

Think Tanks and the Media: How the Conservative Movement Gained Entry Into the Education Policy Arena

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Abstract

This research examines how the conservative movement has used both conservative think tanks and the media to gain entry into the field of education policy. The study examines how the conservative movement has attempted to use think tanks as legitimating organizations to enter the education policy arena by (a) measuring the historical growth in the number of conservative think tanks focused on education policy, (b) situating that growth within the larger context of efforts on the part of the conservative movement to bring free market ideas to education, and (c) analyzing and comparing conservative think tank media presence to that of centrist and progressive think tanks and university-based education-policy centers. Findings indicate that conservative think tanks produced the largest number of education media citations, followed by centrist think tanks. Liberal/progressive think tanks and university-based education-policy centers had little to no media presence.

Keywords

conservative movement, education policy, media, neoliberal, neoconservative, think tanks

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Introduction

This research examines the use of the media and conservative think tanks by the larger conservative movement, as a means to gain entry into the field of education policy debate. Prior to the 1990s, conservative and corporate interests did not have a definitive organizational or institutional medium through which to influence educational agendas, particularly at the federal level (Debray, 2006; McGuinn, 2006; Spring, 2005). With education largely the domain of Democrats, teacher's unions, and academic researchers, over the past two decades conservative and corporate interests have turned to think tanks, their public relations arms, and media outlets as a legitimating tool and a means for quick entry into the field of debate.

Although think tanks have been concerned with issues such as foreign policy, defense, and social policy dating back to the early 20th century (Rich, 2004; Smith 1991), education policy did not 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 (Edwards, 1997; Ricci 1993; Spring 2005). As education became defined as a national crisis, so to did the need for think tanks to shift greater focus and emphasis towards the research and analysis of public education (Cross, 2004; Lugg, 2000). In 1980 there were just 23 think tanks that focused on education as one of their policy issues. By 2005 this number had increased to 90, with the majority of growth being among conservative think tanks (McDonald, 2008).

While the number of think tanks has dramatically increased, they still find themselves alongside dozens of advocacy and grassroots organizations, unions, business coalitions, professional organizations, school boards, and parent-teacher groups that are all vying for recognition (Cross, 2004; Debray, 2006; McGuinn, 2006). However what differentiates think tanks is that historically they have been locations from where research is conducted. In theory the policy recommendations at such research institutes are based on knowledge and expertise that sets them apart from many other organizations (Guttman & Willner, 1976; O'Connor, 2007; Ricci, 1993), however in practice an increasing number of think tanks founded over the past 30 years are ideologically driven rather than research based. First referred to in the literature as "advocacy" think tanks (McGann, 1992; Stone, 1996) these policy organizations (the majority of which are conservative) are often treated as "equivalent" to academic think tanks, by the media, policy makers, and the larger public (Haas, 2007).

This research examines how the conservative movement has attempted to use think tanks as legitimating organizations to enter the education policy arena by (a) measuring the historical growth in the number of conservative think tanks focused on education policy, (b) situating that growth within the larger context of efforts on the part of the conservative movement to bring free market ideas to education, (c) analyzing and comparing conservative think tank media presence to that of centrist and progressive think tanks, and (d) examining the presence of university-based education centers and education experts in media citations.

Historical Rise of Conservative Think Tanks and Their Entry Into Education Policy

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, several high profile conservatives saw the need for an institutionalized platform from which conservative ideas could make their way into policy discourse. For example, 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 outlined his concern over what he saw as an attack on the American free enterprise system. 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.” In terms of public outreach, Powell suggested the use of television, radio, paid advertisements, scholarly journals, books, paperbacks, and pamphlets (Powell, 1971).

Gabbard and Atkinson (2007) provide a comprehensive analysis of the Powell memo and describe how Powell’s concern over the attack on free enterprise can be traced to the ideas of neoliberal scholars Arthur Shenfield and Milton Friedman. They argue that “neoliberal ideologues began a propaganda campaign to prepare the public mind to receive the essential message of *A Nation at Risk*” (p. 100) and describe how neoliberal ideas in support of school privatization were cultivated at conservative think tanks early on (Gabbard & Atkinson, 2007).

The efforts of Powell and other high profile conservatives (both neoliberals and neoconservatives) resulted over the next several decades in the establishment of conservative think tanks 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 (Gabbard & Atkinson, 2007; McDonald, 2008). Conservative think tanks sought to replace this paradigm with market oriented approaches to solving social problems (Easterbrook, 1986; Nash, 1998; Ricci, 1993; Simon, 1978; Smith, 1991; Steinfels, 1979). In terms of education policy, the conservative movement found think tanks to be an ideal organizational form to enter the educational field, which they had largely stood outside of for decades. This meant getting vouchers, school choice, national standards, merit based pay, and antiunion campaigns into the discourse of American education (Apple, 2004; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Debray, 2006; Jennings, 1998; McGuinn, 2006)

