaver 2002).

Advocacy think tanks on the other hand have staff with philosophical, political or ideological agendas. Research positions are less likely to be filled by academics with Ph.D.s, and the agenda of the think tank is set by its directors. Examples of conservative think tanks include the Heritage Foundation, American Enterprise Institute, and Manhattan Institute, which generally advocate for limited government, free markets, private enterprise, and individual responsibility. Examples of liberal or progressive think tanks include the Economic Policy Institute, Center for American Progress and Political Research Associates, which generally advocate for economic and social justice, racial equity, reproductive rights, and increased environmental protections. Lastly, *political party think tanks*, which act as the research arm of a particular political party, are mostly found in Western Europe and not in the United States (McGann and Weaver 2002).

Think Tank Work

What specifically constitutes "research" varies widely from one think tank to the next. Academic think tanks generally conduct research "in house," collecting their own data or analyzing publicly available databases to produce books and lengthy reports, as well as more abbreviated publications. Other think tanks may commission outside research, collaborating with consultants to produce a report or study authored by the think tank. Lastly, some think tanks do very little original research and instead summarize and repackage research that has been conducted elsewhere.

The dissemination of research and policy recommendations to the public also differs by think tank. Lengthy research reports and books are more typical of the publications produced by academic and contract think tanks, while advocacy think tanks put more emphasis on producing policy briefs, summary reports, thought pieces, and newsletters. This more condensed style of policy research is typical of think tanks that are interested in marketing their publications to policy makers and the press on a frequent basis. In addition to developing relationships with print, radio, and television media, think tanks hold conferences, give briefings to legislative committee staff, and in some cases testify as policy experts at legislative hearings.

Think tanks focused on national and federal education policy issues are for the most part based in Washington, DC. However there are some exceptions like the Manhattan Institute in New York and the Reason Foundation in Los Angeles. Most think tanks based outside of Washington, DC tend to focus on local policy, or how federal policy will affect state based institutions such as schools. I was told by several people

that in Washington, DC, the location of a think tank is often strategic. For example Richard Kalenberg of the Century Foundation noted the following in an interview.

> There is a certain symbolism to where the think tank decides to locate. If you are in DuPont Circle, that is Brookings and AEI, it is considered a little more intellectual. Then if you are on the Hill, which is where Heritage and the Progressive Policy Institute are located, and the Center for National Policy, that is symbolic of trying to be part of the day to day goings on the Hill. Whereas other groups are trying to look a little further down the road and exert their influence by creating big, new ideas that may take 20-30 years to catch on (Richard Kahlenberg, The Century Foundation).

Staffing Think Tanks

Think tank researchers are commonly referred to as fellows, scholars, experts, or analysts. Think tanks have resident scholars who are located and work full-time at the think tank, as well as non-resident scholars, who work on specific projects for the think tank and usually are simultaneously located at another policy-related organization, think tank, or university. In many instances, fellows are affiliated with more than one think tank, sometimes up to three or four at a time. This most often occurs when a think tank scholar is recognizable to the national education media. People like Diane Ravitch, Chester Finn, and Paul T. Hill, can actually add to a think tank's profile, even if they are only distant affiliates of the organization. Many think tanks have a resident staff of only three or four individuals, but an extensive list of fifteen or more researchers affiliated with the think tank who act as consultants.

Think tank scholars and experts come primarily from two areas, academia and politics, some with experience in both fields. Those who come from the world of politics have in some instances served as policy s to presidents, while others have held lesser

roles as legislative assistants, or congressional and senate committee staffers. Many think tank employees have worked at education advocacy organizations and other small state-based think tanks. It is not uncommon for individuals to move around from one education policy related organization to another within the span of five years. Only a couple of think tank experts have held posts in the Department of Education over the course of their careers.

Within the education policy divisions of think tanks, the educational backgrounds of think tank experts vary tremendously. Only a few have backgrounds in education, with even fewer ever having had experience working within a school as a teacher or school administrator. A significant number have backgrounds in economics, while other commonly found fields include public policy, government, political science, law, history, and journalism. By definition, ideological think tanks have far fewer policy researchers with Ph.D.'s than do academic think tanks. The fact that ideological think tanks are more concerned with advocating a particular policy stand, rather than engaging in systematic, long term, complex research projects, allows for this.

The Tax Status and Political Limits of Think Tanks

The 501(c)(3) tax exempt status covers charitable, religious, and in the case of think tanks, organizations engaged in educating the public.[2] According to the IRS, an organization does not qualify as a 501(c)(3),

> if a substantial part of its activities is attempting to influence legislation (commonly known as lobbying). A 501(c)(3) organization may engage in some lobbying, but too much lobbying activity risks loss of tax exempt status (Internal Revenue Service 2006) .

[2] Some think tanks also have separate 501(c)(4) divisions that can engage in limited lobbying efforts.

What constitutes a "substantial" part of a think tank's activities as an attempt to influence legislation is up for interpretation by both think tanks and the enforcement arm of the IRS. This vague definition allows think tanks to walk a fine line. Consider the following two statements from the IRS, which in some ways provide contradictory interpretations for think tanks:

1. An organization will be regarded as attempting to influence legislation if it contacts, or urges the public to contact, members or employees of a legislative body for the purpose of proposing, supporting, or opposing legislation, or if the organization advocates the adoption or rejection of legislation (Internal Revenue Service 2006).
2. Organizations may, however, involve themselves in issues of public policy without the activity being considered as lobbying. For example, organizations may conduct educational meetings, prepare and distribute educational materials, or otherwise consider public policy issues in an educational manner without jeopardizing their tax-exempt status (Internal Revenue Service 2006).

As "educational organizations" it is the role of think tanks to make their research findings and policy proposals available to the public and policy makers. Think tank staff members often brief legislative staff and testify at congressional hearings. Their reports and policy briefs, sometimes on a weekly or even daily basis, are sent over to specific members of Congress and their committee staff members. Additionally, weekly and daily e-mails go out to various policy related organizations, and individual members of the public who are signed up on think tank listserves. The question then is, what is the difference between "educating" legislators and "proposing, supporting, or opposing"

specific pieces of legislation? Consider the answers I received when asking two staff members of the Heritage Foundation about their relationship to policy makers.

> We advocate for policy, not for specific legislation. We advocate for how policy should be shaped in the general sense, not line by line how legislation should be written (Dan Lips, Education Analyst, Heritage Foundation).
> We want to directly influence the debate. We are interested in some of the minutia of this provision or that provision and how we think that would effect the overall policy aim. We sit down with staffers and legislative council that are actually drafting the legislation. They will ask, "what do you think about this or that and the other?" We will say, "this would have a good outcome," or "this would have a bad outcome." Never do we say "this bill should be voted on" or "that bill shouldn't be voted on" (Kirk Johnson, Senior Policy Analyst, Center for Data Analysis, Heritage Foundation).

Presumably "educating" the public, no matter if the think tank is politically ideological or not, involves putting forth some sort of proposal or supported list of recommendations, based on the research conducted by the think tank. Rarely do think tanks provide legislators with numbers alone, without any analysis or recommendations. Similarly, think tanks that historically have received government contracts, like RAND and the Urban Institute, are given the task of not only educating policy makers, but providing a recommended course of action. Despite the blurred IRS guidelines that think tanks have to follow, most avoid endorsing, at least publicly, candidates or legislation; nor do they contact members of the public to solicit their votes. For example, a staff member of the Center on Law and Social Policy notes,

> We usually call what we do "educating"; we don't call it "lobbying." We don't have a grassroots that we notify and call and tell them to call legislators. There are other organizations who do that in the child care and early education world, we don't. We provide policy briefs and fact sheets that are then used by other groups that then do that (Staff Member, Center on Law and Social Policy).

Blurred Lines: Differentiating Think Tanks from Advocacy Organizations and other Non-Profits

There are many centers, institutes, and foundations in existence that focus on education policy and are registered with the IRS as non-profit, tax exempt organizations. However not all of these organizations are think tanks. During the course of my research I was referred to certain organizations such as the Center for Education Policy, the Alliance for Excellent Education, Freedom Works, and the Education Trust, only to find out when I arrived to conduct interviews, that they were not think tanks. All located in Washington, DC staff members of these organizations informed me that their organizations were not think tanks, but either advocacy groups, grassroots organizations, or simply non-profits. However some of these organizations certainly do "think tank like" work. In some instances these organizations do more work that can be referred to as "research" than organizations that actually call themselves think tanks. For example the Center on Education Policy in Washington, DC identifies itself as an "independent advocate for public education," however they do not explicitly identify as a think tank, or as a research organization, yet they commission consultants to gather a considerable amount of both qualitative and quantitative data and produce comprehensive reports. Conversely, other organizations that identify as think tanks, such as the Heartland Institute in Chicago do not produce original research, but instead create publications such

as *School Reform News*, and link visitors from its website to outside research in support of vouchers and charter schools. When I asked such organizations about what they do, I received some of the following answers.

> We are sometimes called by other people a think tank. We never call ourselves that. For me the difference is that most classic think tanks don't actually endorse legislation and don't follow through to press it into action. We think of ourselves as a new breed of advocacy organization, rather than a new breed of think tank (Kati Haycock, Director of the Education Trust).

Similarly, I arrived at the Alliance for Excellent Education only to find out that, despite doing considerable secondary data analysis of others' research, they don't consider their organization to be a think tank, but simply a non-profit organization.

> I believe that the strength of our organization is to take research, or to take policy, to develop and to show what our research backed solutions to the problems we try to address in the high schools, then to work to educate the public, as in accordance with the IRS requirements of the 501(c)(3) (Governor Bob Wise, President of the Alliance for Excellent Education).

Also, when I arrived at Freedom Works, an organization invested in the school choice movement and chaired by former House Majority Leader, Dick Army, I was informed that it wasn't a think tank.

> We consider ourselves a grassroots organization not a think tank. We are an advocacy organization. We are the merger of Citizens for a Sound Economy and Empower America. Citizens for a Sound Economy was first started as the grass roots wing of the Cato Institute (Max Pappas, Director of Policy at Freedom Works).

The line between think tank, advocacy organization, and grassroots organization is certainly blurred. While interviewing several people involved in the education policy field, as well as staff members who sit on the House Education and Welfare Committee I

was often asked to define what I meant by "think tank." Beyond well established think tanks such as the Brookings Institute, Urban Institute, and RAND, I was surprised to find that even in Washington, DC many people in the policy world do not draw any distinctions between "think tank," "advocacy organization," and "policy organization." This is quite telling, and likely the result of the changing nature of think tanks over the last twenty-five years. Many think tanks have taken on different characteristics from their research institute predecessors, and have instead become more ideologically driven and oriented toward marketing themselves and their reports to media outlets. As such, the distinction between think tank and advocacy organization has become less salient.

Methodology: Defining Think Tanks for Purposes of this Study

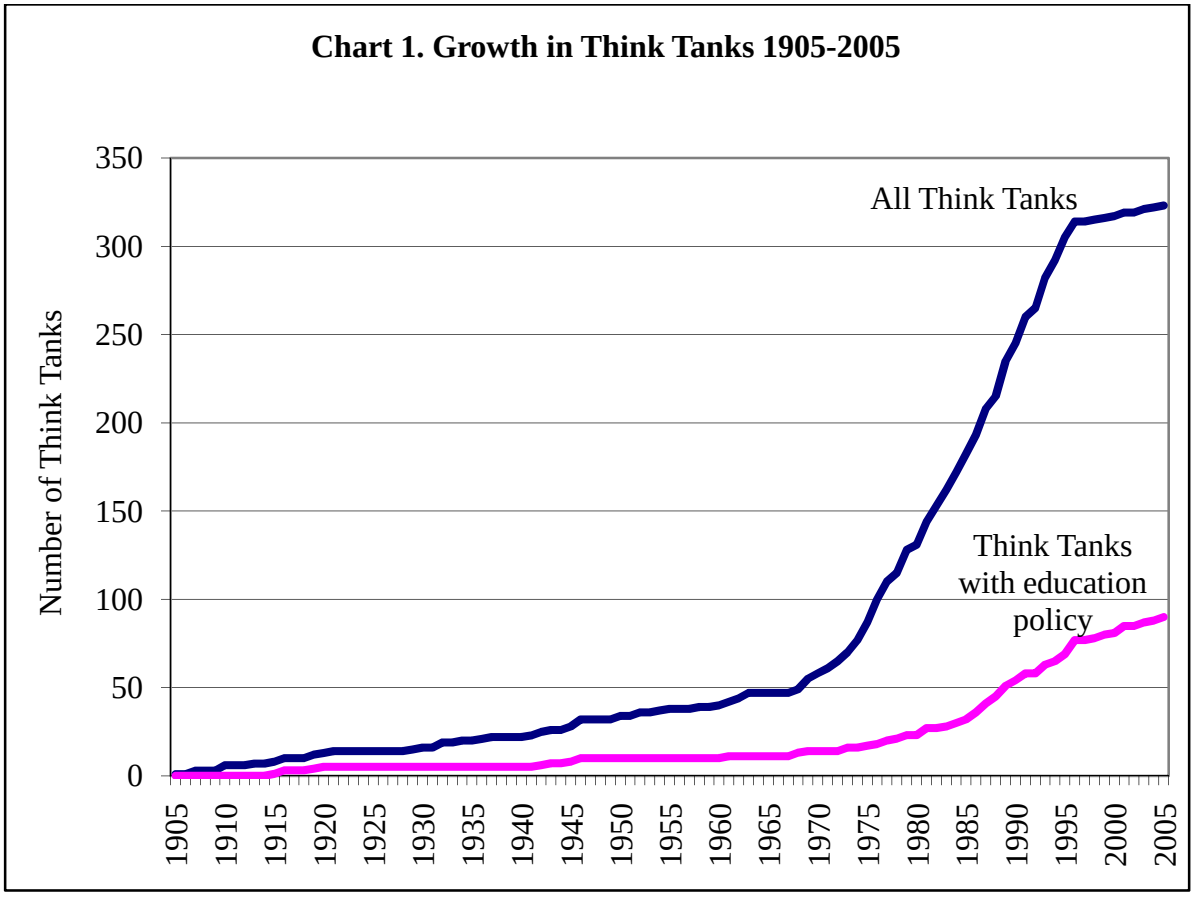
I used several sources to compile a list of think tanks focused on education policy issues. This list was based on a think tank database provided to me by Andrew Rich, author of *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise*. Rich's 2004 list was compiled largely from one of the few printed think tank directories, Helleburst's (1996) book, *Think Tank Directory: A Guide to Nonprofit Public Policy Research Organizations*. Additionally, my think tank list was supplemented with searches on the *State Policy Network* (www.spn.org), a professional organization for free-market think tanks, the *Atlas Economic Research Directory* (www.atlasusa.org), an organization that acts as a resource to market oriented think tanks, and *The Electronic Policy Network* (www.movingideas.org), a policy and information center for progressives and non-profits. The remainder of the list was compiled and updated from extensive internet searches and information given to me from interview participants.

The following definition was used to create the list of think tanks included in this study:

1. 501(c)(3) non-profit, non-partisan independent (non-university based) organizations for which education is at least one of its policy issues.
2. Organizations that either self-define as "think tanks" or explicitly self-define in their *Mission*, *Who We Are*, or *What We Do* sections as organizations that engage in some sort of "research." This further classification was necessitated by the number of advocacy, non-profit, and grassroots 501(c)(3) organizations in existence that appear so similar to think tanks, but do not self-define as "think tanks," nor do they represent themselves as research organizations.

Think Tank Numbers

Chart 1. Growth in Think Tanks 1905-2005



Over the last thirty-five years there has been a dramatic growth in the number of think tanks in the United States, going from approximately fifty think tanks in 1970 to

well over three-hundred by 2005. For purposes of this study I wanted to determine how many of the three-hundred and twenty-three think tanks today have an education policy division, or dedicate time to researching education issues. Using the methodology described above, I found a total of ninety think tanks that have education as one of their policy issues. As noted earlier, only ten of these ninety think tanks focus almost exclusively on education. The more common situation is for a think tank to have education as just one focus along side such policy areas as taxes, healthcare, and foreign policy.

Of these ninety education-included think tanks, fourteen were founded prior to 1970, while an additional nine were founded during the 1970's. The largest period of growth in think tanks that have education policy divisions was during the 1980's and 1990's when an additional fifty-seven think tanks were founded.

Think Tank Education Scholars and Their Accounts of Growth

Given the dramatic increase in the number of think tanks concerned with education policy issues, I asked think tank scholars and other education policy-related practitioners what they thought accounted for this growth. Several people I spoke to identified the 1983 *Nation At Risk Report* as pivotal in sparking more education research at think tanks.

> I'm fairly new to this, but some of this at least you can attribute to the publication of *A Nation At Risk*. For a lot of the nation that was a wake up call, it was sort of a Sputnik moment. (Former Governor Bob Wise, President of the Alliance for Excellent Education).

As Bruce Fuller, a researcher at PACE, an education policy center affiliated with the University of California Berkeley notes, a growing industry of education experts and consultants, including think tanks sprung up once the issue of education was federalized.

> *A Nation At Risk* legitimated the idea that we could debate education issues at the federal level, it wasn't only a state issue. Then you had Heritage, AEI [American Enterprise Institute], EPI [Economic Policy Institute], you had these national think tanks that could suddenly attract foundation support to talk about national education issues. So it is the classic case that if you legitimate a more centralized discussion, and the sector now becomes more centralized, then you've got all these secondary industries that can now attract funding. Well if you rationalize education to the federal level, then the organizational structure follows that, and that has benefited the think tanks on the Left and the Right (Bruce Fuller, PACE: Policy Analysis for California Education).

A Nation At Risk, which brought attention to international comparisons between American students and those in other nations:

> I think that since the late 1980's and early 1990's there has been an increase in reform initiatives that coincided with the view that maybe American education isn't as great as it should be or can be. It is also related to the fact that so many other countries' education systems were coming up, particularly Korea, Taiwan, China, and India. On the one hand people were worried about the state of U.S. education. They were finding the disparities. There were all of these new reform proposals coming up. In some sense there was an interconnection between worries about education and proposals for new reforms. This has led to a lot of the current debates. I think that what also happened is that to support these reforms people published data that was specifically selected to support what fit a particular point of view (Joydeep Roy, Economist – Economic Policy Institute).

Cynthia Brown from the Center for American Progress, who has worked in various capacities in public education for almost 40 years, including being the first Assistant

Secretary for Civil Rights when the Department of Education was formed, noted that think tanks are growing in power as the influence of other educational bodies are declining.

> I do think that think tanks are going to become more powerful in education as education groups become less powerful. By that I mean the unions, the Council of Chief State School Officers, the National Association of School Boards, and the American Association of School Administrators (Cynthia Brown, Center for American Progress).

The increasingly partisan nature of policy debates was also identified as a reason for the emergence of think tanks in many policy areas, including education. Sara Mead, a Senior Policy Analyst at Education Sector, who formerly worked at the Progressive Policy Institute, noted the following.

> One reason is that all of the policy issues are becoming more polarized and partisan, politically. I think education issues historically were not seen as partisan, now they are seen as more partisan and more politically volatile. There is more interest in the policy play on them (Sara Mead, Education Sector).

Marc Tucker, the President of the National Center on Education and the Economy and a former education to Bill Clinton made a similar observation.

Well education has become a very political issue. It didn't used to be. If you go back 20 or more years, you will find that the general attitude of governors around the United States was that they would entertain ideas for education legislation in their states, provided that the education constituencies were agreed on that legislation. Through the 1950's, 1960's, and 1970's with some notable exceptions, there was pretty wide agreement . . . . This country used to trust the education professionals to tell them what to do when it came to elementary and secondary education. They don't trust them anymore.

The whole issue of education has become highly politicized and people are being looked to for solutions who don't look like educators, which wouldn't have happened 30 years ago (Marc Tucker, National Center on Education and the Economy).

Similarly, Kati Haycock, the Director of the Education Trust, an influential advocacy organization that played a large role in the NCLB legislation, noted increasing partisanship following the release of *A Nation At Risk*.

> The 1980's was the first time we started having a national consciousness about education in the U.S. compared to education elsewhere. We started having national goals, so it would make sense that you would have more think tanks. It is also true that as it has become politically more interesting, it has become a place where there are partisan wars that we don't need to have. So you have people create think tanks essentially for partisan advantage rather than to improve the enterprise of education (Kati Haycock, Director, The Education Trust).

The increase in the number of think tanks serves two purposes, one research based, another more political. As Kim Anderson, a Lobbyist for the National Education Association notes.

> I think there are a couple of explanations. One is from the pure policy standpoint. The desire for legislators to have concrete evidence that a particular policy proposal is a sound one and will achieve the desired results. That is the good news and the more purest view of why they [think tanks] exist. I think that truly some of them do exist for that purpose. Then there is the political reason for a seeming cottage industry of think tanks. And that is – you find the proposition you believe in and you create the research that supports that proposition. Unfortunately I think the numbers of those types of think tanks have dramatically increased (Kim Anderson Lobbyist, National Education Association).

Many people from conservative, centrist, and liberal think tanks suggested that the growth of think tanks can be attributed to a larger conservative movement that has

taken place in America over the last thirty years. Kirk Johnson, Senior Policy Analyst at the Heritage Foundation notes that the creation of such conservative think tanks has been an alternative to the university.

> We do see ourselves as a relative and reasonable alternative to university researchers who historically have been called by policy makers to do research consulting. You may have heard this before, but think tanks to a large degree are simply universities without students. To the extent that the university started to loose its relevancy in terms of conservative ideas, it did give rise to a lot of the broad based think tanks like Heritage and Cato, and then some of the special interest, smaller education niche think tanks. For example The Center for Education Reform comes to mind. The president, Jeanne Allen used to work here at the Heritage Foundation (Kirk Johnson, Heritage Foundation).

Neal McCluskey, the Education Policy Analyst of the libertarian Cato Institute argued that the creation of places like the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute was a reaction against the growth of government.

> The two I really know much about are Heritage and Cato. Those two institutions started in the 1970's as a reaction to the malaise the country was in and as a backlash against big government. . . . Most of the think tanks probably didn't start doing a lot of school choice stuff in earnest until the early 1990's, largely because of the publication of a book called, *Politics, Markets, and American Schools*. It was by Chubb and Moe when they were at Brookings (Neal McCluskey, Education Policy Analyst, Cato Institute).

Rick Hess, the Director of Education Policy Studies at the conservative American Enterprise Institute also thought that the growth in think tanks was a reaction on the part of conservatives to what they saw as a lack of power in policy debates.

> I think a lot of the growth is that the conservatives were out of power for four decades, or at least felt out of power even during the Reagan years in some ways. In the last five years some of the Democrats won, it is starting to push back. As we have nationalized education policy over the

> last fifteen years, there has just been a natural incentive for folks who work in this game to deal themselves into the game (Rick Hess, Resident Scholar and Director of Education Policy Studies, American Enterprise Institute).

A professor and researcher, located at a university based education policy center, also suggested that the growth in think tanks has largely been part of a conservative movement that began in the 1970's.

> First of all, the general trajectory of the growth of think tanks has been a long term trend since the mid 1970's. To a certain extent it has been one of the principle conservative projects. It has been a 30 year project for conservatives. I think the other ones [think tanks] have grown in response (Researcher, University Based Education Policy Center).

Pam Chamberline, a researcher at Political Research Associates, a liberal/progressive think tank that has studied conservative think tanks, discussed their growth.

> Since we primarily study the Right, the purpose of the growth of think tanks was to run an end run around academia, and try to decrease the impact of academic research on public policy, because a lot of that research was Left leaning. So you create these so-called independent entities that generate their own material, and they are seamlessly plugged into networks that apply that material in public policy settings. They have a whole training network for young people coming up, you can be 22, 23, 24, 25 and you get access to Congressmen (Pam Chamberline, Political Research Associates).

Similarly, Carol Weiss, a long time professor and program evaluator at the Harvard School of Education, who has conduced research on think tanks, emphasized the conservative movement as well.

> There were certainly wealthy conservatives who, in the middle 1980's, decided to sponsor public policy institutes of various kinds and to get their case before the public and particularly before legislators and bureaucrats. I think it was part of the same conservative movement that the Republicans have generally fostered (Carol Weiss, Harvard School of Education).

Bruce Fuller, a researcher at PACE, a university based education policy center affiliated with UC Berkeley commented on the conservative shift in education, and the need for more independent research.

> I've just been back in California for about 10 years now, but in the 1980's there was a concern in the foundation community that nobody was really doing independent analysis on state level issues. We had seen the growth of soft money firms doing contract work for government, but there wasn't much independent research being done. The Hewlett Foundation out here and a couple of smaller foundations got together and said lets try to create this independence within a university based milieu. That goes back to the early 1980's. The 1990's, it may be kind of a reaction to the Reagan era in a couple of ways. The Reagan conservatives demonstrated that education was a ripe platform for the Right wing to talk about all sorts of culture issues, language issues, culture war kinds of issues, school choice and market remedies, vouchers and charters. It may be that Reagan inadvertently opened up the whole new front for conservatives (Bruce Fuller, PACE).

Lastly, Sara Mead, who worked for the Progressive Policy Institute, the think tank of the DCL (Democratic Leadership Committee), and is now a Senior Policy Analyst at Education Sector, a newly created centrist think tank, highlighted the Democrats' reaction to the success of the conservative think tank movement.

> There are some really good articles about how the conservative movement took a strategy on building these institutions that create ideas from the "conservative ideas matter" approach. . . . I think that there is increasing recognition by the Democrats that we need to build more of an intellectual framework, that we need to build institutions like Heritage that can do messaging, that can take an idea like Social Security privatization and spend 30 years publishing about it. I think that when you walk around Democratic political circles you hear a lot of talk about, well we need a Heritage, we need organizations that can do these things (Sara Mead, Senior Policy Analyst, Education Sector).

Defining the Ideology of Think Tanks

The year 1970 is often marked as a turning point in the think tank landscape. The increasing growth in the number of think tanks that began during that decade was accompanied by a shift towards what Stone (1996) refers to as the "new guard," of think tanks that are more directly focused on affecting policy and more partisan in nature. Although growth has occurred among all types of think tanks, the most dramatic increase has been among conservative think tanks, particularly conservative state-based think tanks. Scholars have attributed this growth to the expansion of business in politics, the rise of neo-conservatism, a new paradigm of neoclassical economics, and the political mobilization of fundamentalist Christians (Rich 2004). Think tank growth in the United States has also been aided by the strong tradition of philanthropic support for social, economic, and political policy research (Weiss 1991).

As noted earlier, as 501(c)(3) organizations, think tanks cannot endorse candidates or legislation and therefore are able to self-identify as "non-partisan." Despite their non-partisan categorization, think tanks have been generally categorized by social scientists as either conservative, centrist, or liberal leaning based on their mission statement and advocacy for a particular set of policy ideas. In his 2004 classification of 306 independent, non-university based think tanks, Rich (2004) found that 45% of think tanks had a centrist or non-identifiable ideology, while 55% were ideological. Of the ideological think tanks 65% were conservative and 35% were liberal.

Many think tanks do not affiliate themselves with any particular political, philosophical, or ideological position. But conservative or libertarian think tanks are not shy about their ideological perspectives, and generally identify themselves in their

mission statements as supportive of limited government, private enterprise, liberty, free markets, and individual responsibility. They also use the word "conservative" to describe their organization and its mission.

In contrast, ideologically liberal or progressive think tanks rarely if ever, identify themselves in such a way. "Progressive" may be used from time to time in a think tank's mission statement, however, I have yet to see the word "liberal" embraced by any think tank. This is likely a reflection of the fact that the word "liberal" has become a pejorative term in modern day politics.

Any methodology used to classify think tanks ideologically is difficult for three reasons. First, the individuals who work within a think tank are not a monolithic group, but instead guided by their own philosophical, ideological, political, and disciplinary backgrounds. Depending upon the think tank, researchers may have quite varied backgrounds and either a small or large amount of freedom in shaping the think tank's research agenda within the organization's mission.

Second, in large think tanks, the research agenda can vary widely from one division to the next. For example a large think tank can publish studies in their healthcare division that call for a nationalized tax payer subsidized system, a position generally supported by the political Left. At the same time this think tank's education division might produce a report that supports the benefits of having market mechanisms introduced into the public school system, a position generally supported by the political Right.

Third, the social, political, and economic tide of the country at a particular historical point in time can influence the general framework of a think tank and its

researchers. For example, during the 1960's the country was concerned with the Vietnam War, issues of race, poverty, and civil unrest. As noted in Chapter 1, government and foundation grants during this period tended to focus on addressing racial and income inequality through a series of government grants and programs. Similarly the general framework for education policy at the federal level during this period was one of equity, access, and monetary inputs. However the 1980's and 1990's saw a conservative shift in politics and policy making, which affected the general context within which think tanks operate. The result for education policy was a concern among think tanks of various political leanings in the measurement of standards, accountability, and outputs.

Given the variation in individuals, divisions, and the political climate in which think tanks find themselves, I decided to define think tanks ideologically by their current mission. I used Rich's (2004) classification system. His methodology was based on key words and phrases in think tank mission statements and/or annual reports.

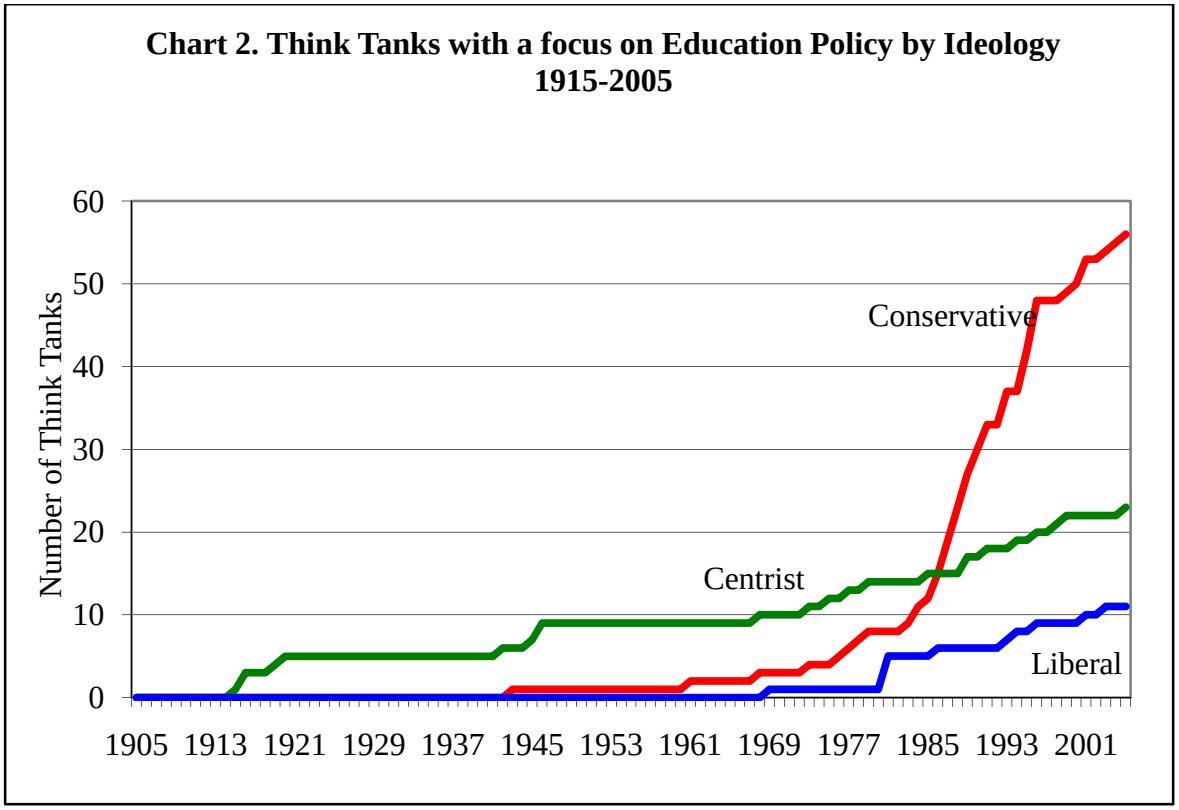
Table 1. Identifying the Ideology of Think Tanks

Conservative Think Tanks	Promoting the free market system, limited government, individual liberties, religious expression, and traditional family values, or to eliminate racial or ethnic preferences in government policy. If its mission was defined as counter to the opposing ideology.
Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	Those organizations whose published statements either did not readily place them in either broad ideological category or qualified them in both categories.
Liberal Think Tanks	Using government policies and programs to overcome economic, social or gender inequalities, poverty, or wage stagnation, progressive social justice, sustainable environment, lower defense spending. If its mission was defined as counter to the opposing ideology.

Rich, Andrew. 2004. *Think Tanks, Public Policy, and the Politics of Expertise*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 19.

Using this methodology, of the ninety think tanks with a focus on education policy, fifty-six (62%) were found to have a conservative ideology. Twelve of these fifty-six conservative think tanks also self-describe as "libertarian," however they still meet the criteria to be classified as conservative think tanks. Twenty-three (26%) of these 90 think tanks were classified as centrist or having no identifiable ideology, while eleven (12%) could be described as liberal or progressive. Thus conservative think tanks who do work on education outnumber their liberal counterparts by five-to-one.

Chart 2. Think Tanks with a focus on Education Policy by Ideology 1915-2005



Issues regarding ideology and its effect on research

What role does a think tank's ideological or philosophical background have on the type of work that it produces? Researchers' philosophical underpinnings often shape their research interests and research questions, however a more crucial issue is whether or not researchers already know the answers to the questions they are asking prior to conducting

the research. An additional issue is whether think tank scholars are willing to publish research findings, when those findings do not conform to the political orientation of the think tank.

Not surprisingly ideological think tanks tend to produce less work that can be classified as research in the traditional sense of the term, meaning that procedures of scientific method are followed and research can be readily replicated by other researchers. Increasingly, ideological think tanks produce policy briefs and summary arguments based on research conducted elsewhere that supports their philosophical and ideological claims, while ignoring research that contradicts them. It certainly is not impossible for think tanks that are ideologically oriented to conduct methodologically sound research, as long as the orientation of the think tank shapes only the research question but not the result.

For example, a conservative think tank may ask the question, under what conditions do markets work best to raise student test scores? Clearly the question is asked with an interest in the positive benefits of markets on schools. The critical issue concerns whether or not a conservative think tank researcher would be willing to publish results that indicated that markets seem to work in improving test scores under conditions A and B, but do not work to improve test scores under conditions C and D. If the think tank advocates for market mechanisms and school voucher plans, would it feel comfortable with publishing such results? Additionally, academically phrased results, which are usually complex, don't always lend themselves easily to "catch phrases" and generalizable policy solutions. This aspect of academic research can run counter to the daily operations of an ideological think tank, whose mission is to affect ideas, persuade

public opinion, and influence policy makers; not with mixed results, but a definitive course of action.

The issue of whether or not a think tank is willing to report research results, no matter what they may be, certainly does not only apply to conservative think tanks, but to centrist and liberal ones as well. A liberal think tank that advocates for universal pre-school might not be willing to publish research results that were only partially supportive of their agenda. Just as is the case of the conservative think tank, such results do not necessarily eliminate the benefits of a particular policy agenda, however it may complicate the think tank's mission to directly influence policy with a simplistic, one-sided research finding.

Another issue to consider is whether or not conservative, centrist, or liberal think tanks are more or less likely to produce methodologically sound research. The conventional wisdom is that because ideological think tanks on the Right and Left tend to be more advocacy oriented, their work is less likely to meet the methodological criteria of academic research. Although this does tend to be the general pattern, in my judgment some ideological think tanks clearly do conduct academically oriented research projects. For example the Economic Policy Institute, a liberal think tank staffed by economists, conducts highly quantitative studies using national databases. These seem to follow rigorous methodological canons of scholarly research. Additionally, it would be false to assume that all centrist think tanks are completely unbiased, non-ideological entities, free from social, political and economic influences. Despite these caveats, the tendency is for ideological think tanks, particularly but not exclusively conservative ones, to produce research with predictable results. Ideologically driven results are often marketed in

simple and absolutist terms, while the tendency for academic think tanks is to have less predictable, less definitive, and more complex results.

Chapter 4

Funding of Think Tanks

This chapter discusses how think tanks are funded through philanthropic foundation grants, endowments, and corporate and individual donations, and how funding flows into conservative think tanks. However given that a large proportion of conservative think tank revenue comes from corporate and individual donors rather than from foundations, it is difficult to track how much of this funding goes into education-specific projects. This is in contrast to both centrist and liberal think tanks, which depend on foundations for the majority of their revenue. Additionally when conservative think tanks do receive funding from foundations, it is much more likely to be earmarked for "general operating expenses," whereas the funding that goes to centrist and liberal think tanks is more likely to be specified for a specific policy area. Again this limits our ability to measure monies that flow into education policy at conservative think tanks. Despite these limitations, this chapter does explore education specific grants given to conservative, centrist, and liberal think tanks by philanthropic foundations. It also analyzes the types of projects that are funded through foundation grants, and whether or not such projects are advocacy based.

During most of the 20th century the large academic think were supported heavily by philanthropic foundation grants. This trend changed in the late 1960's when members of Congress became concerned over the use of non-profit philanthropic funds to support political causes. In 1969 Congress passed the Tax Reform Act, which restricted the amount of monies private foundations could donate to political activities. Under the new tax code, foundations could no longer directly fund the lobbying activities of non-profits,

however they could continue to fund programs that generally addressed public policy issues (Krehely, House and Kernan 2004). The Ford Foundation, which was one of the largest contributors to think tanks, began to decrease its support following the passage of the 1969 Tax Reform Act. One think tank that suffered was the Brookings Institution. In 1978 the Ford Foundation cut $500,000 or approximately 25% of Brookings' annual budget at the time. Since the 1980's, the Brookings Institution has had to increase its dependence on both individual and corporate donations (Rich, 2004).

O'Connor (2007) argues that the rise of conservative philanthropy has not only changed the landscape for foundation support for public policy, but has challenged the very premise of applied social scientific research. She argues that early foundation support during the 1930's drew from scholars such as Robert Lynd, who in his book *Knowledge for What?* argued for a relevant social knowledge. O'Connor notes the following about Lynd,

> He also issued a warning about the dangers of a social science trapped within the confines of narrow empiricism and overly abstracted theory, and sheltered behind the veil of neutral scholarly detachment. Such a science, he argued, was both all too willing to accept prevailing definitions of social problems and incapable of questioning prevailing social norms (O'Connor 2007, p. 4).

Concerned over Congressional sanctions and protecting their tax exempt status mainline foundations that formerly supported progressive causes and social change retreated during the 1970's and 1980's from direct and overt involvement in shaping policy in Washington. Simultaneously conservative foundations began to invest more heavily in conservative think tanks and advocacy organizations. Rather than donating funding to specific projects, where the proportion of political activity could be more

easily regulated, conservative foundations instead gave general operating support to conservative think tanks with the sole purpose of impacting policy. At the very time that liberal and progressive non-profits including think tanks, advocacy, and grassroots organizations had to mute their politics in order to receive foundation funding, conservative think tanks were rewarded by conservative foundations for providing ideological views (Callahan 1999; Covington 1997; Krehely, House and Kernan 2004; Rich 2005). The ease with which conservative think tanks could draw on funding is illustrated by what Rick Hess, Education Director at the American Enterprise Institute, told me in an interview.

> AEI has got folks on the 12th Floor, there are about 3-4 folks who do the fundraising. We don't take state or federal money. We are funded by benevolent supporters. For some of the project specific stuff, like philanthropy, what I will typically do is send a couple of paragraphs to the folks on 12. They will put together a formal proposal, and they will see if there is somebody in the foundation community who wants to fund it. We've never really had much trouble. AEI's master budget underwrites me and my assistants and I just write. On the other hand you have places like RAND and the Urban Institute which are really RFP (Request for Proposals) kind of shops (Rick Hess, Education Policy Director, American Enterprise Institute).

Analyzing the Money of Think Tanks Doing Education Policy Work

The funding for think tanks comes primarily from philanthropic foundations and donations from corporations and individuals, while a far smaller number of think tanks accept government grants. Several think tanks also rely on endowment funds, ongoing revenue provided through foundation investment earnings. Far less money is generated from the sale of books and other materials.

Multi-issue think tanks vary widely in the amount of funding they dedicate to education policy versus other areas such as foreign policy and health care. Due to IRS requirements placed upon foundations, it is much easier to track the flow of foundation money into think tanks than it is to trace corporate and individual donations. It is also difficult to determine the budgets of the education policy divisions of think tanks because revenue is often reported in the aggregate.

Table 2. Total Revenue of Best Funded Think Tanks with Education Policy Divisions[3]

	Tax Year	Total Revenue IRS Form 990, line 12
Conservative		
Heritage Foundation	2005	$52,292,374
American Enterprise Institute	2005	$33,671,688
Manhattan Institute for Policy Research	2005	$13,296,150
Hudson Institute	2005	$9,309,590
Cato Institute	2006	$6,364,917
Reason Foundation	2004	$5,194,247
National Center for Policy Analysis	2006	$5,171,840
Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy	2005	$4,918,277
Heartland Institute	2005	$4,520,884
Acton Institute	2005	$3,842,553
Total		$138,582,520
Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology		
RAND	2004	$228,956,492
American Institutes for Research	2005	$219,550,703
Urban Institute	2004	$85,216,456
Brookings Institute	2004	$48,285,303
Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation	2005	$35,271,252
National Bureau of Economic Research	2004	$31,866,235
Public Policy Institute of California	2005	$18,458,177
The Century Foundation	2005	$17,260,653
New America Foundation	2006	$9,916,957
Child Trends, Inc.	2005	$7,007,207
Total		$701,789,435
Liberal/Progressive		
Center for American Progress	2005	$23,349,470
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities	2005	$15,354,844

[3] This table represents the Total Revenue of each think tank and does not indicate the amount of money spent on education policy work.

Center for Law and Social Policy	2006	$6,734,547
Economic Policy Institute	2005	$5,512,202
Institute for Higher Education Policy	2005	$3,959,520
Applied Research Center	2005	$1,642,441
Center for National Policy	2005	$1,193,462
Political Research Associates	2006	$957,887
Institute for Wisconsin's Future	2005	$731,382
Institute for America's Future	2005	$425,972
Total		$59,861,727

Source: Table 2 prepared by author with figures from line 12 of each think tanks' IRS Form 990

Table 2 reports the total revenue of the best funded think tanks with education policy divisions, separated by ideology. Although Table 2 offers the reader an understanding of the overall budget and size of the think tanks examined in this study, it does not represent the amount of funding specifically spent on education policy work. It is very important to note that only a fraction of the total revenue of each think tank in Table 2 is spent on education. For example, some think tanks with the highest total revenue may spend less than 1% of it on education, dedicating far more to other policy areas. At the same time some think tanks with far less total revenue may spend up to 80% of their total budgets on education.

Determining How Much Think Tank Revenue is Spent on Education

While the total revenue of the top 10 conservative think tanks with education policy divisions is more than double that of the total revenue of the top 10 liberal/progressive think tanks, it would be an error to conclude from this that conservative think tanks are spending twice as much money on education policy as liberal/progressive think tanks. Since think tanks are only required to report income in the aggregate to the IRS, few think tanks break out in their annual reports exactly how much money is spent on different policy areas. Therefore it is difficult for researchers to

calculate how much money ideologically conservative, centrist or liberal think tanks are specifically dedicating to education.

One indicator however of how much money is being spent on education is the number of researchers in a think tank's education division and the number of ongoing projects, original reports and books produced. The centrist Brookings Institution and the RAND Corporation are examples of think tanks with large education divisions, each with entire centers dedicated to education research. This is likely indicative of a noticeable percentage of their total revenue being spent on education policy.

At the same time conservative think tanks like the Heritage Foundation and Cato Institute, that lead the pack in total revenue, have far smaller education policy divisions than Brookings and RAND. Education policy at these conservative think tanks is done by a select few, who are focused primarily on policy positions and generating media attention, rather than conducting research. Even liberal/progressive think tanks like the Institute for Higher Education Policy and Economic Policy Institute, whose total revenue pales in comparison to that of Heritage and Cato, conduct considerably more education research. It can be assumed that these liberal/progressive think tanks are likely to spend as much and possibly more on education policy than some conservative think tanks that have only one or two education experts and no original research.

Traceable Funding Sources: Education Specific Philanthropic Foundation Grants

Although funding for education research and policy analysis at think tanks can come from general operating funds as well as corporate and individual donations, there are no available means for uncovering such information through public databases.

However philanthropic *foundation grants* made to think tanks for education research can be tracked using public databases.

The Foundation Center's Grant Search Program provides information on foundation grants made to think tanks for education specific work. The Foundation Center only holds five years worth of data at a given time. Therefore records were only available dating back to 2002.[4]

[4] Foundation Center (fdncenter.org). The search criteria was as follows: "Search Grants", Recipient Name: [Name of Think Tank], Subjects: Education, Year Authorized: 2002-2006.

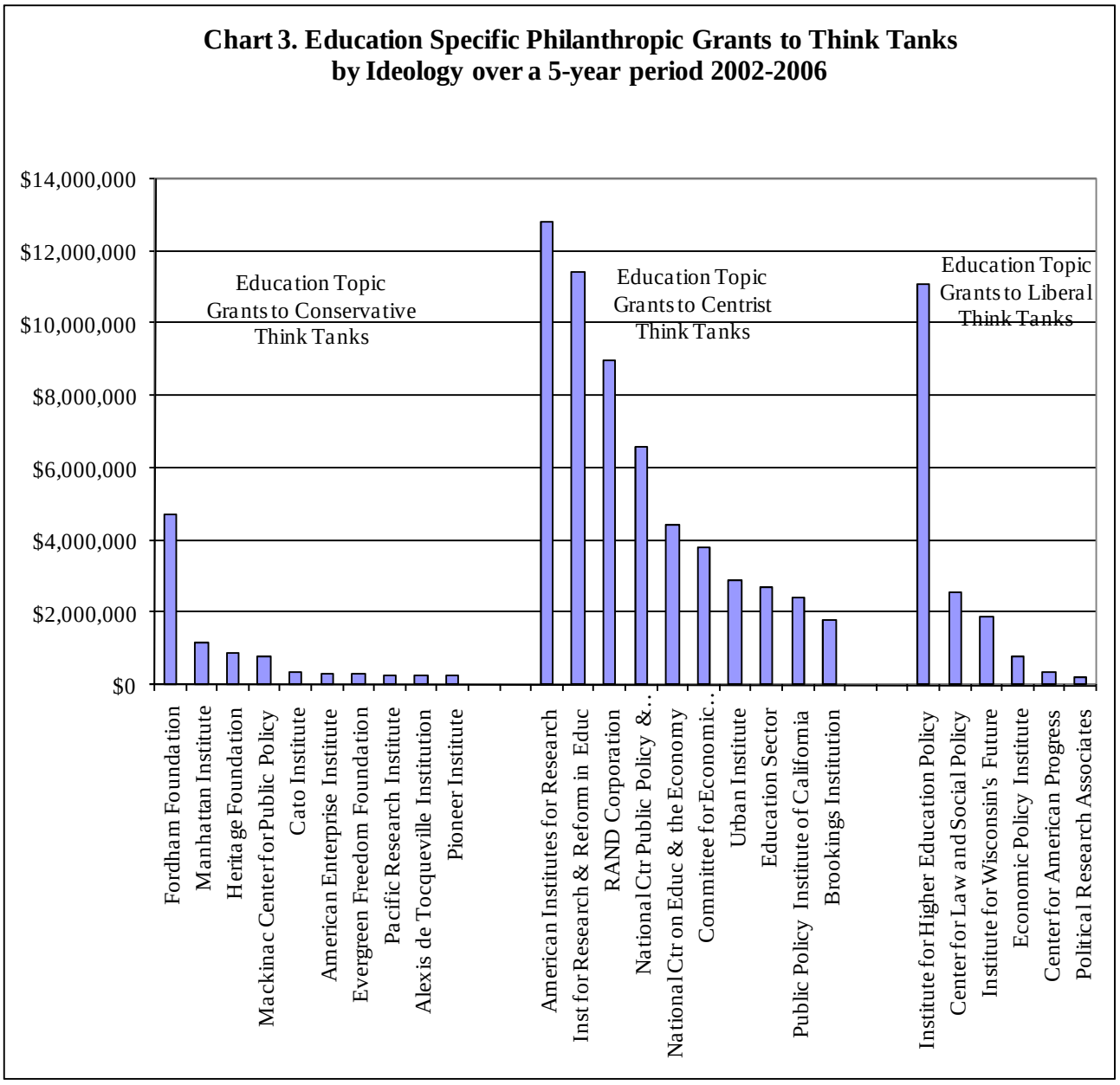


Chart 3 reports education grants that were made to think tanks over a five year period from 2002-2006. I included foundation grants for all ninety think tanks in the United States with a focus on education research and policy. Of the fifty-six conservative think tanks, only twenty-two (39%) received education specific foundation grants in the five year period from 2002-2006. Of the twenty-three centrist think tanks, twenty (87%)

received education specific foundation grants, while six of the eleven (55%) of liberal/progressive think tanks received education specific foundation grants. Although centrist think tanks as a group receive the most education grant money earmarked for education, one liberal think tank in particular stands out, the Institute for Higher Education Policy. Between 2002-2006 this think received over $11 million for education projects. The mission of this think tank is to promote access to higher education, particularly for low-income, minority, and first generation students. The one conservative think tank that stands out is the Fordham Foundation, which received over $4 million for education projects between 2002-2006.

As Chart 4 indicates, in the aggregate centrist think tanks receive far more education specific grants than either conservative or liberal think tanks. This is consistent with the funding pattern found by Rich (2005) for foundation giving in all policy areas. Even if you were to exclude the three large contract research think tanks (RAND, American Institutes for Research, and the Urban Institute), centrist think tanks still receive considerably more foundation funding for education projects than both conservative and liberal think tanks.

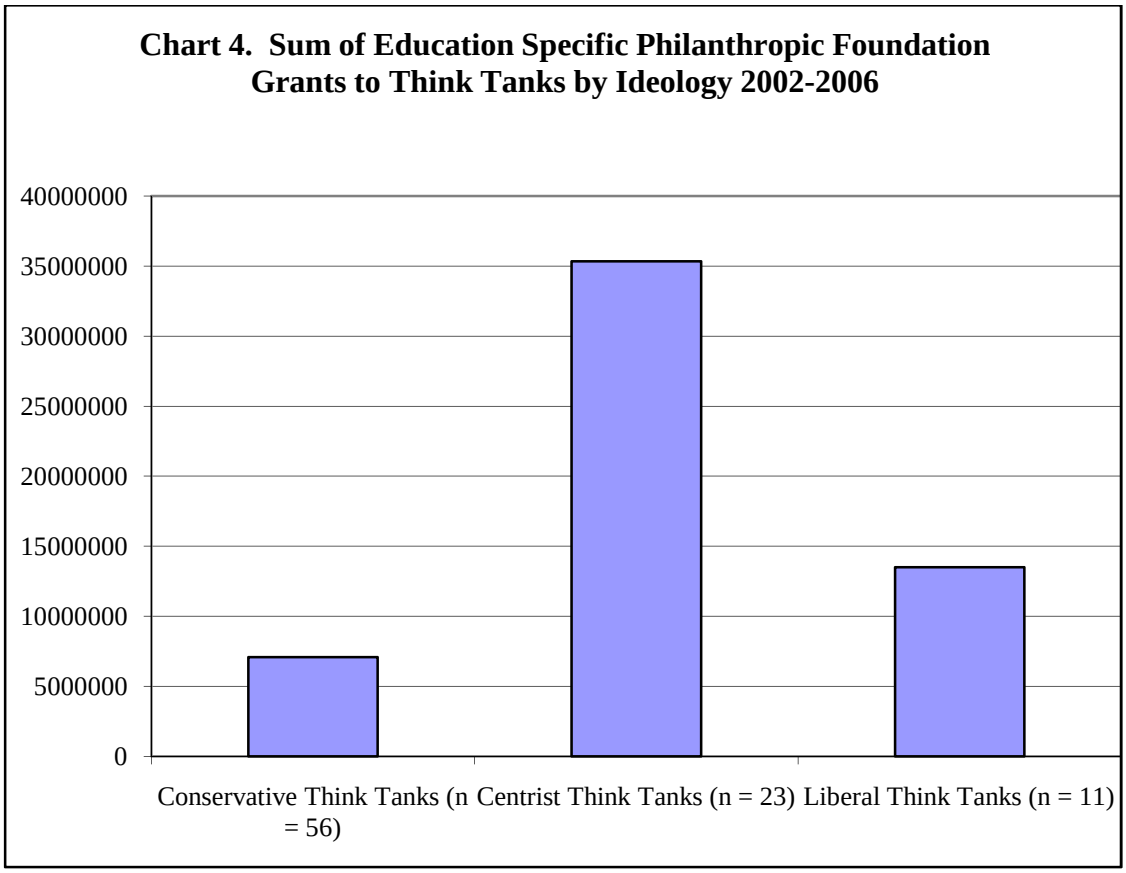


Table 3 lists the top six foundations giving education grants to think tanks. The largest philanthropic foundation in the world, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is also the largest contributor to think tank education specific work. Between 2002-2006 the Gates Foundation gave over $24 million dollars to three conservative and eight centrist think tanks for education research and policy work. It did not fund any liberal/progressive think tank education policy work. The next largest giver to education think tank work was the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, which gave over $9 million dollars to one conservative, eight centrist, and two liberal think tanks. Coming in third was the W. K. Kellogg Foundation which gave over $6 million to three centrist and two liberal think tanks.