During the 1990s, organizations such as the Business Roundtable and U.S. Chamber of Commerce partnered with the National Governors Association to shift emphasis in educational discussions away from increased spending and towards outputs and results (Debray, 2006; McGuinn, 2006). In addition, conservative foundations increased funds to conservative think tanks, rewarding them for promoting ideological views. At the same time liberal and progressive nonprofits including think tanks, advocacy, and grassroots organizations had to mute their politics in order to receive foundation funding (Callahan, 1999; Covington, 1997; Krehely, House, & Kernan, 2004; O'Connor, 2007; Rich, 2005)

Four broad political developments are often cited as contributory to the dramatic post-1970 growth in conservative think tanks: the expansion of business in politics, the rise of neoconservatism, a new paradigm of neoclassical or neoliberal economics, and the political mobilization of fundamentalist Christians (Rich, 2004). Think tanks usually fall into one of the following categories: *academic*, *contract*, *advocacy*, or *political party* think tanks (McGann & Weaver, 2002). While think tanks can bridge more than one classification, conservative think tanks more often than not, fit the definition of advocacy-oriented think tanks. They tend to have staff with philosophical, political or ideological agendas, and research positions are less likely to be filled by academics with PhDs (McGann & Weaver, 2002; Ricci, 1993; Rich, 2004; Smith, 1991).

In terms of education specifically, the policy positions of conservative think tanks are often informed by two perspectives—neoliberalism or neoconservatism.¹ Neoconservatism has been used by scholars to describe the increasing corporatization of public education and the growing influence of the state in terms of national standards and testing (Apple 2004, 2006; Emery, 2007; Gabbard & Atkinson, 2007; Kornfeld, 2005; Kovacs & Boyles, 2005; Ravitch, 2011; Watkins, 2011). Whereas the term *neoliberal* has been used by scholars to describe efforts aimed at privatizing the educational sphere through competition, charter schools, vouchers, market mechanisms, and the

language of entrepreneurship (Apple 2004, 2011; Harvey, 2007; Giroux, 2008; Leyva, 2009; McCafferty, 2010; Pedroni, 2006; Shiller, 2011; Sung, 2010; Torres, 2010; Watkins, 2011). While the two perspectives overlap in terms of support for private sector involvement in education, they differ greatly in terms of the role of the state in educational reform.

The Institute for Economic Affairs served as an early model for conservative think tanks and espoused what economists Hayek and Friedman call “classical liberalism” (Hayek, 2007; M. Friedman, 1982).² The Institute of Economic Affairs also helped build resources such as the Atlas Economic Research Foundation and the Economic Freedom Network, which aided free market entrepreneurs who wanted to set up their own think tanks (Blundell, 2003; Yergin & Stanislaw, 2002). Several conservative think tanks (places like the Cato Institute) embrace Friedman’s ideas on education and frequently critique “government schools” (M. Friedman & R. Friedman, 1980; McCluskey, 2011). Similarly think tanks such as the Reason Foundation produce reports informed by Hayek and Friedman (Gustavson, 2010), while the Manhattan Institute annually awards the Hayek Lecture and Book Prize. Other supporters of this perspective, as articulated in the Heritage Foundation publication *Mandate for Leadership*, would ideally like to eliminate the Department of Education as a federal cabinet position, and any federal role in education, returning control to the states (Docksai, 1981).

Beginning in the late 1960s 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 anticommunists, who in their later years, during the decades of the 1970s and 1980s, found themselves in conservative and Republican circles, while others remained Democrats influencing the party from a more conservative business perspective (Buras & Apple, 2008; Nash, 1998; Ricci, 1993; Smith, 1991; Steinfels, 1979).

Similar to neoliberals, neoconservatives support privatization, charter schools, vouchers, and a role for business in public education. They are similarly critical of teacher’s unions and hostile to bilingual education, multiculturalism, and progressive pedagogy (Docksai, 1981; Ravitch, 2001). Where neoconservatives depart from the neoliberal perspective is in their belief that 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 (Apple, 2004; Gabbard, 2007; Gabbard & Atkinson, 2007; Hirsch, 1988; Jennings, 1998; Kovacs & Boyles, 2005). 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 (Apple, 2006; Lugg, 2000; Spring, 2005).

Conservative think tank growth over the past two decades has helped to define the parameters of education policy debate away from an old educational paradigm, where the federal government's role was focused on providing equal access to schools and greater funding for disadvantaged students; to a new educational paradigm focused on oversight and accountability. During the 1980s the viability and effectiveness of the old "equity" or "input" model of the federal government was brought into question by conservatives. They cited stagnant or declining test scores and deemed most educational spending by the federal government ineffective. This critique ultimately gave way to an emerging "accountability" or "output" model of education (Debray, 2006; McGuinn, 2006).