Table 3. Top 6 Foundations Giving Education Grants to Think Tanks 2002-2006

		# of grants	Amount Given 2002-2006
1. Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation			
Institute for Research & Reform in Education	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	5	$11,383,916
American Institutes for Research	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	2	$7,479,602
Fordham Foundation	Conservative	4	$2,696,812
National Center on Education & the Economy	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	1	$800,000
Education Sector	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	1	$600,000
Committee for Economic Development	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	1	$500,117
RAND Corporation	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	3	$439,900
Manhattan Institute	Conservative	4	$328,575
Progressive Policy Institute	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	1	$300,000
New America Foundation	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	1	$250,000
Texas Public Policy Foundation	Conservative	1	$170,000
			$24,948,922
2. The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation			
American Institutes for Research	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	7	$2,867,500
Public Policy Institute of California	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	4	$2,045,000
Education Sector	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	1	$1,350,000
RAND Corporation	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	6	$992,000
National Center on Education and the Economy	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	2	$800,000
New America Foundation	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	2	$687,000
Committee For Economic Development	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	2	$250,000
National Center for Public Policy & Higher Education	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	2	$233,000
Economic Policy Institute	Liberal/Progressive	1	$225,000
Fordham Foundation	Conservative	1	$100,000
Center for American Progress	Liberal/Progressive	1	$100,000
			$9,649,500
3. W. K. Kellogg Foundation			
Institute for Higher Education Policy	Liberal/Progressive	1	$5,996,225
Committee for Economic Development	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	1	$527,482
Urban Institute	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	1	$155,051
Economic Policy Institute	Liberal/Progressive	1	$99,944
Citizens Research Council of Michigan	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	1	$95,354
			$6,874,056
4. The Pew Charitable Trust			
National Center for Public Policy & Higher Education	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	1	$3,700,000
Committee for Economic Development	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	3	$1,785,000
			$5,485,000
5. Lumina Foundation for Education, Inc.			
Institute for Higher Education Policy	Liberal/Progressive	6	$3,541,402
Urban Institute	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	2	$657,000
Brookings Institution	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	4	$432,700

National Center on Education and the Economy	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	1	$400,000
Century Foundation	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	1	$300,000
American Institutes for Research	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	1	$90,400
Education Policy Institute	Conservative	1	$12,500
			$5,434,002
6. The Ford Foundation			
National Center for Public Policy & Higher Education	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	2	$2,250,000
Institute for Higher Education Policy	Liberal/Progressive	2	$1,350,000
RAND Corporation	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	4	$1,273,300
North Carolina Center for Public Policy	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	1	$320,000
Political Research Associates	Liberal/Progressive	1	$175,000
Urban Institute	Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	1	$35,000
			$5,403,300

Table 4 shows the top foundations giving to think tank education policy work by ideology. Again, the Gates Foundation was the top giver to both conservative and centrist think tanks, while the W. K. Kellogg Foundation gave the most money to liberal think tanks for education research and policy work.

Table 4. Top 5 Foundations giving education grants to think tanks by ideology

	Amount Given 2002-2006
Conservative	
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation	$3,195,387
The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, Inc.	$1,382,500
Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation	$843,250
Herrick Foundation	$700,000
Walton Family Foundation	$480,000
Centrist/No Identifiable Ideology	
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation	$21,753,535
The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation	$9,224,500
The Pew Charitable Trusts	$5,485,000
The Ford Foundation	$3,878,300
The David and Lucile Packard Foundation	$2,826,944
Liberal/Progressive	
W. K. Kellogg Foundation	$6,096,169
Lumina Foundation for Education, Inc.	$3,541,402
The Joyce Foundation	$2,287,464
The Ford Foundation	$1,525,000
The Rockefeller Foundation	$1,005,000

There were a few instances where foundations would give to both conservative and centrist think tanks, this occurred most prominently with the Gates Foundation, Broad Foundation, Carnegie Corporation, and Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. However there was an even greater overlap between foundations that gave to both centrist and liberal think tanks, including the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Joyce Foundation, and Ford Foundation. There was only one instance where a foundation gave education grants to conservative, centrist, and liberal think tanks. The Annie E. Casey Foundation gave to the conservative American Enterprise and Heartland Institute, the centrist Brookings and RAND Corporation, and the liberal Center for American Progress and Center for Law and Social Policy.

Table 5 shows that 27% of education specific foundation grants given to conservative think tanks were non-specific, meaning that how they are used is up to the education policy divisions of think tanks. This differs from centrist think tanks that only received 7% of this more flexible funding from foundations, while liberal think tanks received no flexible education funding. Conservative think tanks are also more likely than centrist or liberal think tanks to receive foundation grants earmarked for specific conferences and seminars as well as fellowships and publications. For example, in 2004 the American Enterprise Institute received $175,000 from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation for research and subsequent conference and publication of a book on entrepreneurship in education.

Table 5. Education Specific Foundation Grants to Think Tanks 2002-2006

	Conservative	Centrist	Liberal
General Funding for Education Policy Research (non-specified)	27%	7%	0%
Other: Conferences/Seminars, Fellowships/Scholarships/Publications	16%	4%	0%
Grants Earmarked for Specific Education Areas/Projects:			
Charter Schools/Vouchers/School Choice	11%	7%	0%
High School/Secondary Education/Graduation Rate	7%	3%	0%
Higher Education/Post-Secondary	4%	8%	16%
Minority/Low-Income/Disadvantaged Students/Achievement Gap	4%	3%	14%
Pre-School/Early Education	0%	12%	25%
Reading/Literacy	0%	3%	0%
Relationship btw. Education, Workforce, Global Economy	0%	3%	0%
School Funding/Finance/Cost-Benefit Analysis	0%	9%	30%
Standards/Tests/Accountability/Assessment	5%	3%	0%
Teacher's Unions	9%	4%	0%
Teachers/Certification/School Leadership/Governance	2%	2%	5%
Other Education Specific Grants/Projects	16%	26%	11%
	n = 105	n = 182	n = 44

Monies earmarked by foundations for scholarships and fellowships come in two forms. In several instances conservative think tanks have received monies from conservative foundations to distribute as scholarships. For example, between 2002-2006, the conservative Independent Institute received $175,000 from the Wayne & Gladys Valley Foundation for scholarships for moderate and low-income students to attend private schools. As a supporter of the school choice movement, the Independent Institute noted that the mission of the scholarship program "is to help families achieve freedom of choice in the education of their children (Center for Equal Opportunity 2007)."

Fellowships are more likely to be given by centrist think tanks. For example, between 2002-2004 the progressive leaning Helena Rubenstein Foundation gave $50,000 to the RAND Graduate School Fellows Fund. Additionally in 2006 the RAND Corporation received $25,000 from the conservative Lynde and Harry Bradley

Foundation for the Bradley Fellowship and Post Fellowship Program. Such funds allow graduate and post-graduate students to conduct research at RAND.

Another topic that is well supported by foundations is the study of charter schools, vouchers, and school choice. Eleven-percent of conservative think tank education grants are specified for this work, while only 7% of centrist think tanks, while no liberal think tanks receive funding specifically earmarked for this area. Some foundation grants earmarked for this area are more research oriented while others specifically advocate for charter school and/or school choice. For example, in 2005 the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation gave the conservative Fordham Foundation a three year grant for $497,639,

> to inform public debate and advance academic achievement in Ohio charter schools by convening charter school leaders, producing research, and disseminating information on charter school issues (Foundation Center database).

Similarly, in 2003, the centrist Progressive Policy Institute received a $300,000 grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation "to build public and political awareness and support for charter schools through targeted outreach, and publication and dissemination of report series (Foundation Center database)." Between 2002-2005 the Progressive Policy Institute also received $200,000 from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, "toward expansion and strengthening of charter school movement (Foundation Center database)." The Annie E. Casey Foundation supported further work that advocated for school choice when in 2002 it gave the RAND Corporation $50,000 for work on "Rehetoric Versus Reality," a book that presents evidence on the effectiveness of vouchers and charter schools on academic achievement.

Other foundation grants are more generally defined and don't seemingly advocate for a particular position. For example in 2006 the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation gave

$300,000 to the RAND Corporation for a national research study on charter schools and $100,000 from the Joyce Foundation for a national longitudinal evaluation of charter schools.

Another policy issue that stands out is foundation support for research conducted by both centrist and liberal think tanks on early childhood education. Similar to the pattern for charter school and voucher funded work, some grants clearly advocate for a specific position, while others do not. For example, in 2005 the Pew Charitable Trust gave the centrist Committee on Economic Development a grant for $655,000 "to build support for early education by developing a new business-endorsed policy statement on economic development benefits of investments in high-quality pre-kindergarten for all children (Foundation Center database)." Similarly in 2005, the RAND Corporation received a $100,000 grant from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation for "the economic benefits of investing in early childhood." Also in 2005, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation gave $99,944 to the liberal Economic Policy Institute, "to support a study to estimate internal rates of return and long-run budget, economic and crime effects of investment in early childhood development."

While there are few foundation grants that specifically address education policy issues focused on minority, low-income, and disadvantaged students, liberal think tanks do receive the majority of those grants. However the purpose of the grant is different based on the ideology of the think tank. For example in 2005, the conservative Center for Equal Opportunity received $125,000 from the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation "for the study of racial preferences in admissions at the University of Wisconsin." Despite its name, the Center for Equal Opportunity is against affirmative action policies. Its mission

"supports colorblind public policies and seeks to block the expansion of racial preferences and to prevent their use in employment, education, and voting (Center for Equal Opportunity 2007)." At the other end of the spectrum, in 2003, both the liberal Institute for Higher Education Policy and liberal Center for American Progress, each received a $750,000 grant from the Ford Foundation for a joint project titled, "Slipping through the Cracks: The Changing Dimension of Disadvantage in American Higher Education."

Where liberal/progressive think tanks differentiated themselves from others was in the number of grants that they received focused on school funding and cost-benefit analyses of school financing. While 30% of liberal think tank grants were focused in this area, only 12% of centrist think tanks received grants for this type of work, and conservative think tanks received no specific foundation funding for this area. The school funding grants included a $515,000 grant by the Joyce Foundation in 2002 to the liberal Institute for Wisconsin's Future for an analysis of Wisconsin's school funding formula and a statewide campaign on school finance issues. Also, the centrist New America Foundation in 2006 received a $250,000 grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation "for independent research and analysis of federal education funding."

The Hidden Factor: Corporate & Individual Donors and the Use of General Operating Funds

Philanthropic foundation grants are a significant source of funding for think tank education policy work; however they are not the only source of funding for think tanks. While most centrist and liberal think tanks are likely to depend on foundation grants, conservative think tanks generate a considerable amount of revenue from corporate and

individual donations. For example, the Heritage Foundation receives 67% of its funding from individual contributions, 6% from corporations, and only 27% from foundations (Heritage Foundation 2006). Similarly, the Cato Institute notes that they receive 75% of their funding from individuals with lesser amounts coming from foundations and corporations (Cato Institute 2006). The American Enterprise Institute receives somewhat less of its budget from individual donors at 37%, but receives 21% of its budget from corporate donations, and only 16% from foundations (American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research 2005).

This is contrasted with the Brookings Institution, a centrist think tank, which receives 61% of its revenue from gifts and grants and 33% from its endowment (Brookings Institution 2006). The liberal think tank, the Economic Policy Institute, depends heavily on foundations for its funding, with 71% of the EPI budget coming from foundation grants, 15% from labor union donations, and only 3% from corporate donations (Economic Policy Institute 2005).

How then do conservative think tanks without education specific grants fund education projects? The answer is that they use foundation grants dedicated to general operating costs, rather than education specific projects, as well as monies received from individual and corporate donors. Unfortunately there is no public data to track how this is done. Because so many conservative think tanks do not depend on philanthropic grants earmarked specifically for education, it is difficult to measure the flow of monies into this policy area or many others. This also allows conservative think tanks a flexibility when it comes to funding that most centrist and liberal think tanks don't have.

Several reports have been published by the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) on this topic: *Moving a Public Policy Agenda: The Strategic Philanthropy of Conservative Foundations* (1997); *$1 Billion for Ideas: Conservative Think Tanks in the 1990's* (1999); and *Axis of Ideology: Conservative Foundations and Public Policy* (2004). A progressive organization whose mission it is to work toward social and economic justice, NCRP has produced the majority of research in what is a generally understudied area.

As noted in Chapter 1, concern over the civil and political unrest of the 1960's, a push within economic theory away from Keynsianism and towards the neoliberal economic theory of Hyack and Friedman, and an already growing unrest among conservative supporters following the defeat of Barry Goldwater, all brought about a call to action from members of the conservative movement. People such as Supreme Court Justice Lewis Powell, neoconservative Irving Kristol, and libertarian William E. Simon, advocated for the establishment of well financed institutions where conservative ideals could be cultivated and inserted into public policy and media campaigns. Conservative foundations responded with a well planned and strategic effort to fund conservative ideas over the course of the 1970's, 1980's and 1990's. O'Connor (2007) notes that the goal of conservatives was to align philanthropy with free market capitalism.

> Convinced that the great fortunes of early twentieth-century industrial capitalism were irreversibly controlled by an anticapitalist liberal elite, the new philanthropic activists would organize to break or at least to counter the stranglehold in an alternative network of foundations (O'Connor 2007, p. 118)

Conservative foundations used a multi-prong approach, funding not only think tanks, but also religious, legal, and advocacy organizations, as well as academic institutions. Funding poured into institutions that already supported free markets, privatization, environmental deregulation, cuts to government programs serving low income groups, and reductions in corporate taxes (Covington 1997). Conservative foundations worked to shape elite consensus. As Callahan (1999) notes,

> Conservative think tanks have played an especially visible and critical role in the transformation of America's public policy agenda by advancing new intellectual frameworks to justify paradigmatic change by translating broad ideological concepts into detailed policy blueprints, and by legitimizing conservative ideas with expert voices and research products (Callahan 1999, p. 11).

The NCRP reports indicate that conservative think tanks during the 1980's and 1990's were consistently funded by twelve large foundations including the Sarah Scaife Foundation, Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, and the John M. Olin Foundation. Although the amount of money spent by conservative foundations does not reach the spending levels of mainstream foundations, the pattern of spending by conservative foundations differs greatly from that of mainline foundations. Krehely, et. al. (2004) found that conservative foundations provided general operating funds to think tanks, allowing for more flexible spending. They also provided long-term funding which allowed organizations to focus their efforts over several decades if necessary, without worrying about constantly renewing their budget. By pouring money into conservative think tanks and other free market organizations with few strings attached, conservative think tanks were funding a movement. The payoff and shift in ideas came in the long term (Krehely, House and Kernan 2004).

Building on the research conducted by NCRP as well as an analysis by Shuman (1998), Rich (2005) claims that unlike conservative foundations, mainline foundations do not view themselves as organizations engaged in a broad based "war of ideas." Instead these foundations fund projects based on individual issue areas. The structure of think tanks and advocacy organizations on the political Left tend to mirror this pattern, vying for funding based on a narrowly designated set of grants. Such "policy silos" leave little room for a cohesive and coordinated progressive mission. Rich (2005) argues that conservatives are winning the "war of ideas" because of the way in which the money is spent.

The trend for mainstream and liberal foundations to give mostly project-specific funding is in stark contrast to the general operating support offered to conservative think tanks. The benefit for a think tank in receiving foundation grants for general operating support or unrestricted use, is that the money can be shifted to immediate and current policy concerns. For example, if social security reform is being debated in the House and Senate, conservative think tanks with large general operating funds, can immediately pour that funding into research, media campaigns, conferences, and meetings with key policy makers. If the following week, there is an impending vote on healthcare reform, the general operating support can just as easily be shifted to that debate.

The story for centrist and liberal think tanks is quite different. Say for example the Economic Policy Institute receives a grant from the Ford Foundation to study the economic costs and benefits of early childhood education. Then during the following week a raise to the minimum wage is being debated on the Hill. No matter how much of an interest the Economic Policy Institute has in that debate, the money received from the

Ford Foundation for the education study can not be shifted and used to produce economic research for policy makers regarding the benefits of raising the minimum wage. The restrictions, review and evaluation process for most research-based grants given by mainline and liberal foundations restricts think tanks and other advocacy organizations, particularly those on the political Left from building a movement through a series of piecemeal and unconnected policy grants.

Mainline and liberal foundations are preoccupied with funding *scientifically* rigorous research, whereas "concern for neutral, unbiased research is not a preoccupation of the foundations on the right (Rich 2005, p. 23)." While liberal and progressive organizations must bend over backward to appear neutral and scientific in their grant proposals, what is first and foremost for conservative organizations and think tanks is an ideologically conservative mission and support for free markets.

This is not a point that goes unnoticed by those seeking grants and funding in the education policy world. In one interview with a university based education policy researcher, I was told the following,

> The so-called liberal foundations have a lot more money than the so-called conservative foundations. The problem is that the so-called liberal foundations are not liberal. The second problem is that they are totalitarian. It is like the worst nightmare critique that a Right-winger could throw at the Left, "behave like a so-called liberal foundation." They are heavily bureaucratized, they are rigid, they basically attempt to turn people into employees. Instead of looking for good ideas they look for good employees for their ideas. Whereas the Right is much more likely to say, this is a good person, this person will do good work, let's put this amount of money over at the Heritage Foundation or the Fordham Foundation for four years. (University Based Education Policy Researcher).

Beyond this, the proportion of funding that centrist and liberal think tanks devote to getting their message out via media and government relations is very small in comparison to the proportion spent by conservative think tanks. Rich (2005) notes that in 2004 the Brookings Institution spent 3% of its budget on communications, while in that same year the Heritage Foundation spent 20%. This pattern in funding and concentrated efforts by conservative think tanks to influence public opinion through marketing, media, and relationships with policy makers has continued. Only one liberal think tank, the Center for American Progress, founded in 2003 with substantial support from George Soros and other wealthy donors, has attempted to follow the strategy and "advocacy" pattern of many conservative thinks.

The focused, concentrated, and strategic efforts of conservative foundations and their support of a range of conservative institutions, including think tanks, certainly lends credence to the argument that public policy over the last thirty years has been largely influenced by a well planned, well funded, strategic effort on the part of conservative elites who have been able to successfully shift the parameters of public debate. While conservative foundations have strengthened the ideology of conservatives, Covington (1997) argues that,

> the pragmatic stance of the philanthropic mainstream has weakened the ability of progressive or community-based nonprofit organizations to articulate their interests and place alternative policies before national and state policymakers and the general public… It has also had serious implication for how well American democracy functions to aggregate and represent interests (Covington 1997, p. 39).

Furthermore O'Connor (2007) argues that the ascension of conservative think has been aided by the unwillingness of liberal and progressive foundations and think tanks to question the assumptions of conservative categories of analysis and modes of inquiry.

> the lengths to which historically liberal and nominally nonideological foundations and think tanks have gone to accommodate, and in the process to empower, conservative social knowledge in the postwelfare debate, as the inclusion of Charles Murray in a recent Brookings volume and a number of other efforts to ensure ideological balance in research and policy analysis suggest. These balancing acts are justified as efforts to be fair-minded in laying out and airing the key issues for debate. In reality, and especially in the case of welfare, they have done more to validate the conservative reform agenda and skew how the issues are formulated to the right (O'Connor 2007, p. 9).

This research similarly finds that the caution taken by progressive and centrist think tanks in conducting research is restricted to a right of center dialog on education. With few exceptions almost all policy work being done by think tanks on education, regardless of ideology, fits within a very restricted paradigm.

Conclusion

This chapter documents several trends in think tank funding patterns and education policy work. First, conservative think tanks receive the majority of their revenue from corporate and individual donors, while centrist and liberal/progressive think tanks receive the majority of their revenue from philanthropic foundation grants. When conservative think tanks do receive foundation grants they are more likely to be earmarked for "general operating expenses." In contrast, when centrist and liberal think tanks receive foundation grants they are almost always earmarked for research tied to a very specific policy area or project.

Conservative foundations primarily give to conservative think tanks, whereas mainline (centrist) and liberal foundations spread their giving to both centrist and liberal think tanks. Foundation giving to think tanks can be either research-based or advocacy based. Conservative think tanks are more likely to fund education grants for general, non-specified education policy projects. Additionally, from 2002-2006 conservative foundations are more likely to fund research and projects that promote charter schools, vouchers, and school choice. During this same time period, mainline and liberal foundations most consistently funded centrist and liberal think tank research projects focused on early childhood education and higher education.

While mainline and liberal foundations provide far more money to think tanks than do conservative foundations, they have an entirely different set of procedures for obtaining those monies. The mainline and liberal foundation grants are project based, and not designed to fund a cohesive political movement. Additionally the grant proposals are reviewed and revisited, while evaluations are conducted and certain reporting mechanisms are put in place for continued funding. Many of these foundation grants are only given to think tanks that design "scientifically sound" research proposals. For many conservative foundations, methodologically sound research proposals are a secondary concern. The mission of such foundations is to fund a conservative movement and its ideas, to create public intellectuals to debate ideas and insert them into media campaigns.

Chapter 5

Think Tanks and the Media

This chapter measures the ability of conservative, centrist, and liberal think tanks to exert themselves into education policy debates through the use of the media. I review the limited amount of literature on the topic of think tanks and the media; use the Lexis Nexus© database to count and track the number of times that conservative, centrist, and liberal think tanks appear in education topic newspaper articles and on television and radio broadcasts. Lastly, I use interview data to examine the importance that think tank scholars themselves give to the media as a means for influencing education policy debates.

Access to mass media allows think tanks to influence current public policy debates. The ability of think tanks to garner media time as policy experts has in part, been due to their non-partisan, non-profit, research institute status. Whereas advocacy and professional organizations, as well as unions are viewed as having vested self-interest in certain policy issues, think tanks have historically been regarded as independent.

As 501(c)(3) organizations, think tanks are prohibited from exerting direct political influence through lobbying, funding grassroots organizations, or endorsing candidates and legislation. As such, the media have become increasingly important as a legal route for think tanks to influence education policy debates.

Traditionally the mission of a think tank was to gather a group of experts in a given field to actually "think" about pressing social, economic, and political issues. In recent decades, the ability of think tanks to market their research findings, but more importantly their policy recommendations, has increased dramatically. Even the smallest

think tanks have become adept at marketing policy ideas through media outlets. The majority of think tanks have media relations departments that not only take press inquiries, but develop ongoing relationships with newspaper, television, and radio outlets. These media consultants are often able to call around to promote a particular study, get op-eds placed, or provide a list of experts, available for comment at a moment's notice. Additionally think tanks use their web pages and periodic e-mails to alert the public and policy makers to crucial policy debates.

The presence of conservative think tanks in the media has garnered more attention from journalists and media watchdog groups than it has from academic scholars. One such group, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), published a series of articles in their magazine *Extra!* covering the topic of think tanks and their media use. Since 1996, FAIR has been conducting an annual survey of the twenty-five most frequently cited think tanks and documenting their representation in media, based on ideology. Findings indicate that the total number of think tank citations increased each year since 1996, only dropping off slightly in 2005. Additionally FAIR has consistently found that conservative and centrist think tanks have dominated in the media, while progressive think tanks have received far fewer citations (Dolny 2005; Dolny 2006).

Despite the growing importance of think tanks in the political policy making process at the federal, state, and local level, to date fewer than five academic studies have been conducted that trace and track the media presence of think tanks (Grimes 1997; Haas 2004; Rich and Kent 2000; Yonghoi 2004). The most significant is Rich and Kent's (2000) study of the visibility of a sample of fifty-one think tanks in six national newspapers between 1991-1998. Their findings indicated that centrist think tanks (those

with no-identifiable ideology) and Washington based think tanks were cited most frequently. Additionally they found that conservative think tanks were cited far more frequently than liberal think tanks in the aggregate. However this difference disappeared when controlling for think tank budget and resources. In other words, greater resources among conservative think tanks accounted largely for their advantage over liberal think tanks in media presence (Rich and Kent 2000).

While the Rich and Kent study gives insight into the ideological presence of think tanks in six national newspapers, it does not capture the cumulative effect think tanks can have on the public consciousness and their general messaging beyond national newspapers. Their frequently repeated messages appear, not only in national newspapers, but in hundreds of local newspapers, and in television and radio broadcasts.

Haas (2004) provided a case study of one high profile conservative think tank, the Heritage Foundation, and its education related citations in 2001. He found that the news media uncritically presented the work of the conservative Heritage Foundation, citing Heritage in a positive light, using scientific language to describe their positions, despite the lack of scientific method used. Additionally Haas notes that the media often did not question the expertise of spokespersons for the think tank (Haas 2004).

Method Used to Track Think Tank Newspaper, Television and Radio Citations

I decided to track the number of times the names of conservative, centrist, and liberal think tanks appeared in education topic newspaper articles and on television and radio broadcasts.

Using the Lexis Nexis© database I conducted the following search for all ninety think tanks included in this study:

- U.S. Newspapers
- Separate Searches for: Midwest Regional, Northeast Regional, Southeast Regional, and Western Regional.
- Search Terms found in Full-Text of the Article.
- Years: 2001, 2006

Lexis Nexis Search Terms:

1st search term: [Name of Think Tank]

2nd search term: [Each of the 30 search terms below were run separately with the 1st search term]

Table 6. Search Terms

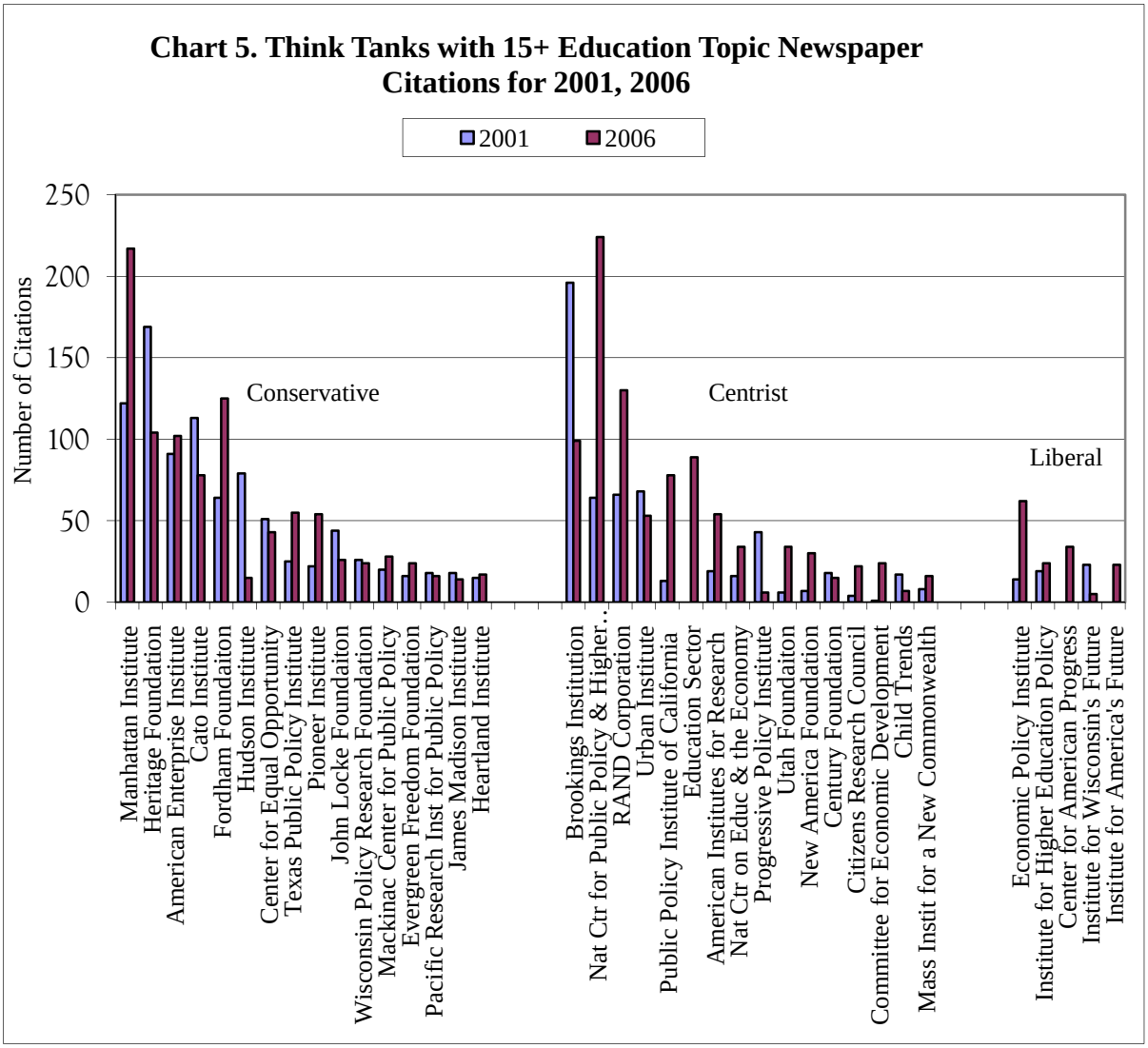
Academic Standards	Gender and Education	Race and Education
Accountability and Education	Graduation Rates	School Choice
American Federation of Teachers	High School and Education	School Desegregation
Bilingual Education	Higher Education	School Funding
Charter Schools	K-12	School of Education
College Education	National Education Association	School Prayer
Curriculum	No Child Left Behind	School Vouchers
Department of Education	Preschool	Special Education
Education Policy	Private School	Teachers Union
Education Reform	Public School	Test Scores

Paralleling this newspaper search, I also used the Lexis Nexis© database and the search terms listed in Table 1 to generate education topic television and radio citations.

- All Transcripts
- Search Terms found in Full-Text of the Article.
- Years: 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006

Getting at education related think tank documents is a uniquely difficult task. Because the search term "education" reveals tens of thousands of records that are completely unrelated to education policy, it was necessary to search the name of each

think tank with each of the thirty search terms listed in Table 5. Each citation was only counted once. Due to the thousands of newspaper articles generated through this process, and the extensive amount of work to clean the files, for newspapers I chose to look at two significant years: 2001, the year President George W. Bush entered office and the year the *No Child Left Behind* legislation was proposed and 2006, the most recent and current full-year of data available on the Nexis Lexis© database. Since far fewer television and radio education topic citations are generated for think tanks, I was able to examine and include data for every year during the six-year period 2001-2006. I counted each television and radio citation once for each day that it aired.

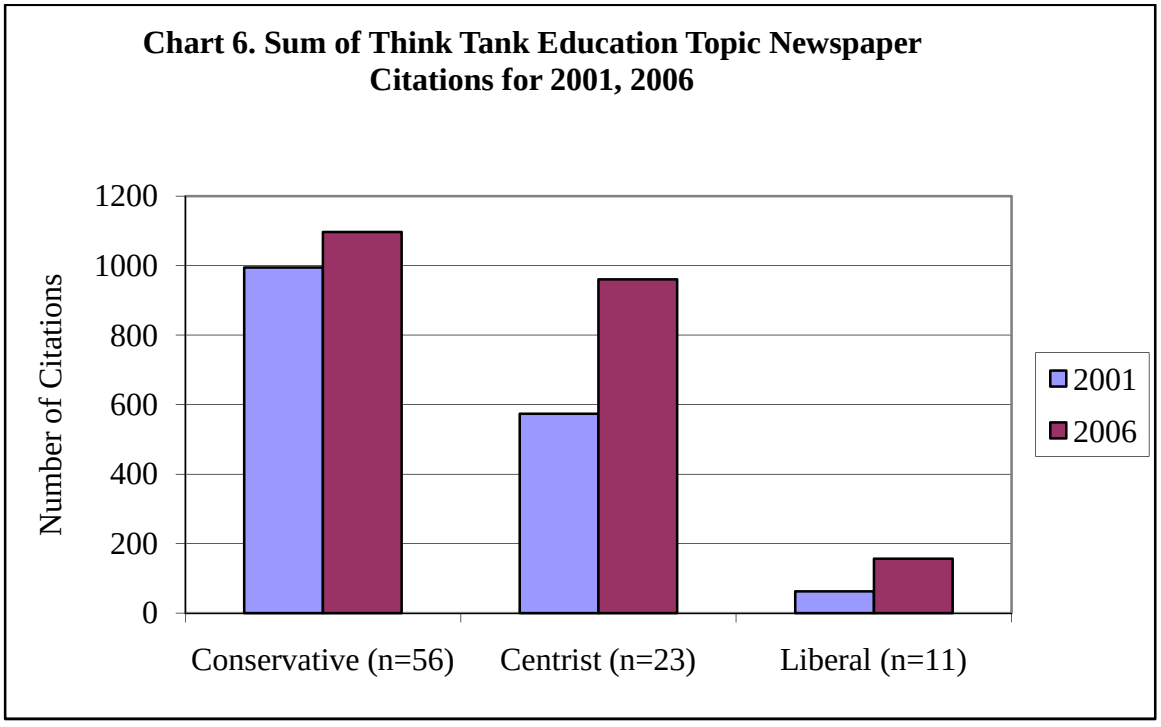


This analysis indicated that both conservative and centrist think tanks have a significant presence in education topic newspaper articles, while liberal think tank hardly have any newspaper presence. As indicated in Chart 5, the top conservative think tanks such as the Manhattan Institute, Heritage Foundation, American Enterprise Institute, Cato Institute, and Fordham Foundation average one-hundred or more citations in a given year. The top centrist think tanks like the Brookings Institution, National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, and RAND Corporation have comparable, but somewhat

fewer citations than the top conservative think tanks. Particular standouts in 2001 were the Heritage Foundation with 169 citations and the Brookings Institution with 196 citations. In 2006, newspaper citations increased, with the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education leading with 224 citations, followed by the Manhattan Institute with 217 education topic newspaper citations.

The leading liberal think tanks in education policy had far fewer citations, but did see substantial increases in the number of citations from 2001 to 2006. For example the Economic Policy Institute went from just 14 education-topic citations in 2001 to 62 citations in 2006. Although it is a liberal think tank, the Economic Policy Institute fits the traditional academic research model, and is largely staffed by economists with doctorate degrees. The Center for American Progress, founded in 2003 by John Podesta, the former chief of staff to President Bill Clinton, additionally made a mark as a liberal think tank in 2006, with 34 education topic citations.

Chart 6. Sum of Think Tank Education Topic Newspaper Citations for 2001, 2006



As shown in Chart 6, when think tank education topic newspaper citations are added, conservative think tanks outweighing both centrist and liberal think tanks. At first glance it may seem that this is simply due to the fact that there are more conservative think tanks (n=56) than centrist (n=23), or liberal (n=11) doing education policy work. However, the majority of conservative think tank education-topic newspaper citations are generated by just fifteen think tanks, with the remaining think tanks producing on average just 2-5 citations per year. Taken in the aggregate, the far greater number of conservative think tank citations indicates that the conservative movement has made very effective use of think tanks as vehicles to express their ideas.

One important issue is that conservative think tanks are given similar consideration by newspapers as sources of information as centrist or non-ideological think tanks even though conservative think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation and Cato Institute, have produced little to no material that could be considered "research" by traditional academic standards over the past six years. In contrast, centrist think tanks with frequent newspaper citations such as the Brookings Institution and RAND Corporation do consistently produce original academically oriented research, books, and analyses of education data. Thus the conservative think tanks can seize media attention even without doing new research.

Examples of Think Tank Education Story News Coverage

Journalists use think tanks as sources for education topic stories in two primary ways. Once is when a think tank comes out with a study, book, or report on an important education issue. Journalists often write about the findings of the think tank's research and may go to another think tank, advocacy organization, or educational organization for

a different perspective on the issue. The second way that journalists use think tanks is to call on a particular think tank expert for an opinion or insight into an education issue or policy. Oftentimes the think tank expert's statement is included in a quote within the body of the article. Think tank experts also write and are cited in Op-Eds and sometimes appear as guest columnists writing editorials for newspapers.

The Manhattan Institute is one of the leading conservative think tanks in education media citations. Accounting for much of the Manhattan Institute's lead in 2001 was a study conducted by Jay Greene on high school graduation rates. Greene reported high school graduation rates for each state across the nation, declaring the average to be 70%, with much lower rates among Black and Latino students. The state by state ranking by Greene was picked up by dozens of local newspapers. Headlines read as follows: *Columbus Dispatch* - "City Flunks Dropout Study; Columbus school officials say they're addressing the problem," *Sarasota Herald* - "Florida's dismal graduation rate," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* - "Report shows gap in graduation rates; State's high school rates are near the top overall, but last for black students," *New York Post* - "Report Hits City's Dropout Rate and Cites Race Divide," *Associated Press* - "Study finds Georgia's Hispanic children have lowest graduation rates" (Associated Press November 14, 2001; Bush November 14, 2001; Campanile November 14, 2001; Miller Kunerth November 30, 2001; Schulhofer November 14, 2001).

The Heritage Foundation has also engaged in a considerable number of education debates in the media. Conducting little of their own research, the Heritage Foundation mostly produces short policy statements called *Backgrounders*, *WebMemos*, *Executive Memorandum*, *Special Reports*, or *Heritage Lectures*. For example in 2001, Krista

Kafer, former senior policy analyst at the Heritage Foundation was cited thirty-one times in newspapers across the country, but most prominently in the *Washington Post*, *Washington Times*, and *New York Times* on education issues. Although having no background in the field of education, Kafer was quoted as an expert on various issues including the No Child Left Behind legislation, school funding, standards, tests, and vouchers. Similarly Dan Lips, current education analyst for the Heritage Foundation, is frequently quoted in major newspapers despite having no background in education. A proponent of the school choice movement, Lips had a special topic article on the issue for the *Washington Times* in 2006 (Lips June 21, 2006).

The American Enterprise Institute also stands as a prominent conservative think tank garnering media attention on various education related issues. For example, in 2001, Dinesh D'Souza, research scholar for the American Enterprise Institute, wrote a special article for the *Chicago Sun Times* arguing against the idea that a digital divide is putting minority students at a disadvantage (D'Souza March 15, 2001). Also in 2001, the book *The War Against Boys: How Misguided Feminism is Harming Our Young Men*, written by Christina Hoffs Sommers, a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute was profiled in eleven newspaper articles, including the *Washington Times*, *New York Times*, and *USA Today* (Hoff-Sommers February 8, 2001; Marziani June 6, 2001; Tierney December 11, 2001) .

The current Director of Education Policy at the American Enterprise Institute, Frederick Hess also appears frequently in major newspapers discussing education issues. For example, in 2006, Hess was cited eighteen times in major newspapers and eleven times in the periodical *Education Week*. Unlike the education experts of the Heritage

Foundation, Hess actually does have an extensive background in the field of education. In 2006, Hess also had two editorials published by the *Washington Post*, one against the overuse of courtrooms to reform schools and the other against the liberal political agenda taught at schools of education (Hess February 5, 2006; Hess July 2, 2006).

Centrist think tanks are frequently cited in newspapers. However for think tanks like the RAND Corporation, the names of its policy experts are not mentioned and instead identified as "RAND researchers." The experts from think tanks like RAND usually stay away from contentious education debates that conservative think tanks are eager to engage in. However the research from large academic think tanks is selectively used by other think tanks to advocate for a particular policy position. For example, in 2001, the RAND Corporation conducted a study on school choice plans. Findings indicated that there was no conclusive evidence that charter schools or voucher plans raised student achievement on a consistent basis. The study however reported high levels of parent satisfaction among those families who were given scholarships to enroll their students in private schools. Newspapers, including the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* and *Arkansas Democrat Gazzette* emphasized parental satisfaction, while other newspapers including the *New York Times* and *USA Today* emphasized the lack of effectiveness (Branam December 19, 2001; Franck December 31, 2001; Henry December 7, 2001; Schemo December 9, 2001).

Unlike the RAND Corporation, the Brookings Institution not only puts out studies, but has increasingly had its experts called upon by journalists for quotes on various education issues. For example in 2006, Tom Loveless, Director of the Brown Center on Education Policy at the Brookings Institution, was cited in twenty-two

newspaper education stories and six times in *Education Week*. Coverage included a profile of a study produced by Loveless on U.S. education compared to education systems in other countries. Articles in the *Washington Times*, *Houston Chronicle*, and *USA Today* highlighted one of the studies' findings that spoke about the emphasis U.S. teachers put on student happiness (Thompson October 20, 2006; Toppo October 18, 2006; Tran October 19, 2006). Loveless was quoted as saying that,

> What's clear from these findings is happiness is not everything. Our national obsession with student happiness over academic content may, in fact, be hurting our children when considered in an international context (Education Week October 18, 2006, p. 7).

Another prominent voice from the Brookings Institution is Diane Ravitch. Ravitch, a professor at NYU and a fellow at the conservative Hoover Institution, has been one of the leading voices in education policy over the past decade. In addition to being quoted in various newspapers, Ravitch has also written opinion pieces, editorials, and Op-Eds on various education topics. For example, in 2005, Ravitch wrote an editorial for the *New York Times*, titled "Every State Left Behind." The editorial argued for national rather than state standards in education. Ravitch stated that the current system of measuring achievement at the state level is piecemeal and ineffective. She concluded by stating that this issue should be a domestic policy priority (Ravitch November 7, 2005). Following up on that editorial, in 2006 Ravitch wrote an opinion piece for the *New York Sun*, highlighting New York City's abysmal test scores and the need to focus more attention on curriculum and standards rather than funding (Ravitch November 21, 2006).

In general conservative and centrist think tanks receive far more coverage on education issues than do liberal think tanks. However in 2006 two liberal think tanks, the

Economic Policy Institute and Center for American Progress, did increase their recognition in the media on education issues, although in a very small way when compared with other think tanks. The liberal/progressive Economic Policy Institute received coverage in 2006 primarily for disputing the high school graduation rates found by Jay Greene of the Manhattan Institute. The Center for American Progress, another liberal/progressive think tank also made its mark with coverage by various newspapers, including an article about increasing inequality in segregated public schools in the *Detroit Free Press* (Pratt December 4, 2006).

Regional Distribution

The regional distribution of think tank newspaper citations is also important. Think tanks, regardless of ideology, are cited most often in southeast regional newspapers like the *Washington Post* and *Washington Times*. This is not surprising given that most of the large, well-funded think tanks are located in Washington, DC, and seek to affect education policy at the federal level. This was especially true during 2001 when the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), titled "No Child Left Behind" by the Bush Administration, was up for reauthorization.

Table 7. Regional Distribution of Think Tank Newspaper Citations

	2001 Education Topic Newspaper Citations		2006 Education Topic Newspaper Citations	
Conservative Think Tanks				
Midwest Regional	129	13%	175	16%
Northeast Regional	218	22%	292	27%
Southeast Regional	427	43%	275	25%
Western Regional	125	13%	271	25%
News Wires	96	10%	84	8%
Total	**995**	**100%**	**1097**	**100%**
Centrist Think Tanks				
Midwest Regional	74	13%	135	14%
Northeast Regional	106	18%	209	22%
Southeast Regional	214	37%	190	20%
Western Regional	125	22%	325	34%
News Wires	55	10%	92	10%
Total	**574**	**100%**	**951**	**100%**
Liberal Think Tanks				
Midwest Regional	26	41%	39	25%
Northeast Regional	18	29%	31	20%
Southeast Regional	7	11%	40	25%
Western Regional	6	10%	37	24%
News Wires	6	10%	10	6%
Total	**63**	**100%**	**157**	**100%**

Table 7 illustrates how newspaper citations were distributed by ideology and region of the country in 2001 and 2006. In 2001 southeast regional newspapers cited both conservative and centrist think tanks on education topic articles most frequently. The regional distribution of citations changed somewhat in 2006 with both conservative and centrist think tank citations being spread more evenly across different regional newspapers. As for liberal think tanks, the most significant change that took place from 2001 to 2006 was the increase in the number of newspaper citations, which more than doubled from 63 citations in 2001 to 157 citations in 2006.

Although many large think tanks seek to have their studies, policy analysis, and op-eds placed in major national newspapers like the *Washington Post* and *Washington Times*, it is also important for think tanks to be cited in other newspapers across the country. As Kirk Johnson of the Heritage Foundation noted in an interview,

> We don't just want to target media to the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Washington Post*. We want to also get into the smaller papers (Kirk Johnson, Senior Policy Analyst, Heritage Foundation).

Findings also indicate that between 2001 and 2006, all think tanks, regardless of ideology, were covered and cited in more newspapers on education stories. For example, in 2006, education-topic citations to conservative think tanks appeared in 224 different newspapers, up from 105 in 2001. Centrist think tanks were cited in 93 different newspapers in 2001 and 144 in 2006. Liberal think tanks increased their exposure on educational topics as well, going from citations in 30 newspapers in 2001 to 72 newspapers in 2006.

Table 8. Top 5 newspapers that cited think tanks on education topics 2001 & 2006

All Think Tanks	**2001 Citations**	**All Think Tanks**	**2006 Citations**
Washington Post	159	Associated Press State & Local Wire	152
Associated Press State & Local Wire	123	Washington Post	93
Washington Times	117	New York Times	84
New York Times	75	New York Sun	77
Atlanta Journal Constitution	49	Boston Globe	65
Conservative Think Tanks		**Conservative Think Tanks**	
Washington Times	90	Associated Press State & Local Wire	68
Washington Post	84	New York Sun	68
Associated Press State & Local Wire	76	Washington Post	48
New York Times	39	New York Times	43
Atlanta Journal Constitution	33	Boston Globe	42
Centrist Think Tanks		**Centrist Think Tanks**	
Washington Post	72	Associated Press State & Local Wire	77
Associated Press State & Local Wire	41	Washington Post	44
New York Times	33	Pittsburgh Post Gazette	36
Washington Times	27	New York Times	32
Boston Globe	20	Sacramento Bee (California)	29
Liberal Think Tanks		**Liberal Think Tanks**	
Milwaukee Journal Sentinel	11	Associated Press State & Local Wire	7
Associated Press State & Local Wire	6	Plain Dealer (Cleveland, Ohio)	7
Wisconsin State Journal	6	Washington Post	7
Boston Globe	4	Washington Times	7
New York Times	3	Columbus Dispatch (Ohio)	6

As Table 8 shows, despite their distribution in newspapers across the country, think tanks are still most likely to be cited on education stories in major newspapers. Many local papers depend on information from the *Associated Press* and other news wires to write stories on various education policy topics. Therefore in a given week, a similar education policy story will appear multiple times in local newspapers across the country. This occurs most frequently when think tanks generate studies that rank how each state is performing in terms of graduation rates, test scores, class size, college affordability, or preschool attendance.

In some cases there is a link between the political orientation of the think tank and the political orientation of the newspaper while in other cases the connection is less clear.

One clear example of the link occurred in 2006. During that year the conservative Manhattan Institute was cited 42 times by the conservative *New York Sun* on education topic stories. In this same year the *New York Sun* had a total of 68 education topic citations from conservative think tanks, and just 9 from centrist think tanks, and no education topic citations from liberal think tanks. However in other instances the link is less clear. For example in 2001 the Heritage Foundation was cited by the liberal-leaning *Washington Post* 29 times on education topic stories and 23 times by the conservative-leaning *Washington Times*. The Brookings Institution had similar figures in 2001 when it was cited 16 times by the *Washington Times* on education topic stories and 27 times by the *Washington Post*. In this case, two prominent Washington, DC based think tanks one conservative and one centrist received similar education coverage from both prominent newspapers.

Television and Radio Citations

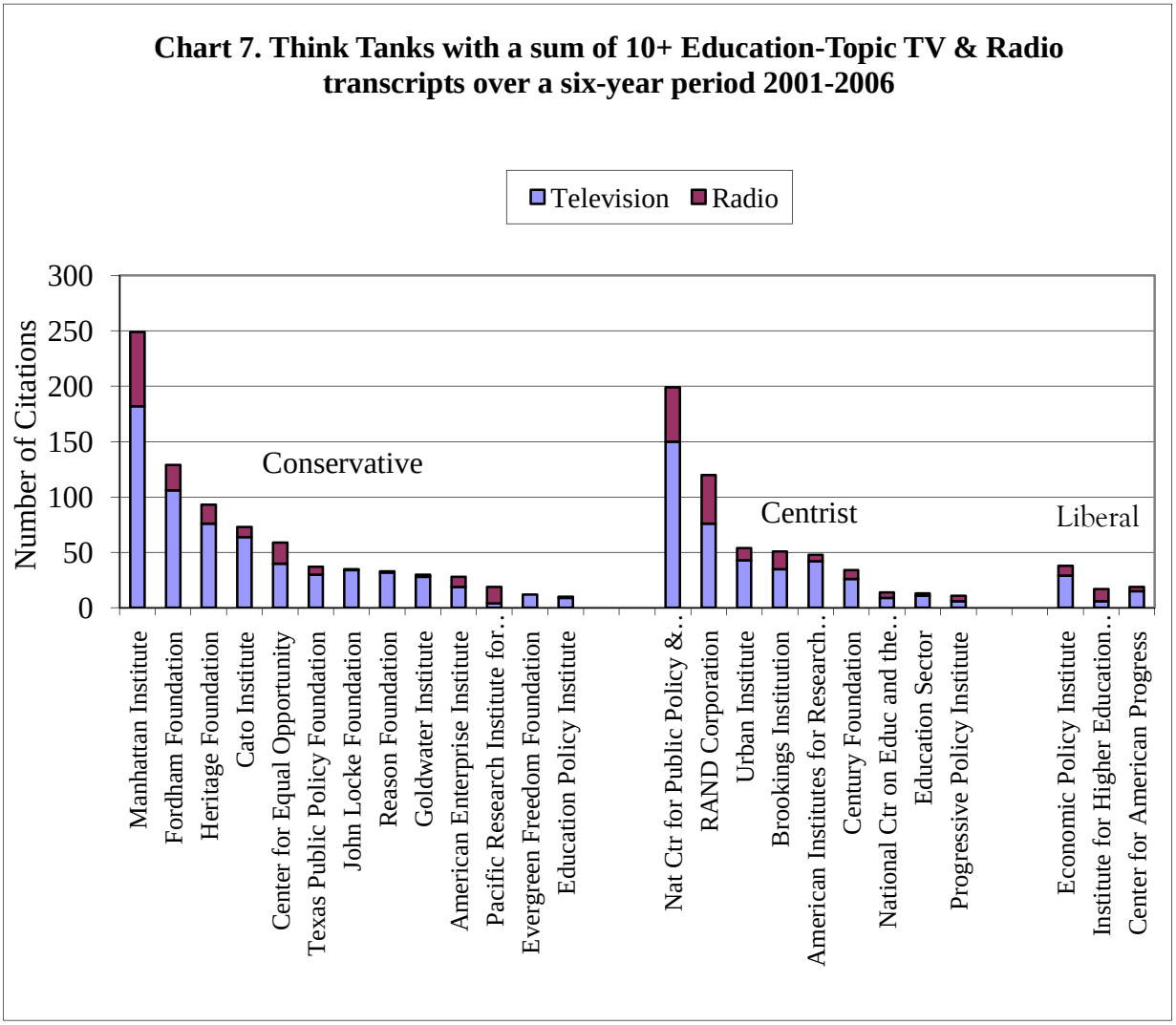
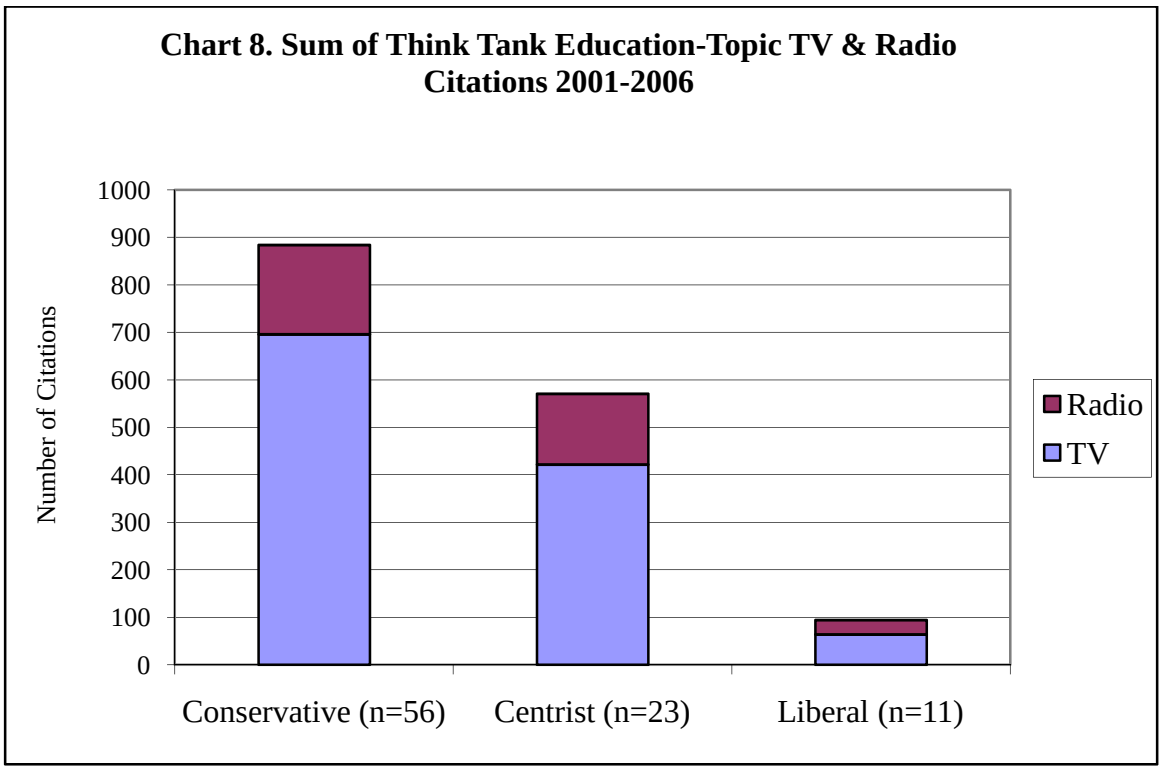


Chart 7 shows a pattern for television and radio citations is similar to that of newspaper citations, with conservative and centrist think tanks garnering far more citations than liberal think tanks. The Manhattan Institute, Fordham Foundation, Heritage Foundation and Cato Institute led with the highest number of television and radio citations for conservative think tanks. Centrist think tank television and radio citations were led by the National Center for Public Policy in Higher Education, RAND Corporation, and Urban Institute. Although one of the leaders in newspaper citations, the

Brookings Institution had far fewer television and radio citations than the top five conservative think tanks.