The *A Nation at Risk Report* that spurred the accountability movement came about inadvertently, and was never the initial aim of the conservative movement. While President Reagan announced that he would eliminate the Department of Education on the urging of the Heritage Foundation (Docksai, 1981), his moderate Secretary of Education Terrel Bell ensured the Department of Education's survival after he convened the National Commission on Excellence in Education that produced the *A Nation At Risk Report* (Lugg, 2000). Democrats had dominated education as an issue and had received considerable support from both middle class suburban and urban minority voters (Cross, 2004; McGuinn, 2006). Chester Finn (President of the conservative think tank the Fordham Institute) worked within the Department of Education for both Reagan and Bush I. Finn warned conservatives that if they continued to distance themselves from education reform because of their adherence to the conservative principle of small government, they would be turning over education reform to "colleges of education, the NEA, the American Association of School Administrators, and other bastions of liberal establishmentarianism" (McGuinn, 2006, p. 54).

Under the Bush I, Clinton, and Bush II 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 taking over and managing charter schools, supported by public tax dollars (Apple, 2006; Cross, 2004; Debray, 2006; Fabricant & Fine, 2012; McGuinn, 2006).

Embraced by both Democrats and Republicans, this paradigm, informed by both neoliberal and neoconservative thought, has permeated the general climate of discussion in Washington, DC and has also guided a significant amount of research at think tanks like the Brookings Institution, RAND Corporation, and American Institutes for Research (Apple, 2011; Emery & Ohanian, 2004; Jennings, 1998). As such, it would be inaccurate to think of Democratic educational perspectives as "liberal" or "progressive" and Republican educational perspectives as "conservative." Instead the

parameters of debate for both political parties in Washington, DC, have taken place within in a Right-of-Center paradigm, dominated by both free-market neoliberal policy prescriptions and a neoconservative push for government oversight in the form of assessment (McDonald, 2008; Welner, 2011).

To the dismay of many small government free market conservatives, the federal role in education actually grew under George W. Bush with the passage of NCLB (No Child Left Behind). However support for charter schools and the standards and testing paradigm also grew. This paradigm has been supported by what Kovacs and Christie (2008) refer to as “spontaneous consent” among various think tanks and advocacy organizations, including The Education Trust, Gates Foundation, Education Sector, and Fordham Institute. Debray-Pelot and McGuinn (2009) note that “support for standards, both state-level efforts and national standards, was a big idea that began to unite otherwise rather ideologically different think tanks” (p. 34). The standards and testing paradigm has continued into the Obama administration, with the President supporting merit based pay for teachers and an end to limits on charter schools (Debray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009; Wilson, 2009)

A debate still continues within the conservative movement and within think tanks as to government’s role in education. Those in support of neoconservative principles embrace the appeal of managerialist thinking—that schools can be treated just like businesses, with assessment outcomes and the adoption of incentives for better performance. Whereas those in support of neoliberal principles have continued to call for the elimination of any federal role in education, and focused their efforts on school choice and the privatization of the public system.

Think Tank Funding

During most of the 20th century the large academic think were supported heavily by philanthropic foundation grants. This trend changed in the late 1960s 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 nonprofits, however they could continue to fund programs that generally addressed public policy issues (Krehely, House, & 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

US\$500,000 or approximately 25% of Brookings' annual budget at the time. Since the 1980s, 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 1930s 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 1970s and 1980s 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 nonprofits 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, & Kernan, 2004; Rich, 2005)

Think Tanks and the Media

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 nonpartisan, nonprofit, research institute status. Whereas advocacy and professional organizations, as well as unions are viewed as having a vested self-interest in certain policy issues, think tanks have historically been regarded as independent (Rich, 2004). As 501(c)(3) organizations, think tanks are prohibited from exerting direct political influence through lobbying, funding grassroots organizations, or endorsing

candidates and legislation (Internal Revenue Service, 2010). As such, the media have become increasingly important as a legal route for think tanks to get their ideas into the education policy arena.

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. This advocacy think tank model has become especially visible among conservative think tanks (McGann, 1992; Smith, 1991). 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. In addition think tanks use their web pages and periodic emails 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 25 most frequently cited think tanks, documenting their representation in media based on ideology. In an analysis of think tank citations from 2005, FAIR found that conservative/center-right think tanks made up 40% of all think tanks citations, while centrist think tanks had 47% and progressive/center-left think tanks had 13% (Dolny, 2006). Between 2006 and 2008, FAIR saw an overall drop in the number of think tank citations however centrist and conservative think tanks still led the way (Dolny, 2007, 2008). In 2009, for the first time progressive/center-left think tanks made some gains, garnering 21% of think tank citations, while conservative think tank citations declined to 31% (Dolny, 2009).

Despite the growing importance of think tanks in the political policy making process at the federal, state, and local level, to date only two institute reports (Haas, Molnar, & Serrano, 2002; Yettick, 2009) and seven journal articles (Altheide & Grimes, 2005; Grimes, 1997; Haas, 2004, 2007; Rich, 2001; Rich & Weaver, 2000; Yonghoi, 2004) have been published that trace and track the media presence of think tanks. The earliest study conducted by Rich and Weaver (2000) examined the visibility of a sample of 51 think tanks in six national newspapers between 1991 and 1998. Their findings indicated that centrist think tanks (those with no-identifiable ideology) and Washington based think tanks were cited most frequently.

In addition they found that conservative think tanks were cited far more frequently than liberal think tanks. However this difference disappeared when they controlled 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 & Kent, 2000).

A subsequent study by Rich (2001) analyzed how the news media and Congress evaluate the expertise of think tanks. Findings indicated that congressional staff and journalists are more likely to consult accessible sources that are perceived to be credible. However more ideological and marketing-oriented think tanks are likely to be used as sources on the editorial pages of newspapers and by congressional members to build support for an idea (Rich, 2001).

Just four studies (Yettick, 2009; Haas, 2004, 2007; Haas et al., 2002) have been published that specifically examine think tank media presence on education-related stories. Haas (2004) provides 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 and using scientific language to describe their positions even though scholarly research was not conducted (Haas, 2004). Similarly, in an extensive study of media representation of seven think tanks Haas (2007) found that think tanks, regardless of whether they were advocacy oriented or not, were presented by the media as credible sources in almost all cases. This occurred whether or not professional norms of academic research were followed (Haas, 2007).

In a study published by the Education and Public Interest Center & Education Policy Research Institute, Yettick (2009) examined education-related stories in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Education Week* in 2007 to 2008, that cited university, government, and private think tank research. Findings indicated that government and university sources produce 14 to 16 times more research than think tanks, and as expected were cited more often by the above sources. However, given the proportionately small amount of research produced by think tanks, the study found that think tank reports were statistically more likely to be cited over government or university research. As noted by Yettick (2009), it is unclear whether this is due to the fact that think tank research is geared toward issues of the day, or if think tanks are more skilled at getting a particular agenda into the press. Universities in particular lack the public relations departments found at many advocacy-oriented think tanks, which may account for think tanks' disproportionate share of coverage (Yettick, 2009).

Conservative Think Tanks, the Media, and Organizational Legitimacy

In the social sciences, social movements and formal organizations/institutions have often been studied separate from one another (Davis, McAdam, Scott, & Zald, 2005). Resource mobilization theory and theories of organizational legitimacy, are both useful for understanding and interpreting the efforts made by the conservative movement to use think tanks and the media as institutions for gaining entry into the education policy field. Resource mobilization theory has focused on how social movement organizations (SMO) are used to secure resources (funding, membership, media attention, political and organizational alliances) in order to advance the movement's goals (Gamson, 1975; Jenkins, 1983; McCarthy, 1977; Tilly, 1978, Zald & McCarthy, 1987). As Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993) note, "movements need the news media for three major purposes: mobilization, validation, and scope enlargement" (p. 116). As social movement organizations, conservative think tanks not only need the media to get out the movement's ideas, but also to validate ideas and build organizational legitimacy. As Scott (2008) argues, "organizations require more than material resources and technical information if they are to survive and thrive in their social environments. They also need social acceptability and credibility" (p. 59).

The aim of this research is to build on previous scholarship to understand and capture the broader media landscape upon which conservative think tanks have attempted to make inroads in the education policy field. This research differs from prior research in that it does not focus on a sample of think tanks or media outlets, but instead includes all U.S. think tanks that focus on education issues (56 conservative, 23 centrist, and 11 liberal/progressive) and all U.S. newspapers, TV, and radio transcripts with education-related think tank citations retrieved from the Lexis Nexis database for the years examined. This allows for an analysis and understanding of the organizational infrastructure and media usage across conservative think tanks.

Method

In order to conduct a media analysis of think tanks, it was first necessary to compile a list of think tanks focused on education policy issues and secondly to determine their ideology. A starting point was a list personally provided 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, Hellebust's (1996) book, *Think Tank Directory: A Guide to Nonprofit Public Policy Research Organizations*. I supplemented

and updated that list 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 nonprofits.

To be included in the study an organization had to meet the following criteria: (a) It had to be a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, nonpartisan independent (non-university based) organization for which education is at least one of its policy issues. (b) The organization had to either self-define as a “think tank” or explicitly self-define in its *Mission*, *Who We Are*, or *What We Do* sections as an organization that engages in some sort of policy “research.” This further classification was necessitated by the number of advocacy, nonprofit, 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. This is not to say that think tanks are bounded, discrete organizations. Rather the definition for purposes of this study was necessitated by the fact that what the term “think tank” means is fluid, and has become even less definitive in recent times.

The ideology of each think tank was determined by using Rich’s (2004) classification system to identify key words and phrases in think tank mission statements and/or annual reports. Using this methodology, of the 90 think tanks with a focus on education policy, 56 (62%) were found to have a conservative ideology (promotion of the free market system, limited government, individual liberties, religious expression, traditional family values, or the elimination of racial and ethnic preference in government policy). Twenty-three (26%) of these 90 think tanks were classified as centrist (think tanks whose published statements either did not readily place them in either broad ideological category or qualified them in both categories) while 11 (12%) could be described as liberal or progressive (promotion of the use of government policies and programs to overcome economic, social, or gender inequalities, poverty, or wage stagnation, progressive social justice, sustainable environment, lower defense spending). Thus conservative think tanks that do work on education outnumber their liberal counterparts by five-to-one. It should also be noted that of the 90 think tanks, only 10 focus almost exclusively on education policy issues, whereas the majority of think tanks focus on education policy alongside many other issues.