As shown in Chart 8, the total number of television and radio citations, conservative think tanks far outweigh both centrist and liberal think tanks. Again, this is not due to the fact that there are simply more conservative think tanks, than centrist or liberal, but instead because of the ability of the top ten conservative think tanks to garner the most attention from television and radio. Although obtaining fewer television and radio citations in the aggregate than conservative think tanks, centrist think tanks still have a considerable media presence. However liberal or progressive education policy ideas are much less likely to be conveyed via think tanks to the media.

The distribution across television stations based on ideology is more consistent than it is for newspaper distribution based on ideology. For example, as Table 9 indicates, between 2001-2006 conservative think tanks appeared 229 times in education

stories on conservative FOX television stations. FOX television was 3 ½ times more likely to cite conservative think tanks than centrist think tanks on education stories. This is in stark contrast to ABC, CBS, and NBC, which were about equally as likely to cite conservative think tanks as centrist think tanks on education stories.

Table 9. Top 5 TV & Radio Outlets that Cited Think Tanks on Education Topic Stories over a Six-Year Period 2001-2006

		Number of			
Conservative Think Tanks	**TV**	**Local Affiliates**		**Radio Affiliation**	**Radio**
FOX Total	229	39		NPR Total	127
NBC Total	108	43		CBS Total	32
CBS Total	98	44		ABC Total	8
ABC Total	72	32		Buckley Broadcasting	6
CNN Total	66	N/A		Clear Channel	5
Centrist Think Tanks					
CBS Total	106	51		NPR Total	84
NBC Total	74	40		CBS Total	27
ABC Total	69	38		ABC Total	13
FOX Total	62	27		Clear Channel	9
CNN Total	35	N/A		NBC Total	4
Liberal Think Tank Total					
CBS Total	12	7		NPR Total	17
CNN Total	11	N/A		CBS Total	10
FOX Total	9	6		Pacifica Foundation	1
ABC Total	8	4		Dispatch Broadcast	1
CSPAN Total	7	N/A		Howard Univ Radio	1

Think tanks are occasionally cited or their experts interviewed on national network news programs on ABC, NBC, and CBS. However these citations only make up 2% of their total television references. In the large majority of cases, think tanks are mentioned on local news broadcasts. As for radio citations, conservative think tanks are much more likely to be cited on radio in education stories, regardless of the station, than either centrist or liberal think tanks. National Public Radio (NPR) is the leading station to use think tanks for education topic stories followed by CBS radio.

What Think Tank Experts Say About the Role of the Media

Several think tank scholars talked about the importance of the media for its impact. In an interview with Chester Finn he described the nature of the media efforts at the conservative Fordham Foundation:

> We have a person on staff who is our public affairs director and manager. She works for the Fordham Vice President. We call his job National Programs and Policy. We work real hard at both electronic dissemination and media based dissemination, direct mail, e-mail, stirring up debates where possible. Our audience is not academics. Our audience are policy makers and those who influence their thinking. We try to have the chairman of the state legislative committees on our e-mail lists. Legislators, governors, business leaders, editorial page editors, and so on (Chester Finn, Fordham Foundation).

Similarly the liberal Center for American Progress founded in 2003 is seeking to follow the model of high profile conservative think tanks by engaging in ideological debates through the media.

> We have very skilled people on staff, very sophisticated with long years of experience working with the press, tremendous strategists. Part of its purpose when it [The Center for American Progress] was set up, they thought that there was a need for this. If you study the website, the philosophy of the organization is pretty clear. It is getting a lot of attention, it is growing, it is an amazing place to be. It is amazing for me to be here and watch this going on and contribute to it. We have a legislative affairs staff too. We have two people who do that full-time. Then we have a person in charge of group relations, so we work in coalition with other groups around education issues (Cynthia Brown, Center for American Progress).

A staff member of the liberal Center for Law and Social Policy noted the following in an interview:

> There are journalists that have a beat on education, at *Education Week*, the *Times*, the *Post*, who are interested in the area and then you might want to give them the information. There is also the *AP*. I think that a lot of what we do is hard to translate into the broader audience. Everyone is trying to get better at that in the world because that's where a lot of public opinion gets made. There are plenty of books, articles, and theories on how organized an effort that has been. Certainly they [conservatives] have been very successful in getting their message out over the last 10-20 years (Staff Member, Center for Law and Social Policy).

Similarly, Paul Dunphy, who works as a policy analyst for the progressive grassroots organization, Citizens for Democratic Schools, in Massachusetts, noted the growing media presence and influence of the Pioneer Institute, a conservative think tank in his state. He also expressed concern over the uncritical eye of the media in reporting information from this think tank.

> They [The Pioneer Institute] have generally tended to work through the Boston media, putting out press releases and reports, which have been very well received, almost uncritically received over the first six years of their efforts, from 1994-2000. Often times churning out a press release that then gains a 2-3 column headline on the front page of the paper, early on, about charter schools in particular. I think they were very successful in doing "surveys" then they would publish the results to reach conclusions that they'd already established before the survey began. They did one that from my perspective, there was a shocking amount of uncritical coverage from the media, claiming that parents were more satisfied with charter schools than public schools. After I read a couple of articles, I phoned some of the reporters and asked them a little bit about how they had played the story. Basically they re-wrote the press release, they made no calls to examine what was handed to them. I talked with the people who were hired by Pioneer to do the survey, and they said that they had contacted charter school parents from a list that they were given. They then did random digit dialing to public school parents. This I thought was useful information that might have been

> included in a balanced article (Paul Dunphy, Citizens for Democratic Schools).

Getting an Op-Ed placed is of particular importance to think tanks. Neal McCluskey, education policy analyst for the conservative Cato Institute noted this process when I asked him about it in an interview.

> For Op-Eds, I'll see something in the news that I think is important, especially if it makes me angry, and I'll write an Op-Ed on it. The Op-Eds usually go to the Media Department who will shop them to who they think is best. I do though sometimes target particular publications. For example, when the *Palm Beach Post* was running all of their articles about vouchers, I asked, "can I write an Op-Ed to counter what you are writing?" And they said "sure." The *Akron Beacon Journal* was running a whole bunch of articles about home schooling, and I asked if I could respond in an Op-Ed, they said "sure." So it has worked that way too. Usually we just write Op-Eds on something that we think is topical and go through the media department (Neal McCluskey, Cato Institute).

However the Op-Ed is not the chosen format by all think tanks to communicate ideas. For example, Rick Hess, resident scholar and Director of Education Policy Studies at the American Enterprise Institute noted the following in an interview.

> I don't do a lot of Op-Eds. I don't really like the format. I'm not talking about the things that people think of as the education debate. I am not for or against choice, I am not for or against accountability, I don't care about curricula content that much. It is hard for me in 800 words to explain why what I'm talking about links in to popular interest. I do a lot of popular writing but I do it for what I would argue are lay policy outlets. Places like *Phi Delta Kappan, American School Board Journal, School Administrator, Education Week* backpagers, and *Education Next*. These are journals that are read by 100,000, outlets that are in wide circulation within the education community (Rick Hess, AEI).

Until a few decades ago, the audience for the evaluations, reports, and research findings of think tanks were stakeholders within the policy community. The research results and recommendations of think tanks occasionally appeared in news reports, however the primary function of academic and contract think tanks was not to influence public opinion directly. The growing importance of the advocacy think tank, particularly in the 1980's and 1990's, however has changed the nature of both think tanks and their relationship to the media. In many instances the dissemination of information has equal or even greater importance as research and policy analysis conducted at the think tank.

Although all types of think tanks produce information to be disseminated to the media, conservative advocacy think tanks in particular have been ahead in this game. As noted in Chapter 1, it has become the function of many conservative think tanks to produce on-time policy briefs for both policymakers and media outlets. Influencing public sentiment by conveying and applying conservative ideas and principles to various policy areas, including education, is a primary mission of these think tanks.

Advocacy think tanks in particular have recognized the needs of policymakers and journalists for easy to read, definitive, policy briefs. Pressed for time, and often lacking the knowledge or expertise to dissect academic style research and complex quantitative and qualitative studies, both of these groups have increasingly depended on information produced by think tanks and advocacy organizations that meet their needs. Conservative advocacy think tanks have been much more successful at using this format of dissemination than either centrist or liberal think tanks.

Joydeep Roy, an economist working on education issues at the progressive Economic Policy Institute, noted the following:

> The general difference between academic research and think tank policy research is that our research is being interpreted by the reporters. Often reporters don't have a lot of time to read the report and digest it. This may seem like an indictment of the reporters, but it really isn't. It is not their fault. It is not really possible for them to read the full reports and find out the merits of particular research. They are general education writers. They are not specialized in the particularities for example of special education or charter schools. When they look at a report they typically try to look at the think tanks, what type of work they have done in the past, what sort of organizations they are affiliated with, and then they take this report and have some people from the opposite camp read it and comment on it (Joydeep Roy, Economic Policy Institute).

Similarly in an interview with Sara Mead, who formerly worked at the Progressive Policy Institute and is now at Education Sector, a centrist think tank founded in 2005 by Andrew Rotherham and Thomas Toch, noted the need for accessibility.

> I think one of the things that is a core piece of how we are setting ourselves up as a start-up is to make this stuff accessible and available to people through our basics. We are not going to use jargon when we write about an issue. We are going to write about it in plain English that is accessible to people. Tom, one of our co-founders, comes out of a long journalism background. He is a very good writer. He knows how to write, and help me develop my writing to be better in terms of accessibility, quality, and interestingness. That is just a piece of how we generally write everything. A big piece of what we are planning to do is to create a lot of shorter, more accessible, Op-Ed, magazine length type pieces, maybe for somebody who doesn't have time or the interest to sit down and read a thirty-page report about an issue.... When you are in an academic scenario, it really doesn't matter if only 12 people read your paper. People write things specifically for an audience of five people who are an expert on an issue. There is a level of elite people that we want to hit, but we also want a large number of people to be reading and responding to our work (Sara Mead, Education Sector).

Former Governor Bob Wise of Tennessee, who is now President of the Alliance for Excellent Education, a centrist advocacy group in Washington, DC also noted the importance of making education policy material accessible to the public and policy makers in order to garner the political will necessary for policies to be implemented.

> Our job is to translate what is sometimes pretty esoteric policy, so that the public will is there to support the president, governor, and others as they move forward to implement changes. At then end of the day in this process, the ultimate test of whether we are going to be successful, is whether or not somebody who doesn't know much about education, but who has the final decision, the elected school board member, a governor, a state legislator, they won't have a Ph.D. in education, but they will make the final decision on what gets implemented. So I tell everyone, at the end of the day, ten Ph.D's are trumped by ten state legislators (Governor Bob Wise, Alliance for Excellent Education).

Advocacy organizations play an important supporting role in this effort to connect with the media. In an interview with Shaka Mitchell, Director of Policy at the conservative Center for Education Reform, an advocacy organization that promotes school choice, I was told about the importance of tracking media as a means for measuring influence.

> Today we were in the *Chicago Tribune*, which is sort of a top tier media outlet, so definitely newspapers, be it the *New York Times*, the *Toledo Blade*. We have folks that track all of that to see where we are having some impact. We also target magazines. There are so many magazines that are focused on family issues and parenting. It makes sense for us to target those. I know that there was someone from *U.S. News and World Report* at a conference on charter schools yesterday. So because education is such an important part of the American political debate, I think that everyone can take an interest, be it *Newsweek*, the *New York Times*, or the *Powder Springs Neighbor*. We also do television interviews on specific programs. We've got some work that we've been doing whichever network 20/20 is on, they have contacted us before and asked what do you know about this? It is important for us and I think helpful to

> the debate overall to inform the TV journalists as well. We may say, here is where you can find the answers to the questions you are asking about (Shaka Mitchell, Center for Education Reform).

The Education Trust is an advocacy organization that was involved in shaping the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act. In an interview with the director, Kati Haycock, I asked about the importance of the media for the work that they do.

> There is both what you see and what you don't see, which is the amount of time we spend with editorial writers who don't ever mention our name, or who mention our name maybe one out of every twenty-five articles. What is important to us is the message. We don't care if we get the credit for it, although some of our funders like it. Radio and TV we have done more recently. Part of the problem with the education issue is that it is hard for commercial TV to cover education well. We do it periodically, not very often. We do public TV a little more. Edward Smith just did "Making Schools Work." We had a major role in both helping him shape it, frame it, and then with the on screen role. We'll do *The News Hour [with Jim Lehrer]* periodically when there is a fight about something. TV so far has not found a way to cover education responsibly (Kati Haycock, Education Trust).

In an interview with Lisa Walker of the Education Writers Association, I asked her about sources for education stories and the extent to which journalists depend on think tanks for this information.

> It depends upon the issue, if the issue involves the union they will go to the unions. If it involves research about how well a certain program works or could work, they are likely to go to a researcher or possibly to a think tank. It depends entirely upon the kind of work the think tank is doing and whether that bears on the issue that they are reporting on. For example, if it is something related to charter schools or an area where there is so much dispute over data, they might well go to a think tank. The think tank that they go to is going to have to be one that is relatively even handed with the data. If it had to do with charter schools or with vouchers, or something that was a

> heavily debated issue, and there were think tanks that did research on both sides, they might well talk to those people, but I think that they would probably go back to basic researchers or people that are conducting something like RAND or SRI or something like that, that has a history and is not really connected with the debate or the argument (Lisa Walker, Education Writers Association).

However some think tanks feel that education journalists are working within a narrow frame when conducting interviews on education topics. For example in an interview with Susan Ohanian of the Vermont Society for the Study of Education, a liberal think tank that has been critical of NCLB legislation, she told me about how she attended an Education Writers Association Conference in Chicago. As someone who has written a monthly column for *Substance,* had articles published in *Phi Delta Kappan,* and Op-Eds in *Newsday* she paid her dues as a member. Later she was thrown out of the conference and told she shouldn't have been on the list because she was not a journalist. This occurred after Ohanian posed questions about the effectiveness of NCLB.

> I had this grand plan. I went to the Education Writers Association Convention. I rented a table. I displayed protest literature from all around the country. I had all of these position papers. They [journalists] couldn't care less, they don't read. It was just stacks of paper, I couldn't give it away. It [the Education Writers Association Conference] is all very corporate ruled. The one I went to, they had Kati Haycock [Director of the Education Trust] speaking. Everybody there was a chorus line member for NCLB. There was nobody speaking against it. They felt very free to bash teachers. I couldn't resist throwing in a suggestion. It wasn't like I was spouting off polemics. I said, "in addition to that maybe you'd like to...." Well that let Lisa know that I was on the list and she informed me that I had no right to be on the list and kicked me off (Susan Ohanian, EPSL and Vermont Society for the Study of Education).

Competing with think tanks and advocacy organizations for space in newspapers are academics conducting education policy research at the universities. With few exceptions, academics fall far behind think tanks and advocacy organizations in garnering media attention for their research and policy recommendations. However there are some research centers located at the universities, which do distribute their research findings to the media. Bruce Fuller of Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), a policy research center based at UC Berkeley and Stanford noted that some journalists are becoming more sophisticated in their analysis of sources and the credibility they carry.

> There is definitely variability, but the major papers, the *L.A. Times*, the *Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, the good reporters will ask you - "has it been peer reviewed and by whom?" A lot goes on reputation. They know your work as an individual, or they know PACE's work, sometimes peer review is less important. Reporters who have been on the education beat kind of know how different think tanks position themselves. They also have to convince their editor that this is solid stuff and not a political diatribe (Bruce Fuller, PACE).

Larry Hayes, a long time education journalist noted:

> One of the things that the media do – in most news rooms, I worked in one, I would imagine that there is this ethos that you have to be objective, impartial, we don't take sides. What happens is that you get this counting of noses instead of weighing. Some idiot stands up, they know nothing but they spout off, and they get the same space and they get the quotes just as much as the sociologist that comes from New York University. I have been in meetings. Gary Orfield is the preeminent desegregation expert. He is here to talk about how retention is counter-productive. That kids who are retained are more likely to drop out. He made this presentation at the school board conference room. I'm sitting about midway back, a long time fan of Gary's, and he makes this presentation, it is so logical. And these people behind me, including a couple of teachers, they said, "ahh you can't believe that." And they've got some anecdotal case. So we end up not only with the anecdote

> carrying the day as the group ends the meeting but that's how legislation is made, by anecdotes (Larry Hayes, Education Writer).

In an interview with Catherine Lugg, a professor at Rutgers University Graduate School of Education and a fellow at the Arizona State Education Policy Studies Laboratory, she expressed her views on journalists covering education beats.

> The think tanks are based in major media markets. If you look at your top education schools, they are located away from the major media markets. Think tankers, Dave Ignatius wrote about this in the late 1980's, he really liked think tankers, because they would write fast, they always called him back. The problem with that is, his papers, particularly on the education beat are notoriously sloppy. A lot of crap gets out there. I have yet to see a newspaper person win the Pulitzer Prize for education reporting. So generally education reporting is bottom of the barrel. What the conservatives have been successful at doing is setting the terms of what we can talk about in education reform. For example, all this stuff about testing. We know that testing in and of itself doesn't really mean a lot. So now schools of education are taking a hard look at accreditation and trying to re-set the agenda that way. We are not talking about desegregation and segregation even though we are more segregated now than we were in 1965 (Catherine Lugg, EPSL and Rutgers).

Conclusion

Given their 501(c)(3) status, conservative think tanks have successfully and strategically been able to use the media as an alternate means for influencing education policy debates. In particular, the top fifteen conservative think tanks have been able to garner a significant amount of media attention, despite producing little research and being less well funded by philanthropic foundations on education issues than either centrist or liberal think tanks. The best funded and largest think tanks primarily target their efforts to southeast regional and national newspapers, and largely seek to influence federal

education policy debates. Conservative think tanks have been most successful at this, while centrist think tanks still have a significant media presence. Liberal/progressive think tanks on the other hand receive little to no media coverage on education issues. Conservative think tanks are mentioned in many newspaper articles, but they are even more prominent in radio and television broadcasts. Most noticeably there is a strong ideological tie between the FOX television network and conservative think tanks. At the same time, there appears to be no consistent tie between either centrist or liberal think tanks and a particular network. Even CBS, which has traditionally been regarded as a liberal leaning network is equally as likely to cite conservative think tanks as they are to cite centrist think tanks on education topic news stories. CBS hardly ever cites the liberal think tanks doing education policy work.

Central to the success of conservative think tanks in the media has been their ability to prioritize advocacy, public relations, and influence, over research. Although centrist think tanks and the studies they produce receive attention in the media, they have complex findings that are not easily reducible to catch phrases. Similarly the few liberal think tanks that do education policy work usually do not engage in the advocacy framework of conservative think tanks. The one exception seems to be the newly founded Center for American Progress. To date, its education division has not been as prominent in the media as its other policy divisions. Conservative think tanks have been very successful at public relations and making themselves an easy and accessible source for the media on education policy issues. Rather than being perceived as pure advocates, the term “think tank” affords these organizations a research institute status in the press.

The shift within the think tank world to one of advocacy over research has not gone unnoticed by think tank experts and academic scholars. As noted in several interviews, public opinion often gets made through repeated messages in the media and simple catch phrases rather than through complex academic research. In particular academics doing education policy research as well as experts from liberal think tanks commented on the idea that the answer to the research question is known by conservative think tanks prior to the research even being done. As it currently stands, academic-style research from both think tanks and universities is often not geared to an easily digestible format for newspapers, television, and radio programs. Oftentimes when this type of research does get noticed is because it is picked up by another think tank or advocacy organization that highlights portions of the research for its own purposes.

This chapter has traced media citations for all ninety think tanks examined in this study and showed the significant impact conservative think tanks have on education policy debates. Although political influence is often diffuse and difficult to measure, the findings of this chapter suggest that conservative think tanks have successfully used the media in recent years as a means to influence the parameters of education policy debate and shape public opinion.

Chapter 6

Education Policy, Research vs. Advocacy, and the Parameters of Ideological Debate

This chapter charts the ideological fault lines of education policy debates in Washington, DC today. I argue that both neoconservatives and centrist Republicans and Democrats have moved education policy debates to a Right-of-center platform over the past two decades. This movement has been aided by conservative think tanks, which have redefined education policy discussions by labeling liberal progressive approaches to education as the source of school failure while placing the solution within a framework based in standards, assessment, and markets. I also argue that liberal progressive educational ideas have been pushed out of the Washington, DC education policy-making community. Today they mainly exist within the confines of the university.

Although there are far more conservative and centrist than liberal/progressive think tanks focused on education policy issues, I expected going into this research that I would find a broad array of perspectives and policy positions across think tanks, especially because many of the think tanks I have methodologically identified as "centrist" have been called "liberal" by others in the policy world. However I did not find a lot of variation in terms of where researchers stood on education policy debates and the range of policy proposals discussed. I was surprised to find that with very few exceptions, the majority of think tanks in Washington, DC work within the same general policy framework. In many respects this reflects a general paradigm shift in education policy that has taken place over the last fifteen years. Standards, accountability, testing, and charter schools are the framework, while even a national curriculum is being discussed.

This lack of diversity of opinion is why I expanded my interview pool to include researchers at university based education policy centers. I did this not only to get a broader array of perspectives and research on public education issues, but also to examine the differences between think tank and university based research. There were two specific exceptions in the Washington, DC policy community to the generally centrist - conservative continuum of education policy discussions. Two fellows at the Economic Policy Institute, a liberal/progressive think, did offer differentiating views, not only from conservative think tanks, but also from centrist and other liberal/progressive think tanks as well.

What used to be standard for liberal, progressive, and even middle-of-the-road commentators in the policy world two decades ago - - an equity framework, support for teachers unions, and the idea that race and class inequalities based in institutions outside of schools, perpetuate educational inequalities within schools - - are virtually non-existent in policy debates today. Increasingly think tanks and others in the policy world embrace increased standards and testing, afraid to appear soft on education, following suit with policy makers who are afraid to not appear tough on crime, regardless of whether such policies yield the intended results. Although not radical to me, the following quotes from two EPI researchers stood in stark contrast to the majority of the interview discussions over education policy among Washington, DC based think tanks. Joydeep Roy, an economist at the Economic Policy Institute noted the following.

> You can't just look at the school as an institution. As long as there are inequalities and societal ills, they are going to be reflected in the schools. Asking or hoping that the schools can take account of all of the disparities in society is naive, what is expected of the schools should be guided by that (Joydeep Roy, Economic Policy Institute).

Similarly Richard Rothstein, former education columnist for the *New York Times*, who is also affiliated with the Economic Policy Institute discussed current educational debates in an interview with me:

> I think you have to think of this in terms of the broader political framework in which education debates are being conducted. Almost all of the other education policy institutes that you are talking to are on the conservative side of the political spectrum, places like the American Enterprise Institute, the Manhattan Institute, and so forth. Their broad perspective is to be against public investment of any kind and against public policy that affects the private sector. It is consistent with that philosophy that they would want to argue that schools do not need intervention in social and economic spheres in order to be successful (Richard Rothstein, Economic Policy Institute, Columbia University).

Although the idea that inequalities in society are reflected in schools is basic to sociologists studying education, the only Washington, DC based think tank that I came across that expressed this perspective explicitly was the Economic Policy Institute. I expected that the Center for American Progress, a liberal/progressive think tank, touted as the "Heritage Foundation of the Left" when it was founded in 2003 would share this view, but it did not. Accordingly, it wasn't until I spoke with education researchers located at universities that I found a differing discussion about public education than the one going on in Washington, DC.

Table 10 summarizes the general ideological framework under which education research and policy analysis is conducted.