This classification system however is not without its limitations, particularly in the following areas: (a) Think tank ideology and/or support for certain policies or perspectives are not static and change over time based on a

myriad of factors including: who funds the think tank, members of the board of trustees, the orientations of individual think tank scholars, and political climate within which the think tank operates; (b) While think tank mission statements and annual reports give insight into the broad orientation of the think tank, this orientation may not be followed in practice or consistently applied across all policy areas (e.g., health care, education, environment, foreign policy, immigration, etc.); and (c) The category “centrist” which is used in this study to categorize think tanks that do not definitively fit into the “conservative” or “progressive” category is imperfect. It implies that these think tanks are either nonideological, apolitical, or take policy stands that stand somewhere in the middle of political discourse. The complexity of these issues are taken into account when interpreting the data and discussing the implications of the findings. It is also important to note that not all conservative think tanks labeled “conservative” for purposes of this study fully embrace either “neoliberal” or “neoconservative” ideas (as discussed earlier), and often incorporate some elements of these perspectives but do not adopt them in the purest sense.

Once the 90 think tanks used for this study were identified by ideology, the year each think tank was founded, and the number of years each has been in existence, was recorded. This data was then plotted to create Chart 1, which gives a visual picture of the rise of think tanks focused on education policy over a 90-year period.

Following the identification of think tanks with education policy divisions and determining their ideology, the number of times each think tank appeared in education-topic newspaper articles and on television and radio broadcasts, was tracked. Getting at education-related think tank documents is a uniquely difficult task. Because the search term “education” alone reveals tens of thousands of irrelevant records, 30 education-related search terms, such as: charter schools, academic standards, curriculum, education policy, education reform, and so forth, were used to search for citations along with the name of each think tank. Each citation was only counted once, duplicate records in searches were not counted. Each television and radio citation was counted once for each day that it aired. False positives were deleted in cases where the name of the think tank appeared with one of the education search terms in the same citation, however the citation had nothing to do with education topics. (For example an obituary noting where a former think tank scholar was employed and the university where he was educated). Using the Lexis Nexis database the name of each think tanks was used as a search term, along with each of the 30 education-related search terms noted above. Newspaper searches were conducted at two points in time (2001 and 2006), while TV and radio searches were conducted for a 5-year period (2001-2006).

While think tanks are the primary unit of analysis in this study, a supplemental analysis of experts, academics, and education advocates who receive considerable attention from the media was also conducted. Given the vast amount of education research is produced at universities, I was interested to see how university-based education-policy centers stacked up against think tanks. Using an extensive web search, a total of 59 university-based education-policy centers conducting research on both K-12 and higher education policy issues were identified. 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.

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. These education policy experts include individuals from think tanks, advocacy organizations, and universities who appear frequently in education policy news stories. Experts were grouped into three categories: conservative, centrist, and liberal/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 liberal/progressive policy experts together. These were individuals whose research and policy recommendations address root causes of race, class, and gender inequities in education. In addition 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 expert.

Data Analysis

Chart 1 identifies the historical pattern of growth for these think tanks. Of the 90 education-included think tanks, 14 were founded prior to 1970, while an

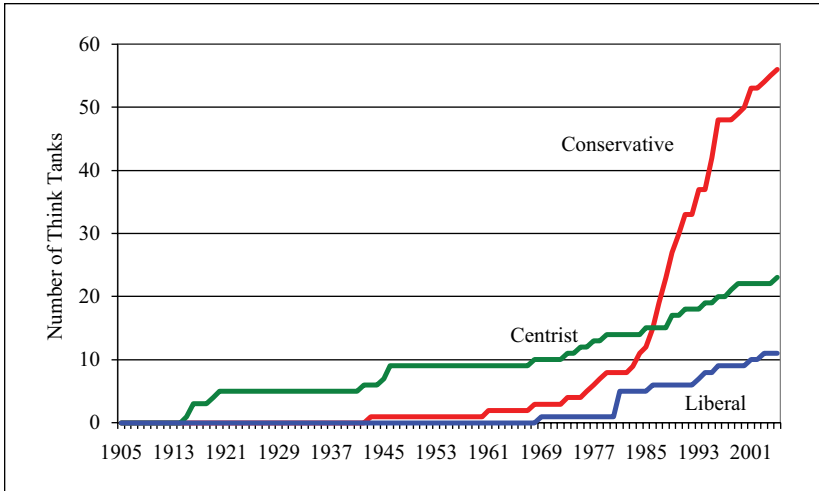


Chart 1. Think tanks with a focus on education policy by ideology 1915-2005.

additional nine were founded during the 1970s. The largest period of growth for think tanks with education policy divisions was during the 1980s and 1990s when an additional 57 think tanks were founded.

Newspaper Citations

Findings indicate that both conservative and centrist think tanks have a significant presence in education-topic newspaper articles, while liberal think tanks hardly have any newspaper presence. As indicated in Chart 2, the top conservative think tanks such as the Manhattan Institute, Heritage Foundation, American Enterprise Institute, Cato Institute, and Fordham Foundation³ average 100 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

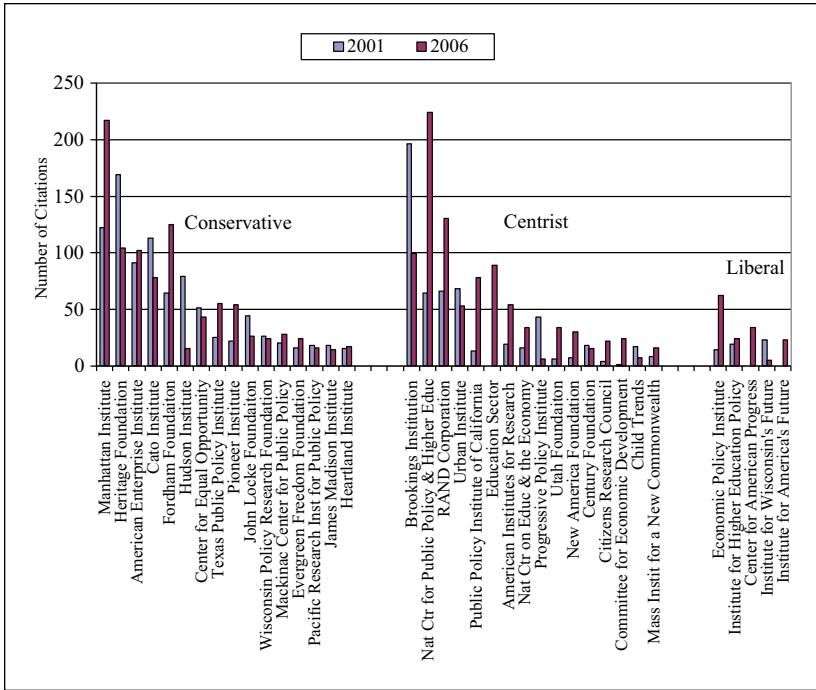


Chart 2. Think tanks with 15+ education-topic newspaper citations for 2001, 2006.

2001 to 2006. For example the Economic Policy Institute went from just 14 education-topic citations in 2001 to 62 citations in 2006. 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.

As shown in Chart 3, when think tank education-topic newspaper citations are added, conservative think tanks outweigh 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 15 think tanks, with the remaining think tanks producing on average just two to three 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.

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 31 times in newspapers across the country, but most prominently in the *Washington Post*, *Washington Times*, and *New York Times* on education issues. According the Heritage Foundation website, Kafer has a degree in history, experience working in politics, but no background in education (Heritage Foundation, 2004). However she 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 teaching or the broader field of education (Heritage Foundation, 2005). As is the case with Kafer, Lips background is in politics. A proponent of the school choice movement, Lips had a special topic article on the issue for the *Washington Times* in 2006 (Lips, 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, 2001). Also in 2001, the book *The War Against Boys: How Misguided Feminism is Harming Our Young Men*, written by Christina Hoff-Sommers, a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute was profiled in 11 newspaper articles, including the *Washington Times*, *New York Times*, and *USA Today* (Hoff-Sommers, 2001; Marziani, 2001; Tierney, 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 18 times in major newspapers and 11 times in the periodical *Education Week*. 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, 2006a, 2006b). It should be noted that, unlike the education experts at the majority of conservative think tanks, Hess actually does have a background in the field of education.

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 children in private schools. Newspapers, including the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* and *Arkansas Democrat Gazette* emphasized parental satisfaction, while other newspapers including the *New York Times* and *USA Today* emphasized the lack of effectiveness (Branam, 2001; Franck, 2001; Henry, 2001; Schemo, 2001).

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 a study by the conservative Manhattan Institute on high school graduation rates. The Center for American Progress, another liberal/progressive think tank also made its mark with coverage in various newspapers, including an article about increasing inequality in segregated public schools (Jackson, 2006; Pratt, 2006).

Think tanks, regardless of ideology, are cited most often in 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. Although many large think tanks have their studies, policy analysis, and op-eds placed in major national newspapers like the *Washington Post* and *Washington Times*, they also are cited in local 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.