Table 10. Ideological Framework for Education Research and Policy Analysis

Education Policy	Neo-Liberal/ Libertarian	Neo-Conservative	Centrist	Liberal/ Progressive
Role for Free Markets in Education	Strongly Support	Strongly Support	Moderate Support	Against
Vouchers	Strongly Support	Strongly Support	Against	Against
Charter Schools	Strongly Support	Strongly Support	Moderate Support	Little Support
Teacher's Unions	Strongly Against	Strongly Against	Moderate Support	Strongly Support
National Standards	Strongly Against	Strongly Support	Strongly Support	Strongly Against
National Curriculum	Strongly Against	Strongly Support	Moderate Support	Strongly Against
Federally Mandated Tests	Strongly Against	Strongly Support	Strongly Support	Strongly Against
Affirmative Action	Strongly Against	Strongly Against	Moderate Support	Strongly Support
Bilingual Education	Strongly Against	Strongly Against	Moderate Support	Strongly Support
Universal Preschool	Strongly Against	Strongly Against	Moderate Support	Strongly Support
Increased Spending	Strongly Against	Strongly Against	Moderate Support	Strongly Support
Education Inequality Tied to Race, Class and Gender Inequality in Society	Strongly Against	Strongly Against	Moderate Support	Strongly Support

Neoliberal/Libertarian: This perspective is represented in education as a move toward the privatization of the public schools system through charter schools and vouchers, with the goal, as outlined by economist Milton Friedman, of eventually eliminating "government schools." This faction of the conservative movement fits with the traditional conservative ethos of small government and free-markets. Supporters of this perspective would ideally like to eliminate the Department of Education as a federal cabinet position, and minimize any federal role in education.

Neo-Conservatives: Similar to neoliberal and neoclassical perspectives, neoconservatives support privatization, charter schools, vouchers, and a role for business in public education. However neoconservatives believe there needs to be a strong role for the state, and as such are in support of standards, testing, and even the move toward a common curriculum. Although the neoconservative perspective is primarily supported by corporate and political elites, in education it has also gained support from

fundamentalist Christians on issues of the content of textbooks, prayer in the public schools, evolution, and vouchers.

Centrist: This group is primarily made up of both centrist Republicans and Democrats who have compromised on education issues and supported the dominant paradigm of the standards movement, assessment, and testing. Additionally they have been in support of charter schools and corporate involvement in public education. However this group has been more cautious on issues of privatization, specifically vouchers. Reform efforts by this group have received some support from teacher's unions.

Liberal/Progressive: This perspective has been marginalized over the past three decades. Discussions of progressive education reform remain largely within the confines of schools of education, progressive education advocacy organizations, and sectors of the teacher's union. Reform efforts are in support of placing educational inequality within the context of race, class, and gender inequality in the larger society. Improving education depends on the intervention and progressive social change in social and economic spheres.

While these categories define the parameters of debate, individuals and institutions have had to shift their support of certain education policies over the past six years. For example support for the No Child Left Behind Act by the Heritage Foundation in the early years of the Bush presidency was a strategic decision to support the Republican Party more generally. However now as we approach the end of the Bush presidency, conservative think tanks have become more vocal and critical about the No Child Left Behind legislation as it comes up for reauthorization. For example, in August 2007, the Heritage Foundation sent out an e-mail to its members stating the following,

> No Child Left Behind is due for reauthorization and Congress is likely to debate the law this fall. After five years of expanded federal involvement in local schools, Congress has the opportunity to reassess whether the federal role in education is effective or warranted (Heritage Foundation 2007).

This statement has been joined by calls for limited oversight by the federal government and decision making to be returned to the states and local school boards. Although in disagreement over many issues such as affirmative action, pedagogy, bilingual education, and universal preschool, both traditional conservatives as well as liberal progressives have been critiquing the federal oversight of NCLB for the past six years, but for very different reasons. In an interview with Susan Ohanian of the liberal Vermont Society for the Study of Education, she described how most of the education establishment has supported the move towards standards and increased federal oversight of education. However she recognizes the issue as a slippery slope, since traditional conservatives and libertarians come to very different conclusions about the role of the federal government in education than do liberals.

> The AFT was a prime mover for the standards movement. They are still pretty much hand in glove. The NEA are suing on NCLB for more money. They are not suing for ideological reasons. I would venture to say that no professional education group has the guts to come out against standards. All of this mess flows from standards – saying that states and increasingly the federal government can impose regulations about how locals do their jobs. It will be interesting to see what happens with Nebraska. The Commissioner of Education is standing up to the federal government because they don't have a state test. Maybe this is unfair, but I don't see the unions rushing to defend his argument, which is fundamental of who should be in control. However that is a dangerous argument, because if you say the locals should be in control, people [conservatives] will bring up Brown v. Board of Education

> (Susan Ohanian, Vermont Society for the Study of Education).

While the parameters of education policy debates in Washington, DC have shifted over the past two decades, so to has the nature of social scientific research conducted at think tanks. O'Connor (2007) argues that liberal social science has had trouble responding to the rise of the conservative knowledge establishment, "because the central projects, perhaps the defining project, of postwar social science was to marginalize if not literally define ideology out of existence as a legitimate force in American politics and culture (O'Connor 2007, p. 79)."

Despite their stance of non-ideological neutrality, O'Connor (2007) states social scientists drew upon ideological consensus:

> The framework was shaped by a combination of liberal keynesianism, pluralism, anticommunism, and confidence that social science had the technical know-how to sustain shared prosperity, economic growth, and to avoid crippling recessions - as well as to bring the benefits of such know-how to the world (O'Connor 2007, p. 88).

This very aura of neutrality held by social scientists is what O'Connor (2007) argues prevented them from engaging in highly political debates with the New Right beginning in the 1970's. Additionally many social scientists discredited more radical efforts of social movements of the New Left. The inability of social scientists at think tanks and their philanthropic supporters to acknowledge their own ideological commitments, led to their failure to adequately respond to attacks from the rising conservative movement.

For education policy in particular, this has meant a focus by think tanks on measuring how well academic standards, vouchers, charter schools, merit-based pay for teachers, and frequent testing work to raise student achievement, as defined by a narrow set of indicators: a prediction for evaluation research. This dominant framework for the past two decades is assumed to be the solution to education's problems. The research conducted involves asking questions about the conditions under which such initiatives work best. It does not pose alternative policy approaches, nor does it critique or question the social, economic, and historical basis for the status quo.

Criticisms of the Washington, DC policy establishment and the limits of the education policy paradigm under which they work, are largely made by academics outside of the system. For example, as one university based researcher noted in an interview, elite consensus in Washington limits policy discussions outside of accountability and high stakes testing.

> It is very hard to distinguish groups on most educational issues. They all more or less stink from a social science point of view. If you hold policy up against what social science knows, it is very hard to say the Republicans are dreadful and the Democrats are great, or vice versa. From my perspective, they all have their heads in a dark place. You can't look to party labels on education policy. There is a kind of elite consensus that education is for the purpose of economic development, that accountability means high stakes testing, that privatizing education is probably a pretty good idea. Democrats tend to be more skeptical, Republicans more enthusiastic on the issue of vouchers. You've got some Democrats like Lieberman over with the Republicans, you have some Republicans against vouchers. There is a kind of broadly based elite consensus on most consequential matters of education policy at the moment. It is harming children, I believe, and distorting what we know, but it is a practical reality. The Education Trust speaks to that elite consensus (University-Based Education Policy Researcher).

Sherman Dorn, a professor of education at the University of South Florida, who is affiliated with the Education Policy Studies Laboratory, pointed to the fact that political discussions of education haven't broken out of the idea that educational institutions alone are the solution to poverty in the United States.

> The Democratic liberal tradition has been spouting human capital rhetoric for the last forty odd years. It was Linden Johnson who said in signing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and the Higher Education Act, and the Economic Opportunity Act, which was the War on Poverty, that included the Job Corp, the Youth Corp, and Head Start, he was saying that education is going to solve poverty. George Miller and Ted Kennedy spout human capital rhetoric, they have for years. . . Ira Katznelson and Margaret Weir make the argument in *Schooling For All*. It is that we attached education to social citizenship in the 19th century, in contrast to European societies, which have social welfare attached to their notion of social citizenship. One way of thinking about it is Jennifer Hochschild and Scovronick, in their book [The American Dream and the Public Schools] a couple of years ago say, we view education as the root to mobility and to life long well being. European society views the whole of the social welfare state. We don't think of schooling as part of the welfare state, but it is, but we don't like to think about that way. So there is this odd separation of education in policy debates from everything else based on that unique assumption (Sherman Dorn, University of South Florida and EPSL).

This general shift in policy discussions in Washington, DC to a mostly Right of center position was also the claim of another academic researcher:

> The political center is conservative, the conservatives are lunatic Right, and the Left is the Center. You cannot use those ideological categories in talking about the practical process of making education policy in the United States in any of these groups you are talking about. The Right wing is absolutely the lunatic Right wing fringe in 1950's or 1960's. The so-called Center is the Right, and the so-called Liberal, they are basically Eisenhower Republicans, if you want to look for a vernacular bent to put on them. You find very few people who would even have been as far to the

> Left as Adlai Stevenson (Researcher, University-Based Education Policy Center).

Opponents and Ideological Debates

I asked think tank experts to talk about what organizations they see as their opponents when it comes to debates within the education policy field. The two most common responses among conservative think tanks were the unions and organizations that are against school choice.

For example, Max Pappas is the Policy Director of Freedom Works, an advocacy organization in Washington, DC noted that the National Education Association, the largest teacher's union in the country, stands in the way of their efforts to promote school choice. Freedom Works is the merger of Citizens for a Sound Economy, originally a grassroots organization affiliated with the Cato Institute, and Empower America, a conservative think tank.

> The teacher's unions tend to be the biggest opponent as far as school choice goes, it doesn't tend to be parents, they tend to be on our side, especially poor parents, who actually live in the places that their kids have to go to, really bad schools, because of the part of the city they live in. There is really no bigger opponent than the NEA and local school unions (Max Pappas, Freedom Works).

Similarly, Charlene Harr, President of the Education Policy Institute, a conservative think tank, describes the issue her organization takes with teacher's unions. After the publication of her book on union obstruction, she was invited to give congressional testimony on the issue.

> When I got to Washington, DC, that was an area that virtually nobody was looking at. That's part of the reason that I helped start the Education Policy Institute. We were looking at policy issues from the standpoint of union obstruction and union reaction. . . . We started out doing a

> book almost immediately, which is now out of print probably, called *The NEA and AFT, Teacher Unions in Power and Politics*. That was about 1996 when the book came out. That is what put us on the map as to what we were all about. So other think tanks in DC began to contact us if they needed information about the unions. They knew little or nothing about union activities from the inside. It has been a good niche for us to fill. I then did a book on the PTA, called *The Politics of the PTA* in 2002. That was the result of learning that the NEA had far more influence in the National PTA than I would have ever imagined (Charlene Harr, Education Policy Institute).

Shaka Mitchell, Associate Director of Policy at the Center for Education Reform, a conservative advocacy organization, is also critical of the unions.

> Opponents are pretty easy to identify because they are the ones who will talk about you in the paper, or the ones who don't talk to you when you are on the elevator with them. I think that the national teacher unions are groups that are foes of school choice and parent options. Those being the American Federation of Teachers, which tends to be more political, marginally more. And then you have the National Education Association. Those groups are admittedly against public school choice. When they say that they are for charter schools, which is something that the Center for Education Reform is in support of, I think they say charter schools in name only. I think that they have co-opted some of that language and given it a different meaning. Those are certainly opponents. I think that there are other groups, like last year during election season, you saw the People for the American Way (Shaka Mitchell, Center for Education Reform).

Neal McCluskey of the Cato Institute, also a supporter of school choice reform efforts, notes several organizations, including unions that stand in opposition to the educational efforts of the conservative Cato Institute.

> In terms of think tanks, The Center for American Progress comes to mind. Often you'd say Brookings, but Brookings is pretty school choice minded. This is an area where we

> have a lot of overlap. Generally the biggest opposition to school choice comes from unions. Probably equally opposed to choice are groups like the American School Board Association. But none of them draw on the number of people or the amount of money that the NEA or AFT does. There is the Arizona State Educational Policy Laboratory. We know about them, but I don't know if they get that much coverage. The Center for Education Policy are big supporters of NCLB and a national curriculum. Interestingly the Center for Education Policy is closely affiliated with *Phi Delta Kappa* and they had a link to them. I only read what they write about NCLB and it's not too radical. The NAACP opposes school choice, but I don't think they are all that much active in it. There is Americans United for the Separation for Church and State. They are ones that we frequently lock our heads with. I can't forget, People for the American Way. Every think tank has been established to advocate for a particular philosophy that is why it exists. I've never found any group that is truly objective from what I can tell. There is one group that is not really a think tank, but they do public opinion research, they are called Public Agenda. They are actually pretty good in terms of being even handed (Neal McCluskey, Cato Institute).

Although clearly anti-union in their general policy stand, Kirk Johnson of the Heritage Foundation actually described an incident where the Heritage Foundation and AFT (American Federation of Teachers) actually agreed on something.

> We do not always disagree with the unions, but we disagree on most things. It depends on the issue. We may form a coalition on issues whenever we have agreements. A couple of years ago we were interested in expanding the Background Questionnaire for the NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress). We were testifying at the NAGBE (National Assessment Governing Board in Education) Hearing. So was the AFT. We essentially came to the same conclusions of what we wanted. We thought that sending home a parent questionnaire to supplement the student questionnaire would provide a lot of really good information so that we could get a handle on why there are differences in student achievement. So that

> is actually is a place where the Heritage Foundation and the AFT actually agreed on something. It got into *Education Daily* and *Education Week*, the horror – the AFT and Heritage Foundation actually agree on something (Kirk Johnson, The Heritage Foundation).

Teachers' unions have a significant media presence. For example the National Education Association (NEA) in 2006 had 1,288 newspaper citations. Approximately half of these were not directly focused on education policy matters, but included honors and awards, political endorsements, pay and contract issues, monetary donations to candidates, and event announcements. In 2006, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) had 497 newspaper citations. Similarly, about half of the AFT's citations were dedicated to union and political matters that didn't speak directly to an education policy issue. While teacher's unions exceed think tanks in terms of education-related citations, they are inherently viewed as having a vested and specific interest, while think tanks by definition are non-profit, non-partisan research and policy analysis organizations. This status affords think tanks more credibility as media sources than both unions and advocacy organizations, even though many think tanks are ideological in their orientation and engage in little research.

On the other side, the only think tank that outwardly supports teachers' unions is the Economic Policy Institute, a liberal/progressive think tank which receives approximately 15% of its funding from labor union donations (Hoover Institution 2007). Joydeep Roy an economist there discusses the unions as well as the fact that EPI collaborates with the Brookings Institution on several issues, but not education.

> Generally the think tanks on the Left, for example the Center for American Progress, Century Foundation, and Brookings have been considered Left leaning. But certainly not Brookings on education. Last year we were

> doing a lot of research on fiscal policy, tax policy, and social security reform, we would often join with Brookings on those issues. However with education there is a disconnect. Their inclination is toward school choice and competition and accountability. EPI is not against accountability, but we are not sold on the idea that accountability will resolve education problems. There is also the Progressive Policy Institute. They are for charter schools. We are not against charter schools, but in the middle, we find that some of them are good and some of them are bad. Again, it does not seem that they are going to improve some things, for example the graduation rate. In education there is a general belief that 70-80% of the ills associated with U.S. education can be traced to teacher unions. I think that we are a think tank that is on one side of that. We are very much pro-unionization, and pro collective bargaining. I think that is one of the main issues that differentiates us from many of the other think tanks. We don't believe that teacher's unions are bad institutions. There are always improvements that can be made, but the idea of a union is supported. You can see where it is coming from. Whenever there is a controversial proposition, the teachers fight it united, very hard. That sends so many people, particularly on the Right - they get ticked off. They see unions as such a huge power. Teaching is one of the few professions where you have a union who really has a say. Many people believe, if you could just break the teacher's union, the Right could put through their reforms much more easily. Teacher unions have been quite steadfast in their opposition to many of the reform proposals that they believe are not going to solve the issues. It is easy to see where the opposition is coming from because they are very visible (Joydeep Roy, Economic Policy Institute).

I asked Kim Anderson, a lobbyist for the NEA (National Education Association) about how their union is labeled by conservatives as a purely self-interested group, for example on issues such as school choice and merit pay. She stated the following.

> It is a label that they have certainly attempted to assign to us. The conservative think tank and research machinery has had a number of missions in this country pertaining to any number of segments. For example, Democrats and labeling them as "tax and spend liberals" and making that a

> pejorative term. Whether it is the education establishment and labeling them as tools of the Democratic Party or "guardians of the status quo", "entrenched", "self-interested", "unionized." In any public discourse movement, you are going to see attempts by one side to label and categorize the other side. That is normal, it has existed from the beginning of time. There is nothing that we can do to stop them from saying that, because that is their rhetorical tactic for shaping and framing the debate in their favor. The best two things that we have in our arsenal are the fact that parents and the public trust teachers. Year in and year out when *USA Today* does its poll of America's Most Trusted Professions, teachers are always in the Top 5, most of the time the Top 3. That leads me to the next part of the arsenal, it is because people know that teachers care about their kids (Kim Anderson, NEA).

In terms of the opponents of liberal/progressive think tanks, most often conservative think tanks were identified. For example, a staff member of the liberal/progressive Center for Law and Social Policy identified several conservative think tanks as generally opposing the work of their organization.

> Heritage, Cato, the American Enterprise Institute, and Doug Breseroff. There are also individual thought leaders. I don't know if you have heard of Ron Haskins, he is at the Brookings Institution, but he used to be a leader in the Republican House. The ideas of our organization are most often supported by people on the more liberal or progressive side of the world, but we will work with anyone. We work a lot with Senator Snowe (R-Maine). There are moderate folks on both sides (Staff Member, Center for Law and Social Policy).

I was surprised to find in particular that the Center for American Progress did not situate its education policy work within an identifiable liberal/progressive framework. When I asked Cynthia Brown, the Director of Education Policy at the Center of American Progress who their opponents were in terms of education policy ideas, she answered as follows.

> I don't like to think in those terms. There are people that have notions that I don't agree with, frankly some of those are on the Left, some are on the Right. I don't find much to agree with from the Cato Institute for example. There is more bi-partisan agreement in education than on the other issues. I agree with Checker Finn [President of the conservative Fordham Foundation] on a lot of things. I just don't see it in terms of competition, I see it in terms of interesting ideas and proposals and strategies to get them adopted and put in place. I have witnessed a lot of change. I was part of the policy process for a lot of it. You don't see your recommendations become policy if you are in the competitive mode. You are trying to convince people and get partners and colleagues (Cynthia Brown, Center for American Progress).

Advocacy vs. Research

Many think tank experts said that they did a mix of research and advocacy, and differentiated themselves from purely academic institutions. Many explained that they did more secondary data analysis, or used data and reports produced by other think tanks or education advocacy organizations, and synthesized them into shorter reports that are more accessible to the public and policy makers. The added component of advocacy occurs across all types of think tanks to some degree. Below are statements from members of the libertarian Cato Institute, liberal/progressive Political Research Associates, and centrist Education Sector, which all reflect that advocacy is a component of the new type of think tank:

> I think we do a mix of research and advocacy. We haven't done as much of what you might consider purely academic research. We aren't doing a lot of econometric analyses and things like that, I think we do something that is a little more accessible, for lack of a better term, to regular folks. Some of our research will use NCES data and other such data. We do research that has immediate policy consequences (Neal McCluskey, Education Policy Analyst, Cato Institute).

> We've debated this long and hard, what is our role? We've come up with a way of thinking of ourselves as a useful contributor to the progressive movement in that we can design what is called "action research." What we mean by that is that it is some interactive result of researchers communicating with the leaders of progressive movements to discover what kind of research those movements need (Pam Chamberline, Political Research Associates).

> I guess what we really want to be is neither advocates nor researchers, but the people, if you are a journalist, if you are a policy maker, a parent, and you just want accessible, trustworthy information about education policy, we want to be the people that you come to. Yes we have some views on some things, but we want to put across what is honest in an unbiased fashion (Sara Mead, Education Sector & Progressive Policy Institute).

As noted earlier, in Washington, DC, the lines between think tanks and advocacy organizations are quite blurred. Below, Diane Stark Rentner, the Deputy Director of the Center on Education Policy, a non-profit organization that describes itself as an advocate for children, but not specifically as a research organization or a think tank. Rentner notes the importance of communicating their work to policy makers, but also noted an evaluation of the Center, which suggested it needed more original research.

> We figured that our value added was that we knew how to write for policy makers having spent time on the Hill. We knew that you can't give people on Capitol Hill a very complex research paper, you have to boil it down into findings that are simple to understand and the bottom line. We did that for a while, about five years into the Center, we were advised that we should do an evaluation of our efforts and develop a plan based on that evaluation. And one of the criticisms was that we had no original research. We then set out to change that (Diane Stark Rentner, Deputy Director, Center on Education Policy).

Rentner also describes the pressure her organization sometimes faces from legislators who want research results to say something specific.

> We are often pushed to say more than our report says, but we are very reluctant to do that. Our idea is, we do the research, we broadly distribute it, and get it out there for everybody to see. Then they can make decisions based on that. I don't think that it would be proper for us to have a legislative agenda that these are the things that we think need to be done (Diane Stark Rentner, Deputy Director, Center for Education Policy).

Rick Hess of the American Enterprise Institute and editor of the journal *Education Next*, describes the type of work he does as different from a traditional academic think tank. He puts emphasis on the discussion of new ideas and the role of advocacy.

> I am certainly not a research entity, not in any pure sense. I do research, but I also do a lot of thumb sucking and explaining. I would say that I see myself as an honest advocate. I don't advocate with the notion that I am serving somebody else's larger partisan agenda. There are certain pieces of the puzzle where it seems to me that certain things are suggested by good sense, and I try to talk about those things on their merits. . . . On other things where I am uncertain, or where I think that people have tried to have it both ways, or where people are trying to deal dirty, I try to use both public rhetoric and research to hold people to account so they are forced to be clear about what they are saying and doing (Rick Hess, American Enterprise Institute).

Given their relatively small size and number when compared to the hundreds of university based education researchers, think tanks have a lot of visibility in defining education debates for policy makers and the media than do university based researchers. Although think tanks have always produced research reports that have been forwarded to the media, relevant congressional and senate committees, and education practitioners, there has been a more recent push to summarize such reports, making them more accessible to legislators, media, and the public. This process has aided many in the think tank world when it comes to advocating for a policy recommendation, or bringing

awareness to data summarizing a particular policy issue. For example, Zoe Nueberger of the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, a liberal/progressive think tank, which does a considerable amount of economic research and analysis, also has a need to make data available to policy makers.

> In my areas I do very little primary or original research. I do a fair amount of synthesizing of research done by others. Looking at reports that might be put out by a group like the Urban Institute or Mathematics Policy Research, and trying to present findings in ways that are understandable to a wider audience as well as make the links between the research that they have done and current policy (Zoe Nueberger, Center for Budget and Policy Priorities).

A staff member of the Center for Law and Social Policy, a liberal/progressive Washington, DC based think tank, notes that what they do is not solely research, but a combination of research, advocacy, and technical assistance.

> We are a combination of research and advocacy and technical assistance, so we are sort of unique in that sense. We are also going out and working with policy makers directly. If there is a particular policy that people become experts in and we spend a lot of time studying how states are putting Pre-K in community based school settings, now we have the capacity to be able to go out and help policy makers more directly by giving them information (Staff Member, Center for Law and Social Policy).

Joydeep Roy, an economist at the liberal/progressive Economic Policy Institute notes that they are first and foremost a research entity, however they do their best to disseminate their research findings. He also contrasts the type of original work that they do with the work of conservative think tanks.

> People here do research. We are a research think tank. We do have people in publications and communications who try their best to disseminate our research. Some of the think tanks which are very prominent in other respects, for example The Heritage Foundation and Cato Institute. They

> do not do original work on education (Joydeep Roy, Economic Policy Institute).

Similarly, Richard Kahlenberg of the centrist Century Foundation, considers conservative think tanks like the Heritage Foundation as advocates more than researchers.

> I would say that we are more on the research side. I would put groups like Heritage in the advocacy column. I think groups like Brookings are on the research side. We are probably somewhere in between, but tilted more towards Brookings in terms of research. We still write books. My sense is that anything that I get from Heritage is a ten page brief (Richard Kahlenberg, Century Foundation).

David Hogberg, who is the Director of Education Watch, a division of the Capital Research Center, a conservative think tank, notes the variation in think tanks today when it comes to a focus on advocacy versus research.

> Regarding think tanks and their role, it depends on the think tank. Something like the Brookings Institution and the Hoover Institution are not necessarily the type of think tanks that engage in a lot of advocacy, maybe a little bit, but they tend to do more research. It is almost like a university, except as a professor there you don't have to teach classes. Others like the Heritage Foundation, the Urban Institute, Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, Cato Institute, it is research and you very much want to affect the policy world with it. They are two different animals, think tanks cannot always be pushed into a very clear category. Some are engaged in advocacy, others are not. Others, might be active in other areas, a think tank that deals with religion may not necessarily be involved in the policy world, but they might be more involved with the churches (David Hogberg, Capital Research Center).

Chester Finn, President of the conservative Fordham Foundation and visiting scholar at the Hoover Institution, acknowledges that his think tank engages in advocacy, but not for a particular industry interest.

> There is a continuum here, from very academic research to opinion pieces which advance a point of view or an interest. We are an advocacy group in terms of the advocacy of ideas that we think very highly of. There are other advocacy groups that are advocating what I would term, their own self-interest. The famous example outside of education would be the Tobacco Institute. It is a 501(c)(3) research institution that kept discovering that smoking didn't do any harm. They are a think tank fronting for an industry interest (Chester E. Finn, President, Fordham Foundation).

The growing importance of think tanks in the policy making process and the shift among many away from the academic model and towards the advocacy model has various implications for the assumptions upon which education policy is made. The next chapter more directly speaks to this issue and examines whether the relevancy of social scientific research in the context of education policy debates has eroded over the past two decades, while the media presence and influence of advocacy think tanks has increased.

Chapter 7

Think Tanks, Education Experts, and the Relevance of Academic Research

The growth of conservative advocacy think tanks and the general shift within the Washington, DC policy community on education policy issues over the past two decades has raised larger questions of the significance, relevance, and role of social scientific research in the policy making process. I argue that while social scientific research produced at universities has been marginalized by conservative think tanks, the university itself has retreated from engaging in applied research that is engaged in social, political, and economic reform. Currently the vast intellectual and human capital available at universities and the abundance of social scientific research they produce far exceeds that of conservative think tanks and other conservative policy planning organizations. Additionally the greater financial resources of progressive and mainline philanthropy far outweigh the foundation grants to conservative think tanks. Nevertheless conservatives have won the "war of ideas" when it comes to shifting the parameters of education policy debates, not because they have more convincing or better research, but because they have built a coalition and social movement that has been able to dominate the debate.