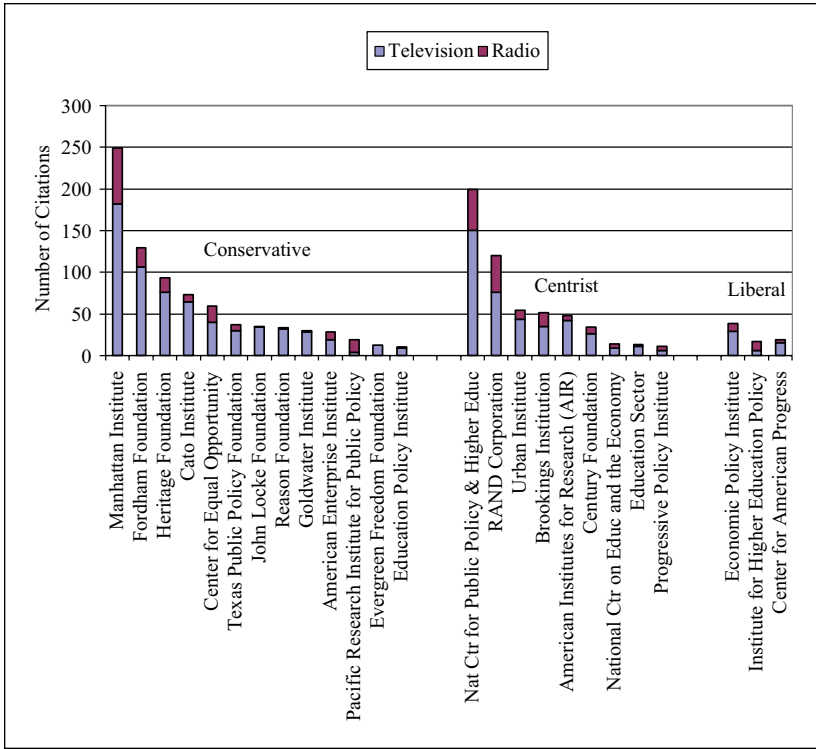


Chart 4. Think tanks with a sum of 10+ education-topical TV and radio transcripts over a 6-year period 2001-2006.

During that year the conservative Manhattan Institute was cited 42 times by the conservative *New York Sun*⁴ on education-topical stories. In this same year the *New York Sun* had a total of 68 education-topical citations from conservative think tanks, and just nine from centrist think tanks, and no education-topical citations from liberal think tanks.

Television and Radio Citations

Chart 4 shows a pattern for television and radio citations that 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

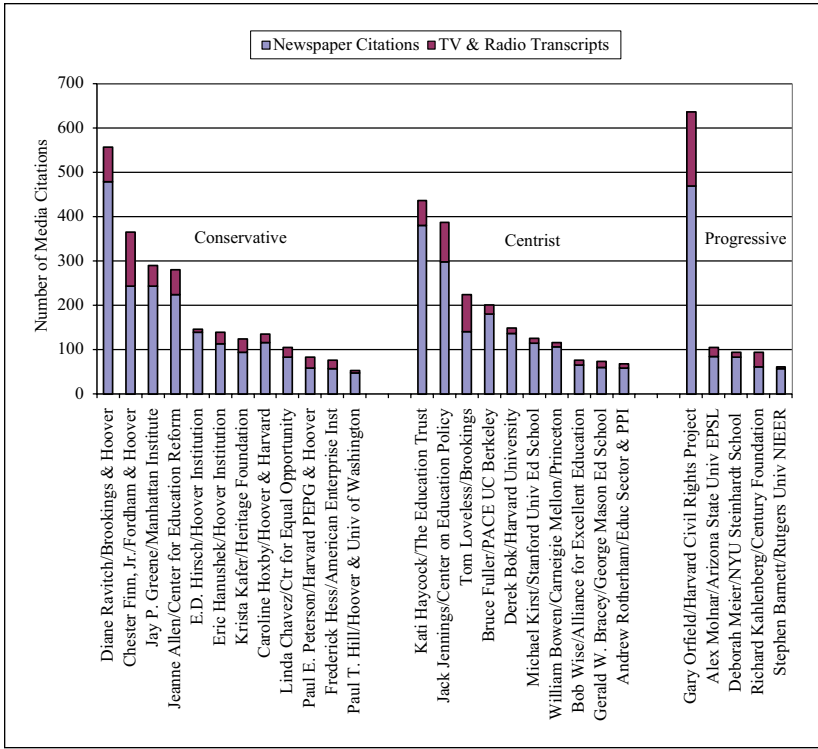


Chart 5. Education experts with 50+ media citations 2001-2006 drawn from think tanks, advocacy organizations and universities.

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.

The total number of television and radio citations of conservative think tanks far outweigh both centrist and liberal think tanks. Again, the data indicates that 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 10 conservative think tanks to garner the most attention from television and radio. This is consistent with prior research which has found that advocacy-oriented think tanks (the majority of which are conservative) have public relations teams focused on marketing the think tank, its ideas, and

experts to media outlets. Success of the think tank is largely based on how often it appears in the media. On the other hand, academic-oriented think tanks are focused on producing research, how often and whether or not the findings are talked about by media outlets is secondary (Rich, 2001; Rich & Weaver, 2000; McDonald, 2008; Welner, 2011; Yettick, 2009).