The focus throughout this research has been think tanks, however this chapter discusses experts, academics, and education advocates who have received considerable attention from the media. Additionally it describes the increasing tension between academic researchers and conservative think tank education experts on matters of research and policy. Given the vast amount of education research produced at universities, I was interested to see how university-based education-policy centers stacked up against think tanks. I found a total of fifty-nine university-based education-

policy centers conducting research on both K-12 and higher education policy issues. These university-based policy centers vary drastically in size, scope, and funding. At some colleges and universities their education centers exist more in name only, and are not funded, and staffed part-time by just one faculty member. At the other end of the spectrum there are several prominent university based education policy research centers that are funded by millions of dollars in grants and have a full-time research staff. The largest is the Hoover Institution, which in 2004 had a budget of over $32 million dollars (Hoover Institution 2007). In many ways Hoover operates and behaves as a conservative think tank, however it is still tied to Stanford University and is not an independent 501(c)(3) organization.

Table 11 lists the university based research centers that generate the most education topic newspaper citations. As compared to the top think tanks, which garner an average of one-hundred or more newspaper citations about education in a given year, university based research centers hardly register. However leading in education newspaper citations is the Hoover Institution with 39 education topic citations in 2001 and 56 in 2006. Hoover was followed by the Harvard Civil Rights Project,[5] Policy Analysis for California Education, and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform.

[5] In 2006 the Harvard Civil Rights Project relocated and became the UCLA Civil Rights Project.

Table 11. Newspapers Citations for University Based Education Policy Centers (2001, 2006)

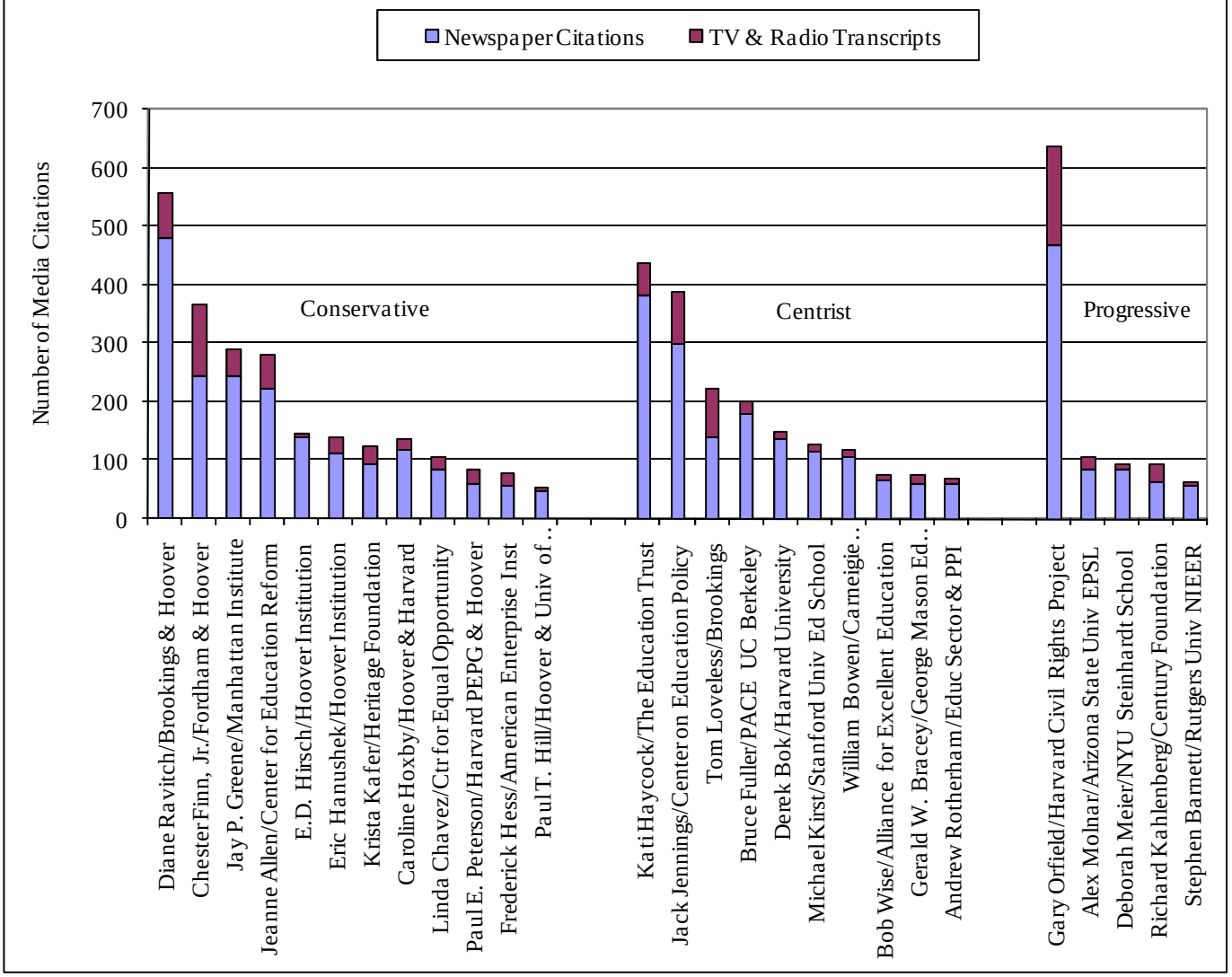
		Newspaper Citations	
Education Policy Research Center	**Located At:**	**2001**	**2006**
Hoover Institution	Stanford University	39	56
Harvard Civil Rights Project	Harvard University (moved to UCLA in 2006)	30	33
Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE)	University of California-Berkeley, Stanford	10	30
Annenberg Institute for School Reform	Brown University	15	19
National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education	Columbia University	6	7
Center for the Study of Testing, Evaluation & Education Policy	Boston College	5	7
Center for the Study of Education Policy	Illinois State University	1	11
Center for the Social Organization of Schools	John Hopkins University	8	4
Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE)	UPenn, Columbia, Harvard, Stanford, others	7	4
Education Policy Studies Laboratory (EPSL)	Arizona State University	1	9
Program on Education Policy & Governance (PEPG)	Harvard University	7	3

Table 11 identifies newspaper articles where the name of the university based research center appeared in the context of an education story. The table does not count instances where journalists cited academic researchers and and/or their universities, but did not name the educational center or institute. Researchers from these centers may well have additional newspaper citations where only the university rather than the education policy center is cited.

As an alternative method to gauge the role and profile of educational experts both inside and outside of academia, I measured the number of newspaper, tv, and radio citations generated by individuals in the field. Chart 9 indicates education experts with fifty or more media citations over a six-year period, 2001-2006. These education policy experts include important individuals from think tanks, advocacy organizations, and universities. Experts were grouped into three categories: conservative, centrist, and

progressive. Conservative experts as a group are the easiest to identify because they are either affiliated with conservative think tanks or advocacy organizations and produce research that generally supports policies for privatization, vouchers, cuts in education funding, the elimination of race-based education policies, and support for standards, testing, and a traditional curriculum. Second I grouped progressive policy experts together. These were individuals whose research and policy recommendations address root causes of race, class, and gender inequities in education. Additionally these individuals generally support organized labor, progressive teaching methods, and increased funding for education. The third group was centrist policy experts. This group of individuals is represented by people whose research and policy concerns did not definitively put them in either the conservative or progressive group. The work of individuals within this group however may overlap with either conservative or progressive perspectives. It should be noted that the ideological labels used in the classification of education experts serve only as a guide and do not necessarily represent the personal political views of any individual.

Chart 9. Education Experts with 50+ Media Citations 2001-2006
Drawn from Think Tanks, Advocacy Organizations & Universities



The pattern of conservative, centrist and progressive policy experts follows the pattern of think tanks more generally, with conservative and centrist scholars receiving far more media attention than progressive scholars. The one exception to this pattern is Gary Orfield of the Harvard Civil Rights Project, who garnered more media attention between 2001-2006 than anyone else in the field of education research. As for the

conservative expert profile, seven of the twelve conservative education policy experts are affiliated with the Hoover Institution, while five are affiliated with conservative think tanks. Attracting the most media attention of the conservative experts is Diane Ravitch of Brookings and the Hoover Institution who received 557 education media citations over the 6 year period from 2001-2006. Ravitch was followed by Chester Finn, President of the Fordham Foundation, who had 366 education media citations during this same period. The centrist expert group was led by Kati Haycock, Director of the Education Trust, a Washington DC based advocacy organization, with 436 education citations. Haycock was followed by Jack Jennings, President of the Center on Education Policy, another Washington based advocacy organization.

High Profile Debates Among Education Experts

The increasing profile of conservative education experts has not gone unnoticed by academics. A small number of academics as well as those from liberal/progressive think tanks have questioned both the validity and reliability of the research conducted at conservative think tanks. Some of the most notable criticisms have come from the Educational Policy Studies Laboratory (EPSL) at Arizona State University. In 2006 this university based education policy center created the "Think Tank Review Project" to analyze and review the work of conservative think tanks and policy centers. The center has reviewed the work of several conservative think tanks including the Cato Institute, Manhattan Institute, and Fordham Institute.[6] With a panel of over thirty reviewers located at various universities across the country, the Educational Policy Studies Laboratory has been the first coordinated effort to challenge the very basis of conservative think tank

[6] In 2006 the Fordham Foundation changed its name to the Fordham Institute.

education policy work. In an article in *Education Week*, Kevin G. Weiner and Alex Molnar of EPSL described the impetus for the Think Tank Review Project.

> At a time when America's education policy makers have nominally embraced the idea of tying school reform to "scientifically based research," many of the nation's most influential reports are little more than junk science. A hodgepodge of private "think tanks" at both the state and national levels wield significant and very often undeserved influence in policy discussions by cranking out an array of well-funded and slickly produced - yet ideologically driven - research. Often written by people with little discernible expertise and invariably not subjected to peer review, these reports consistently end with a findings section that supports the ideological preferences of the research sponsor (Welner and Molnar February 28, 2007).

Although the media attention they have received thus far pales in comparison to that of conservative think tanks, as noted to me in interviews with conservative policy experts, EPSL has become a distinctly noticeable thorn in their side.

School Accountability

One critique of the work of a conservative think tank by outside researchers concerned accountability. In September 2007, the conservative Lexington Institute released a report titled, "Portfolios: A Backward Step in School Accountability." With No Child Left Behind (NCLB) up for reauthorization, various think tanks and policy centers have been releasing reports to maintain the test-based framework of the law. The Lexington Institute Report, written by Robert Holland, argues against expanding measures of assessment to include alternative measures such as student portfolios. His research finds portfolio assessment to be a severely flawed measure of student achievement. William J. Mathis who is a professor of School Finance at the University

of Vermont and serves as superintendent for the Rutland Northeast Supervisory Union conducted the review of Holland's work. His critique of the study is as follows,

> The literature review cherry-picks two studies, both conducted 13 years ago and, on the basis of those studies, concludes that portfolios are not reliable and are too expensive for large scale accountability systems. Yet other large scale studies of portfolios - some of which are discussed in one of the two studies that the report itself relies on - come to different conclusions but are not examined or even mentioned (Mathis September 19, 2007).

The critique that certain think tanks do not conduct proper literature reviews was a frequent theme during the course of interviews I conducted with education researchers. For example, a researcher at Columbia University's Center for the Study of Privatization in Education noted the following.

> There is a very simple step that the think tanks never do in research, they don't think it is legitimate. They never perform a literature review. They just start off as if theirs is the only piece of evidence that has ever been created on this topic, and there is a protocol for doing a literature review. And they do not do it (Researcher, Center for the Study of Privatization in Education, Columbia University).

Public School vs. Private School Performance

Critiques of education policy research have also extended beyond conservative think tanks to university based academics. One example was a report titled "On the Public-Private School Achievement Debate," released in August of 2006 by Paul E. Peterson and Elena Llaudet of Harvard University's Program for Education Policy and Governance (PEPG). The PEPG report followed the release of two federally funded studies, one conducted by statisticians at the Educational Testing Service (ETS) and the other by Columbia University's National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education. Two reviewers critique the Peterson and Llaudet study as follows:

> While the findings from these two federally-funded studies question past beliefs that private schools generate higher academic achievement, the Harvard study produced a different conclusion by introducing "alternative models" for the analyses. According to the Harvard study, the alternative models reveal that private-school students achieve at higher levels than public school students, even after controlling for differences in student characteristics. However, the Harvard analysis used inadequate and ill-suited variables, failed to account for missing data, and produced weaker estimates of student achievement. For these reasons, the evidence and claims in that study are critically flawed (Lubienski and Theule-Lubienski August 20, 2006).

Despite this critique, the day following the release of the PEPG report, its findings were summarized, posted, and disseminated by various conservative think tanks including the Heritage Foundation.

School Vouchers

This is not the first time that Paul E. Peterson's research has come under fire for its lack of methodological rigor. One of the most notable previous cases followed the release of a report by Peterson in August of 2000 during the Bush and Gore presidential race. A *Boston Herald* editorial by-line stated "The facts are clear and persuasive: School vouchers work (Boston Herald Editorial August 30, 2000)." The editorial went on to describe how Peterson's research provides evidence that vouchers could eliminate the achievement gap between black and white students and should be a central point of debate for the 2000 election. The influence and impact of Peterson's study was widespread and included appearances on CNN and the *News Hour with Jim Lehrer*. It wasn't until three years later when criticism over the study's results played out fully in an article written by Michael Winerip for the *New York Times*. Peterson had lost support from his research partner in the project, *Mathematica Policy Research*, for his partisan

interpretation of the results. Eventually Alan B. Krueger, a Princeton economist reviewed the data and concluded that "Professor Peterson had it all wrong - not even the black students using vouchers had made any test gains (Boston Herald Editorial August 30, 2000; Winerip May 7, 2003)."

Charter Schools

Another contentious debate occurred in 2004 when a study appeared in the *New York Times* that found charter school students had lower scores in reading and math compared to regular public school students. The American Federation of Teachers had commissioned this study, which used government selected data. Outraged over the attention the report received, thirty-one conservative education scholars from think tanks and universities signed on to advertisements taken out in *the New York Times* and *Education Week* denouncing the AFT research. The advertisements highlighted that the study was backed by an interest group and should have been responsibly sent out to independent scholars for review and comment. This criticism was ironic, given that ideologically conservative think tanks very rarely send their reports and briefs out for review, yet receive considerable media attention, often presenting their work as independent, non-partisan research.

The debate over charter schools continued with the release of a report by Caroline Hoxby, a prominent economist at Harvard University, who is affiliated with the National Bureau of Economic Research and the Hoover Institution. The report titled, "A Straightforward Comparison of Charter Schools and Regular Public Schools in the United States," Hoxby's findings indicated that charter school students were more proficient in reading and math than regular public school students. The results of the

report were not surprising given that Hoxby's work has generally supported the benefits of market mechanisms in schools. Given the attention received by the original AFT report, attention now turned to Hoxby's methods. In 2005 Joydeep Roy and Lawrence Mishel economists at the Economic Policy Institute in Washington, DC, produced a report titled "Advantage None: Re-examining Hoxby's finding of charter school benefits." A think tank supportive of the AFT, the Economic Policy Institute argued that Hoxby failed to properly control for student background and that her data was weaker in two ways than the data from the AFT study she originally critiqued (Roy and Mishel 2005). Additional criticism of Hoxby's work has come from other economists, including Jesse Rothstein of Princeton and Craig Newmark of North Carolina State University.

Graduation Rates

Another conservative think tank expert who has come under considerable fire from academics has been Jay P. Greene of the Manhattan Institute. In 2007, a Manhattan Institute report authored by Greene and Marcus Winters titled, "How Much Are Public School Teachers Paid?" was reviewed by Sean Corcoran of New York University and Lawrence Mishel of the Economic Policy Institute. The findings of the study were drawn from the National Compensation Survey (NCS) earnings data and concluded that teachers are better paid than most white-collar professionals. However in their review of the methods, Corcoran and Mishel argue that Greene and Winters used hourly rates of pay to calculate teacher's salaries even though "the Bureau of Labor Statistics - which publishes the NCS - explicitly warned its users not to use hourly rates of pay in this exact same context (Corcoran and Mishel February 19, 2007, p. 1)."

Greene's studies, however, continue to receive considerable attention from the media as shown by the results of this research. Greene is the third leading conservative education expert, being cited just under 300 times in newspaper, television, and radio education stories between 2001-2006. The significance of Greene's research findings has gone beyond that of frequent appearances in newspapers. In 2002 his research on vouchers was cited four times by the U.S. Supreme Court in the 5-4 decision that upheld Cleveland's state-enacted school voucher program. The court stated that the program did not violate the U.S. Constitution (Cavanagh October 13, 2004; Walsh June 27, 2002)

Early Childhood Education Programs

Another issue that has received considerable attention from both think tanks and academics is universal pre-school. In all cases conservative think tanks have been against universal preschool and its costs. Other think tanks and university-based researchers are split on the issue, with some supporting programs geared toward low-income children, whereas others support pre-school for all children. The Reason Foundation, a conservative think tank based in California, gave the issue particular attention in 2006 because of Proposition 82, the "Preschool for All Initiative" in California.

In 2006, Stephen Barnett, Director of the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at Rutgers University, reviewed a publication by the conservative Reason Foundation. The report titled, "Assessing Proposals for Preschool and Kindergarten: Essential Information for Parents, Taxpayers and Policymakers" written by Darcy Olsen and Lisa Snell, suggested that universal pre-school and all day kindergarten programs are not cost effective and unnecessary. Between 2005-2007, the study was cited more than a dozen times in both state and national newspapers. Coverage included

two stories in *Education Week* and an editorial in the *Richmond Times Dispatch* (VA) outlining the findings of Reason's Report as well Barnett's criticism of it. There were also opinion pieces written by the report's author for the *Bergen County Record* and the *Wall Street Journal* (Dalmia and Snell March 16, 2006; Education Week January 25, 2006; Education Week October 31, 2007; Richmond Times Dispatch Editorial June 3, 2006).

In his review, Barnett argues that the Reason Foundation Report has several flaws including the following:

> The Reason Foundation report is essentially a selective review of studies and accounts of early childhood programs. It is presented as an argument against universal pre-school and all-day kindergarten programs and more specifically against new proposals in Arizona, California, and Illinois. The methodology that they articulate stets forth high standards for research... However the authors do not consistently apply these standards to the research they cite (Barnett May 12, 2006, p. 5).

Think Tanks vs. Universities

During the course of my interviews, staff at conservative think tanks often argued that universities are dominated by liberal ideas and generally not hospitable places for conservative researchers. Many academics and some centrist and liberal think tank staff argued that what conservative think tanks are engaging in is altogether different from pure ideology. Debates on this issue were very heated, at times between conservative and liberal/progressive think tanks, but more often between conservative think tanks and university based researchers.

Think tank staff not only described the differences between think tanks and the university, but also were critical of academia more generally. For example, David

Hogberg of the Capital Research Center, who has a Ph.D. in Political Science finds the general climate in academia unwelcoming to conservative ideas.

> I think that at least for someone on the conservative side, the nice thing about working at a think tank is that I don't have to worry about university politics, which tend to lean Left and sometimes can lean Left in ways that are authoritarian, and if you have conservative views, it may not be a very hospitable place (David Hogberg, Capital Research Center).

Similarly Kirk Johnson of the Heritage Foundation notes why a think tank, rather than academia is a good fit for someone with conservative views.

> I didn't want to get into a tenure rat race where I must publish things in obscure journals about even more obscure topics, just so I can get tenure and some sort of job security. That wasn't the life for me. So therefore think tanks are very appealing in that way. I don't have to worry so much about the bureaucracy that goes along with university life. I don't have to worry, as is the case with many conservatives, about political correctness. A very good friend of mine who is now a new assistant professor at a Midwestern liberal arts college, used the word "Oriental Culture" in a lecture. He was talking about an article dealing with his class. A student accused him of harassment (Kirk Johnson, Heritage Foundation).

Both Johnson of Heritage and Hogberg of the Capital Research Center describe more specifically the relevance of research being conducted at a think tank versus a university setting, indicating the later does not reach a wide audience.

> Here's where I see the problem with university based research, and where the think tanks have a distinct advantage. It is very difficult for the standard university peer review journals to have timeliness and relevance. If you submit something in one year, maybe it will be published in the next year, if not two years. That's why there are so many good people who do very good work, who work for universities. Myself included opt for think tanks. That is not to say that I don't also work at a university. I am also an adjunct professor at George Mason

> University where I teach statistics in the School of Public Policy. I know if I went to a university environment full-time, I wouldn't be able to enjoy the sort of timeliness that I am used to here [at the Heritage Foundation] now (Kirk Johnson, Heritage Foundation).

> A lot of the research they [academics] do go into obscure journals that get read by 30-40 people who work in the same discipline, or a specialized area in that discipline. It may or may not have any real bearing on the policy world. The primary purpose of it is not to affect the policy world, it is to get tenure. Sometimes that means researching very obscure things that no one beyond those 30-40 people who have similar interests are going to care about. Here I get to research things that people care about, sometimes we make the news, you can call that ego if you want, it is nice sometimes to know that you are having an effect on the policy process (David Hogberg, Capital Research Center).

There were more general critiques of the university as well. For example, Rick Hess discusses how academia as a bureaucratic institution is not necessarily open to critical ideas whether they are coming from a politically Right or Left perspective.

> Right now the university is caught by a variety of institutional anachronisms. If you want to engage as a public intellectual, the university is an uncomfortable place. Whether you are Right or Left doesn't make a difference. You have to put it through a form, through tendentious jargon. The kinds of Leftists that come to a university are the kinds of Leftists who have no impact on the discourse because they are tendentious and hard to follow. Serious public intellectuals, Right or Left, don't score points within the disciplines. There is an underlying presumption in the universities that sensible people are going to be generally uncomfortable with market mechanisms and sensible people understand the desirability of technocratic regulation. Folks like me, who for whatever reason, our priors kind of line up differently. I think the larger problem is that universities are not hospitable to either entrepreneurial discourse or public discourse (Rick Hess, American Enterprise Institute).

Additionally Chester Finn, President of the conservative Fordham Foundation is critical more specifically of schools of education within academia.

> In the field of education I have found that schools of education are profoundly limited in their world view and very conventional in their thinking. If you want to get outside of the box, which I do, in a college of education faculty is about the worst place in the world to be. What E.D. Hirsh refers to as the "thought world" is paralyzing. I am one of the lucky people who sort of happily fit into the think tank world to get away from the paralysis of the education school part of the universities (Chester Finn, Fordham Foundation).

Neal McCluskey of the libertarian Cato Institute concurs, stating that schools of education have become irrelevant in the policy world.

> My reading from a public policy point of view is that education schools are pretty much irrelevant. There is a lot to be said for why they are irrelevant. It is interesting because most of the scholarly work that we use here and that our opponents tend to draw upon is done by economists. The education school people, to an extent it is because they look so much at pedagogy, at least as libertarians, that is not so much a concern for us. We think that parents should be able to choose a school that uses the pedagogical technique they like in the classrooms (Neal McCluskey, Cato Institute).

Sherman Dorn, an education historian from the University of South Florida, notes that the power of schools of education have had throughout the 20th century on policy has been overstated by conservatives.

> The three academics with the most influence on national education policy in the 1960's were Kenneth Clark, stretching from the 1950's and his psychological work that was cited by the Supreme Court in Brown; James Coleman for the Coleman Report in 1966; and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who first did a seminar on the Coleman Report at Harvard, then as an to President Nixon, pushed for the creation of the National Institute of Education. It is not as though conservative think tanks ever had to go against any

> huge juggernaut of colleges of education (Sherman Dorn, University of South Florida).

Not all education policy institutes however were critiqued by conservatives. Kirk Johnson and Dan Lips of the Heritage Foundation both noted the research being done by the following scholars Jay Greene (Department of Education Reform at the University of Arkansas, and fellow at the Manhattan Institute), Caroline Hoxby (Harvard University & National Bureau of Economic Research Fellow), and Paul Peterson (Harvard University Program on Education Policy and Governance). These academics in particular have studied the potential benefits of privatization in the public schools. Johnson and Lips express their support of this university based research below.

> If you look at schools of education, there are very few hospitable places for education reformers or really good research outfits. One of the very few ones that is actually housed in a College of Education is one that is being set up by Jay Greene at the University of Arkansas. He actually comes from a think tank [The Manhattan Institute] (Kirk Johnson, The Heritage Foundation).

> The Paul Peterson shop up at Harvard. They have focused a lot of their research on some of the school reform ideas that the conservative think tanks have been working on for some time, such as school choice, vouchers, and competition in education. Some of their research such as Professor Hoxby's and Professor Peterson's research have been groundbreaking and relevant and tend to support the conclusions that we are arguing for (Dan Lips, Heritage Foundation).

People outside of the think tanks however took a critical stand on the research of conservative think tanks and their criticisms of academia. Kim Anderson of the National Education Association, the largest teacher's union in the United States noted academia as the next target for conservatives. Coincidentally, David Horowitz's book *The Professors*, was released just two months after the interview was conducted.

> The next target of the Right is academia. When anyone from the Right is interviewed by any people who are challenging the norms, the Right calls them "fringe", "elitist", or "out of touch with real America." I think that if there is a resurgence of academia in policy in a real way, the next target will be that. I think the Right will try to target and contain that sector as being out of touch (Kim Anderson, National Education Association).

Criticism of conservative think tanks also came from academics, many of whom agreed that conservative think tanks have been successful and strategic in getting out their message to the media and developing relationships with policy makers. However they noted that what many think tanks do can simply not be termed research and that representing it in such a way is simply inaccurate. For example, a professor from a university based education policy center described what he sees as the difference between conservative think tank research and academic research.

> They are never ever going to say anything that doesn't support their advocacy for charter schools. That's just the way it is. The Heritage Foundation is never ever, ever going to say anything that contradicts a market based solution to anything. That is just not going to happen. They certainly are advocates, it distorts their purported research mission. You can't fit honest research into a pre-determined advocacy agenda if the conclusions are already drawn before you do the research (Researcher, university based policy center).

This same academic researcher noted that if he designed a study that found that school vouchers worked in some capacity, he would have to report those results. That no matter what, he would not change research results to support his political orientation. His quote is as follows,

> Obviously I have my values and my advocacies and all of that, but I can't turn day into night. I can't make the data show what they don't show. In my view, in some ways you could certainly argue that my interests are informed by my

> politics, but my research results are not. They simply are not. (Researcher, University-Based Education Policy Center).

Carol Weiss, who has studied think tanks and is a professor in the School of Education at Harvard University, also discussed with me in an interview how conservative think tank research in particular differs from academic research.

> It is certainly true that university based policy centers do different kinds of research. They do research when they don't know the answer. The conservative think tanks know the answer before they start the research. In the universities, the aim is to discover stuff, and to write about it in respected academic journals (Carol Weiss, School of Education, Harvard University).

Similarly, Catherine Lugg, a faculty member in the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University and a researcher at Arizona State's Education Policy Studies Laboratory, noted the difference she sees between academics and think tanks in an interview:

> Think tanks generate policy briefs that reflect the think tank's ideological lines. They are very consistent and you won't see any surprises. My favorite example is that it will probably be the first frosty Friday in July, before you see an Afro-centric critique of public education coming out of the Heritage Foundation. Think tanks are very narrow in theoretical approach and ideological assumptions (Catherine Lugg, EPSL and Rutgers).

Additionally, a researcher for the Columbia University Center for the Study of Privatization in Education notes the following about how he believes what many think tanks do is simply not research, but policy analysis.

> If it doesn't involve peer review, it is just policy analysis. Now that's fine, but then you are not a research center, you are a policy center. The trouble with the think tanks is that they try to have it both ways. They try to claim that it is research and it has just as good standards as anything

> published in a journal, but that it is also timely and relevant. The process of research doesn't readily allow for both of those things. It wouldn't be so bad if one didn't try to pass off what is essentially policy analysis as research, and didn't try to sit on a panel with a researcher and try to argue ones analysis was better than somebody else's research. When I sit on these panels with policy analysts, it is not the same thing as research. By getting equal media time, equal seminar time, or equal panel time, the implication is that these are the same (Researcher, Columbia University Center for the Study of Privatization in Education).

This common criticism about what think tanks do as simply not research was accompanied by a discussion about peer review. When I asked think tanks about whether or not they had a peer review process, most did not, but some had an internal system, while others actually sent their work to outside reviewers in the field. For example, Zoe Nueberger of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a liberal/progressive think tank, discusses their use of peer reviewed academic research, but also the fact that many think tanks, like themselves, do not have a formal peer review process.

> For that [a paper on federal nutrition programs] we relied on many different sources for more scientific research, including research that came out of universities. Generally speaking I would say, if I am relying on research that is coming out of a university I would want to either make sure that it has already gone through some peer review process, or check with others in the field to make sure that it is considered methodologically sound. Certainly there is a tension. We try very hard to put out analysis that is rigorous and fair and an honest piece of data even though there is no peer review process. I think there are other organizations that don't necessarily apply that level of review (Zoe Nueberger, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities).

When I asked Kirk Johnson of the Heritage Foundation about peer review, he stated that it interfered with the timeliness and relevance of the research. Additionally he

noted that many of the studies conducted at Heritage use national databases and can be reproduced.

> If you read any of my heavy quantitative works that are done under the Center for Data Analysis, I use with few exceptions, large federal databases. Any academic can usually download these. They are data that anyone can go out and use and run my analysis. This is one of the criteria with peer review. We are one of a handful of organizations in town that are pushing for more publicly available data in that regard. We think that openness and transparency are of paramount importance. Secondly we are concerned that the peer review process is not a panacea for a number of reasons. The first one as I've said is timeliness. If you have a long peer review process like you do with a standard academic article you will be waiting eighteen months on average before you get anything out. Second, peer review does not necessarily mean that you are going to get flawless research out. There are lots of examples where bad analysis got published after peer review. Because during the peer review process, what does the typical academic do? I've been on peer review panels for federal reviews of research and also for journals, and academics who do peer review, are they actually calculating the statistics in the models to make sure that they are right? No. They are looking at the write up and the methodology and they usually make suggestions in the margins (Kirk Johnson, Heritage Foundation).

When I asked university based researchers about the claim made by think tanks that they do not have time to conduct peer review given the constraints of the policy world, I received the following answers.

> That is bullshit. You can pay for peer review to be done dispassionately in 24 hours. The second reason it is bullshit - it is suggesting that peer review is not a correct way to proceed. If they are claiming that peer review is not a correct way to validate studies then they have to come up with a better way, there is no better way than peer review. The idea that you don't have to subject your work to peer review is ridiculous (Researcher, Center for the Study of Privatization in Education, Columbia University).

Another researcher based at a university policy center commented on the fact that although peer review does take time, it should not prevent think tanks from providing sufficient information about their methodology and data.

> There is an important distinction between all of the reports that we [university based policy centers] put out and the reports you see at many private think tanks. That is, if you wished, based on what we told you about our method, replicate that report. That is one of the common violations of academic cannon that you find in private think tanks. Some of them have made an art of providing information in tables that is not sufficient to understand how they arrived at the results they did, certainly, much less, attempt to replicate what they did. That is a very pervasive and serious problem with their work. The people doing this know how to provide the information. My conclusion is that they willfully do not. You could never get away with that with a refereed journal. I understand that doing a peer review process does take time. These are aimed to be dropped right into a particular legislative debate. That does not speak to the point of providing sufficient information about your methods. That can be done without any additional time being taken (Researcher, university based education policy center).

During the course of my research I interviewed Charles Achilles, a professor of education at both Eastern Michigan University and Seaton Hall University. He also has an affiliation with the Arizona State Education Policy Studies Laboratory. Best known for his research on class size, Achilles also informed me that he is listed as an education expert in the Heritage Foundation's Policy Directory.

> I am a card carrying member of the Heritage Foundation. I am listed in their public policy experts in two areas. If you open their big thick book, you will find I'm in K-12 education and higher education. I've been a member for many years. I donate money to them every year and get their publications. Politically to situate this, I have been a Republican most of my life, but things in the recent past have changed me more to independent. I stay Republican

> in everything but energy, education, and the environment (Charles Achilles, Eastern Michigan University).

Achilles told me an interesting story about how he was asked to review a research paper produced by the Mackinau Foundation, a conservative think tank. He gave me a copy of his review, and among the comments made to the researcher, he noted in the margins that many of the mistakes made could have been avoided by doing a literature review. Below Achilles describes this incident.

> When I went to Eastern Michigan, the Mackinau Foundation contacted me to review some materials that they had. They got my name from the Heritage Foundation. I did the review for them and it didn't come out the way they wanted, so they didn't even write a thank you note, which is common courtesy. I did it free. So I wrote them back and asked them about it. I never heard from them again. Then I wrote them a letter with a cc to someone important at the Heritage Foundation, which I didn't send of course, and all of a sudden I got a very terse thank you note. As a member of the faculty at Eastern Michigan, I got the Mackinau Foundation reports. All of a sudden Kirk Johnson went to Mackinau as the head of their research and dissemination unit. I really got him in trouble, because he promised in the material he sent out, that if they make a mistake, they will retract it. He argued with me constantly about it until I finally sent stuff to the Great Lakes Foundation, the governor, and to the legislators and the state. The next thing I know, he sends me a note, as you saw, saying I'm not there anymore. He went back to Heritage (Charles Achilles, EMU & EPSL).

Richard Kahlenberg of the Century Foundation, a centrist think tank, discussed how think tanks are sometimes assumed to be ideological, whereas universities are not, which can lead to an unfair characterization of think tank research in the press.

> I think that the advantage when you are at a university is that you are assumed not to have an agenda, which isn't entirely accurate. I get a lot of calls from the press about this very narrow question about socio-economic integration of the public schools. That is what I argued for in *All*

> *Together Now*. I say that we are in favor of this idea. I think then they [the press] go and interview someone from Harvard who may be very opposed, but then because they are from Harvard, which doesn't have a position, they are seen as more neutral perhaps. . . . The other point to make is that think tanks are essentially for people who want to be public intellectuals, and academia has pushed people to specialize so narrowly and does not reward people for communicating broadly (Richard Kahlenberg, Century Foundation).

One distinction repeatedly made between think tanks and universities, was that think tanks are concerned with current policy issues and the impact of policy right now. Whereas academics have more freedom to research what they want. A staff member from the Center for Law and Social Policy, a liberal/progressive think tank with a focus on early education issues, discuses this issue.

> The thing about being in Washington and being in an organization like ours, which is really oriented towards what is really going on, rather than just thinking of ideas, we do that too, but we are very grounded in reality. You have more access on a daily basis to real policy makers. We get out of Washington too and actually go to states and look at programs. We are not ivory tower, we are not academic in that we are just thinking about stuff, reading stuff, and having ideas in the abstract without having to worry about whether they can really be implemented (Staff Member, Center for Law and Social Policy).

Shaka Mitchell, Associate Director of Policy at the Center for Education Reform, a conservative advocacy organization that runs a grassroots campaign to promote vouchers and charter schools, noted that academics do seemingly have more freedom than think tank staff. Surprisingly he also noted that the mission of think tanks can at times become outdated.

> Certainly at a university system you have tenure. It is debatable as to whether or not quality decreases as tenure increases. But it is certainly something to question. A think tank has a mission statement as opposed to someone who is teaching at the college level. A professor of an anthropology program doesn't have a mission statement guiding their work. That professor then has the freedom to do research while on sabbatical or over the summer, and come back next Fall and have a totally different view of how the class should be taught, what the aims of the class should be, and what more sound research is saying. Think tanks depend upon what their ideology is and I think that they can be a little more limited. You may find that they are adhering to a mission statement that is outdated. You may find that people at a think tank have to defend a position that is becoming less tenable (Shaka Mitchell, Associate Director, Center for Education Reform).

The ability and need for think tanks to translate research results into understandable, short documents that can easily be explained to policy makers, was repeated over and over. For example, below, Diane Stark Rentner, from the Center on Education Policy, a centrist advocacy organization, headed by Jack Jennings, a Democrat and former general counsel for the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Education and Labor, argues below.

> I sat at a meeting on a group of assessment, where I understood 50% of what they were saying most of the time. This guy got up and said, I can't believe that they included this in NCLB, didn't they read our research paper that we wrote one year before they were considering this saying, blah, blah, blah. I was thinking, I've read your stuff and it is incomprehensible. You've got to take it to the next step. That is why I think that you see a lot of former Hill staff at the think tanks (Diane Stark Rentner, Center on Education Policy).

Joydeep Roy of the Economic Policy Institute, a liberal/progressive think tank, who himself came out of academia recently with a Ph.D. in economics from Princeton, notes the push for researchers at think tanks to produce timely research for policy makers.

> The think tanks are much more interested in being topical and bringing research out into the open. Whereas if you are in academia and you are thinking of publishing, that can take a lot of time. In political economics, if you want to publish in a journal it could take up to 2-3 years. Academic research is much more journal oriented, whereas in think tanks, if people are working on something they want it now (Joydeep Roy, Economic Policy Institute).

Sara Mead of the Education Sector, a centrist think tank, also commented on the advantage of doing research at a think tank in terms of being able to engage in current education debates.

> One of the advantages to us at a think tank is that we are structured to get our ideas in play and to have impact with our ideas. For academic researchers, the appropriate role for them is to be more detached and to really focus on the methodological rigor of their work, they need to focus on issues of where they are uncovering new evidence. We do some work on that new evidence piece, but I think that the place where we really add value is in terms of, once we have this evidence, we have a communications team, we do a lot of work to get those ideas in the press, make them accessible to both high level decision makers and also we really just need to change how the average person on the street thinks about issues to create the political will and the political space to do a lot of the things that need to be done (Sara Mead, Education Sector and Progressive Policy Institute).

Another example comes from Charlene Harr, President of the Education Policy Institute, a small Washington, DC based conservative think tank that focuses on privatization.

> This is a general statement, and not always true, but academics and people who are at the university level, frequently their research is full of jargon, statistics and formula that the average person would have some difficulty comprehending. It is written for a more academic audience as opposed to a general audience (Charlene Harr, Education Policy Institute).

Conclusion

For decades conservative think tanks have portrayed schools of education, teachers unions, and professional educational organizations as the institutions standing in the way of effective educational reform. While critiquing what they view as the liberal agenda, conservative think tanks have produced their own set of research and recommendations for policy makers at the local, state and federal level. However the increasing profile of conservative think tanks and their experts in the media has caused many in the education policy world to become increasingly concerned about their influence. As a result, debates over the credibility of conservatively informed research have risen over the past several years. The primary targets of these attacks have been conservative think tanks and conservative university based education researchers whose work generally supports a policy agenda that views free markets as the most effective approach to solving many educational issues.

These attacks have come from university based education researchers, who have used scientific method as their weapon for dismantling the research claims of many conservatively

oriented scholars. However it remains to be seen whether the evidence-based attacks by academia against the mostly ideologically driven work of conservative think tanks will have any influence on policy debate. After all, the growing influence that conservative think tanks have had on education policy debates has not come from a growing vault of accumulated data over the past twenty-five years, but instead from a well-planned, highly organized movement which has been able to translate easily identifiable symbols - choice and standards - to the public and policy makers.

Some of the observations of both think tank experts and university based education policy researchers are supported by the findings of this research. First, think tank scholars are correct in their observation that university based research in is not timely, and not packaged in a readable format for policy makers, the public, and media. The tremendous amount of media attention garnered by think tanks as compared to university based policy centers, speaks to the fact that, at least through this medium, think tanks have far more influence than academics on the policy making process. Second, academics are correct in their assessment of the Washington, DC education policy community being based in a Right-of-center discussion over education. Over the past decade this agenda has been most prominently been shaped by neoconservatives and corporate elites with an interest in the education industry. Additionally academics are accurate in their assessment that much of what is produced by advocacy think tanks, particularly by those on the political Right, can not be portrayed as "research." Instead their work is overwhelmingly driven by ideology.

Conclusion

Conservative think tanks have become increasingly important in the policy-making arena over the past twenty-five years. Differing from their academic model predecessors, conservative think tanks have taken on an advocacy model, replacing the role of the researcher with that of the ideologically driven expert. Over the past two decades, conservative think tanks have increasingly involved themselves in all spheres of domestic social policy, including education. By cultivating relationships with congressional and senate staff as well as governors and state policy makers, conservative think tanks have been crucial institutions in aiding the larger conservative movement in America. Through their corporate and philanthropic donors and successful use of the media, conservative think tanks have been able to impact the parameters of education policy debate.

While just three conservative think tanks were focused on education policy in 1970, this number increased to thirty by 1990 and then to fifty-six by 2006. Outnumbering both centrist and liberal think tanks in number, conservative think tanks have been able to wield a significant amount of influence in a policy world that historically has been dominated by the Democratic Party and an equity framework of spending at the federal level. Although highly critical of teacher's unions and the progressive pedagogy taught at schools of education, conservative think tanks have not yet been able to break the influence of these groups on the practice of education. Instead conservative think tanks have been most effective in their ability to join with a coalition of conservative education advocacy organizations as well as the Business Roundtable, National Alliance of Business, and U.S. Chamber of Commerce, to shift the parameters

of education policy debate to a Right-of-Center platform. By the 1990's education policy at the federal level had fully become a bi-partisan issue, defined by the need for a corporate model of accountability in education.

Neoconservatives have been the most successful faction of the conservative movement in their efforts to shift debates away from equity, access, and inputs and towards accountability, standards, and outputs. This is evidenced by their support for increased standards and testing, partnerships with corporations, and government oversight, which have all been incorporated into federal education policy over the past two decades. A secondary influence in education policy has been neoliberals or traditional conservatives. While they have been in conflict with neoconservatives over the role of big government, neoliberals have raised public awareness on the issue of school choice and pushed it into the mainstream education agenda. Although school choice in the form of voucher plans has been limited, it has successfully manifested itself in the creation of hundreds of charter schools across the country.

History Behind the Rise of Conservative Think Tanks

The historical rise of conservative think tanks was part of a well-planned elite policy planning initiative. With the establishment of think tanks, conservatives directly sought to counter the ideas and influence of the university in politics. As consultants to government, the policy recommendations of social scientists in the 1960's and 1970's often included government- funded programs to address issues of social, economic, and educational inequality. At the same time, the New Left and its political movements were no longer depending on the liberal elite to tell them what was best for them. Instead many of these movements, including multiculturalism and feminism began influencing

education curricula and policy. Disturbed that they no longer had control over the definition of "liberal democratic policy," many disgruntled political elites broke off, emerging as neoconservatives. With members in both the Democratic and Republican parties, neoconservatives were joined by traditional small government conservatives and business elites in an effort to reshape the changing political landscape.

At the same time, neoliberal scholars were impacting policy debates related to the entire welfare state. By the 1980's, Keynesianism had been replaced with neoliberal economic principles in support of unadulterated free markets. This philosophy trickled down to education policy through one of economics most well-known scholars, Milton Friedman. He supported the idea that public or "government" schools were inefficient and should ultimately be eliminated in favor of a completely privatized system of school choice.

Conservative Think Tanks and their Influence

As institutions intentionally created by an elite policy planning network, conservative think tanks are supported primarily through corporate and individual donors as well as conservative philanthropy. As Rich (2005) found, conservative think tanks are engaged in a "war of ideas" and therefore the intent of conservative philanthropy is not to fund research on a project to project basis. Instead conservative philanthropy is funding a movement largely through general operating support given to conservative think tanks to influence public policy. This differs from the funding pattern of both centrist and liberal think tanks, which rely heavily on foundation grants for their revenue, and receive far less unrestricted funding in the form of general operating support.

While it is not possible to determine how much funding from general operating support or from corporate and individual donors flows into education policy projects at think tanks, it is possible to examine foundation grants earmarked for education projects. This research found that liberal think tanks receive more than double the amount of funding in education-specific foundation grants than do conservative think tanks. The difference is even more pronounced for centrist think tanks, which receive six times more in funding from education-specific foundation grants than do conservative think tanks.

Given these vast differences in funding, it is difficult at first glance to understand how conservative think tanks are far more likely to be represented in the media on education policy issues than either centrist or liberal think tanks. The answer to this is two-fold. First it is possible that the education divisions of conservative think tanks receive funding from foundations earmarked for general operating support, that eventually ends up going to their education policy divisions. Along the same lines, conservative think tanks may receive funding from corporate and individual donors that eventually goes into education policy work. The second possibility is that conservative think tanks simply do not need the vast support of philanthropy to conduct research, and are instead still able to garner attention from media outlets for their ideological opinions rather than for their research. Given that most conservative think tanks conduct little to no research, but instead are focused on writing short policy briefs, meeting with policy makers and conducting media outreach, they simply do not need the vast resources required by centrist and liberal think tanks to conduct research. Think tanks may produce lengthy research reports, filled with dozens of data tables and findings, but this does not mean that their work will receive more attention from the media. The pattern for

conservative think tanks has been to attack media attention despite producing little to no research, by instead focusing on a public relations strategy and providing a list of experts to the news media, available at a moment's notice. So despite the vast discrepancy in education funding from the philanthropic foundation community to think tanks, based on ideology, it does not have much impact on whether or not think tanks are used as sources on education stories in the media.

While political influence is diffuse and difficult to measure, the findings of this research indicate that the media have been one of the most significant means for conservative think tanks to exert influence. As 501(c)(3) organizations, think tanks are prohibited from exerting direct political influence through lobbying, funding grassroots organizations, or endorsing candidates and legislation. As such, the media have become increasingly important as a legal means for think tanks to influence education policy debates.

The top fifteen conservative think tanks have been able to garner a significant amount of media attention in both newspapers as well as on radio and television programs. Although centrist think tanks also receive a considerable amount of media attention, their share is still less than that of conservative think tanks. Again this is surprising given the vast amount of education research conducted at some of the largest and well-funded centrist think tanks. In stark contrast, liberal think tanks receive little media attention on education issues. This suggests that think tanks have not been a successful means for conveying liberal/progressive views in education through the media.

Think Tanks, Education Experts, and the Relevance of Academic Research

The influence and success of conservative think tanks in the education policy arena over the past two decades raises questions about the relevance of academic research conducted at both think tanks and universities today. Many of the think tanks of the early 20th century were established to use social scientific methods and turn their findings into policy recommendations for government. Similarly university-based social scientists during the 1960's acted as government consultants, using social science as a means for informing domestic policy. As O'Connor (2007) discusses in her book *Social Science for What?,* during the early 20th century, social scientific reformers were engaged not only with empirical questions but with reframing the public discourse. Alongside groups seeking progressive social change, she argues that the philanthropic community funded and advocated for social change in both economic and social spheres. However in recent decades, the tide has shifted and both philanthropy and social science has become preoccupied with value-neutral research and disengaged from political debate.

At the same time that social science and the philanthropic community retreated, the conservative movement in America grew and developed a well-funded network of think tanks, foundations, advocacy organizations, and business coalitions to reframe American policy using a direct and unabashed conservative ideology. Penetrating many policy areas, including education, conservative think tanks have not only shifted the parameters of debate, but have done it without the principles of social-scientific inquiry, sound research methods, or informed political debate. Instead they have contributed to a narrowing debate over the issues, one where influencing policy using conservative principles supercedes the need for valid and reliable research.

Some academic scholars in the education community, like the Arizona State Education Policy Studies Laboratory (EPSL), have become uniquely aware of the high profile that conservative think tanks have received in the media. EPSL is one of few organizations in the field of education that have directly sought to counter conservative think tanks. On the other hand, conservative think tanks and other coalitions, particularly within the neoconservative movement, have made significant strides in marginalizing research or policy recommendations that run counter to their political agenda. Consequently both teacher's unions and Democrats have become reluctant to speak out against standards and tests, fearing public perception as weak on education.

Significance of Research

My study begins with its examination of think tanks as part of an elite policy planning network. Over the past thirty-years, fewer than fifteen books and only a handful of scholarly articles have directly addressed the issue of think tanks. Only two published studies exist on the role of conservative think tanks and education policy more specifically. Second, the study of think tanks has primarily taken place in the field of political science, and has focused on their structure, funding, and purpose in the political system, whereas this research takes a sociological approach and theoretically comes to different conclusions about think tanks as institutions operating in society.

The primary works on think tanks in the field of political science come from three scholars. The work of McGann (2006; 2002) focuses on a structural analysis of think tanks and how they act as catalysts for political change both in the U.S. and abroad. Rich's (2005) research on think tanks is concerned with how these institutions have inserted themselves into policy debates and exerted influence. The work of Stone (1996;

2004) has also focused on a historical and structural analysis of prominent think tanks as well as a comparison of think tanks globally. While all of these scholars acknowledge in their work the interlocking relationships between think tanks and other powerful groups in society, these scholars do not theoretically argue that conservative think tanks are part of a larger elite policy-planning network. Veering away from neo-Marxist interpretations of think tanks as institutions or arms of the bourgeoisie, these scholars primarily view think tanks as operating within a neo-pluralist society. Think tanks are thought to exert power and influence as part of coalitions or epistemic communities that are not permanent or necessarily persistent.

The findings of my research are more consistent with those of scholars who have theoretically understood conservative think tanks to be part of a larger elite policy making process. For example, Pescheck (1987), a political scientist, who found that as early as the 1970's, think tanks such as the Brookings Institution had already shifted away from their support for Keynesian economic policy to fit within the shifting conservative political movement of the time. Additionally sociologist, William Domhoff (2002) used network analysis to document how elites finance think tanks, serve on their boards, and incorporate their agendas into a larger elite policy planning network. Sociologist Ruth Levitas (1986), has also studied the rise of the conservative movement in America using Gramsci's concept of hegemonic control. In her analysis she found that think tanks play a critical role as part of the elite in exerting economic, social, and cultural influence through the state, think tanks, and the media.

The methods used in this study to define, measure, and trace the number of think tanks engaged in education policy debates lay the groundwork for future research in this

area. More research however is needed on the specific relationships think tanks have with media outlets. In particular the decisions of journalists and television and radio networks to seek out think tank experts for news stories, and the way in which think tanks are presented based on ideology. There is a need to examine more closely the quality of research and analysis of think tanks that is being presented through media outlets to the public and policy makers. Lastly there is a need to further examine and discuss the role that academic think tank research and university-based research should play in public policy debates currently dominated by conservative think tanks.

Appendix: Think Tanks with Education As At Least One Policy Issue

Conservative Think Tanks

Acton Institute (Libertarian)
Alabama Policy Institute
Alexis de Tocqueville Institution
Allegheny Institute for Public Policy
American Enterprise Institute
Arkansas Policy Foundation
Bluegrass Institute for Public Policy Solutions
Buckeye Institute for Public Policy Solution
Calvert Institute for Policy Research
Capital Research Center-Education Watch
Cascade Policy Institute (Libertarian)
Cato Institute (Libertarian)
Center for Equal Opportunity
Center of the American Experiment
Commonwealth Foundation (Libertarian)
Education Policy Institute
Ethan Allen Institute
Evergreen Freedom Foundation
Fordham Foundation
Georgia Public Policy Foundation
Goldwater Institute
Grassroot Institute of Hawaii
Heartland Institute (Libertarian)
Heritage Foundation
Hudson Institute
Independence Institute (Libertarian)
Institute for Policy Innovation
James Madison Institute
John Locke Foundation
Josiah Bartlett Center for Public Policy
Kansas Public Policy Institute
Mackinac Center for Public Policy (Libertarian)
Maine Public Policy Institute
Manhattan Institute for Policy Research (Libertarian)
Maryland Public Policy Institute
National Center for Policy Analysis
Nevada Policy Research Institute
New Mexico Independence Institute
Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs
Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy (Libertarian)
Pennsylvania Family Institute
Pioneer Institute (Libertarian)
Reason Foundation (Libertarian)

(conservative think tanks continued on next page)

Centrist Think Tanks/No Identifiable Ideology

American Institutes for Research
Brookings Institution
Center for Governmental Research
Child and Family Policy Center
Child Trends, Inc.
Citizens Research Council of Michigan
Committee for Economic Development
Education Sector
Educational Research Service (ERS)
Institute for Research and Reform in Education
Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth
National Bureau of Economic Research
National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education
National Center on Education and the Economy
New America Foundation
North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research
Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation
Progressive Policy Institute
Public Policy Institute of California
RAND
The Century Foundation
Urban Institute
Utah Foundation

Liberal/Progressive Think Tanks

Applied Research Center
Center for American Progress
Center for Law and Social Policy
Center for National Policy
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
Economic Policy Institute
Institute for America's Future
Institute for Higher Education Policy
Institute for Wisconsin's Future
Political Research Associates
Vermont Society for the Study of Education

Conservative Think Tanks (continued)
Rio Grande Foundation
Rockford Institute for Public Policy
Show-Me Institute
South Carolina Policy Institute
Sutherland Institute
Tennessee Center for Policy Research
Texas Conservative Coalition Research Institute
Texas Public Policy Foundation
The Independent Institute (Libertarian)
Virginia Institute for Public Policy
Washington Policy Center
Wisconsin Policy Research Institute
Yankee Institute for Public Policy

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