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 link between the ideology of the think tank and the ideology of the media outlet is clear when looking at television programs. Between 2001 and 2006 conservative think tanks appeared 229 times in education stories on conservative FOX television stations. FOX television was three and a half 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. Once again liberal think tanks were not in the picture.

University-Based Education-Policy Centers

As compared to the top think tanks, which garner an average of 100 or more education newspaper citations 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. The analysis identified newspaper articles where the name of the university-based research center appeared in the context of an education story. Not counted were instances where journalists cited academic researchers and/or their universities, but did not name the university 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.

High Profile Education Experts in the Media

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 (currently the UCLA Civil Rights Project), who garnered more media

Table 1. Newspapers Citations for University-Based Education-Policy Centers (2001, 2006).

Education policy research centers	Located at:	Newspaper citations	
		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

attention between 2001 and 2006 than anyone else in the field of education research.

As for the conservative expert profile, seven of the 12 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 to 2006. It should be noted that since the time of this data collection, Diane Ravitch’s position on educational issues changed from conservative to progressive (Ravitch, 2010). 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.

Discussion

Conservative think tanks and their founders understood that legitimacy was central to their survival and influence in the policy field. Many scholars have discussed organizational legitimacy. Weber (1978) focused on three types of legitimacy—legal, traditional, and charismatic, and how bureaucratic arrangements allow for organizations to legitimate their own existence. Parsons (1956) emphasized that legitimacy is central to an organization's goals and objectives. Dowling and Pfeffer (1975) note that legitimacy is difficult to achieve and that organizations can do three things to become legitimate: (a) conform; (b) alter the definition of legitimacy, or (c) "identify with symbols, values, or institutions which have a strong base of social legitimacy" (p. 127). Similarly, Suchman (1995) notes three broad strategies that are often employed by organizations to gain legitimacy: (a) conform to the environment (b) select a new environment; or (c) manipulate the current environment.

The conservative movement has used all three methods to varying degrees in an attempt to gain legitimacy in the education policy field. Simply by choosing to create think tanks, the conservative movement noticed that it may be easier to "conform" to traditionally accepted organizations as a means for gaining both entry and legitimacy. The second method for an organization to gain legitimacy is to alter the definition of legitimacy or find a new environment and audience that will accept the organization's definition of what it means to be legitimate. In terms of audience, conservative think tanks certainly seek out conservative constituencies through their websites, mailing lists, and political relationships. However they have not abandoned efforts targeted at a wider audience of policy makers, educators, school boards, and parents.

The third strategy involves some manipulation of the environment to gain legitimacy. Conservative think tanks have certainly manipulated the environment from which they operate in order to gain legitimacy. For example, many conservative think tanks have redefined what it means to do research, with the term "research" becoming synonymous with a policy brief, web memo, report, or lecture. They have also transformed the academic think tank, into the advocacy think tank, using sophisticated public relations departments to

convey their messages. Conservative think tanks have also been successful at using symbolic language to convey legitimacy. For example, their staff, like those at academic think tanks, are referred to as scholars, experts, fellows, or analysts, despite the fact that their job duties and qualifications vary widely. While insiders in the education policy community can often discern these differences, the media has not always done so, and therefore the media becomes a key tool for conservative think tanks to convey to the public a legitimacy that comes with the name “think tank.”

With no established organizational means from which to influence education policy from a free market perspective, over the past 20 years conservatives have used both think tanks and the media as reinforcing institutions to gain relatively quick entry into a field with well-established organizations and coalitions. In the 1980s conservatives knew that outside of business influences they had no organizational infrastructure from which to promote conservative ideas in the field of education. As such, in the years that followed, think tanks were used as legitimating organizations with “scholars” and “experts” who could counter what they saw as a liberal dominance in education by colleges of education, teachers’ unions, and other professional education organizations.

While the profile of conservative think tanks has risen in the education policy community, it is not due to their use of academically produced research, but rather their advocacy-oriented approach, which relies heavily on individual actors within the organization (policy experts, fellows, scholars). The term *think tank* is used to establish legitimacy, and garner attention from media outlets, and in turn frequent mention in media outlets is used to legitimate the legitimacy of the think tank itself.

Stone (2007) notes, the brand name “think tank” and its adoption by so many domestic and international organizations, signifies the cache the label carries, particularly when seeking out donors. However the overuse of the descriptor “think tank” indicates that traditional academic think tanks are becoming less distinct, and it is “the management of expert discourse rather than research that empowers think tanks in agenda setting” (p. 274). 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. 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.

Threats to legitimacy can certainly occur, as has been the case with conservative think tanks in the education policy field. The increasing number of media outlets citing conservative think tanks on education issues, has

prompted scholars to “call out” conservative think tanks on the legitimacy of their research. The most prominent example is the “Think Tank Review Project” created by Alex Molnar and developed at the Arizona State University Education Policy Research Unit (EPRU) and the University of Colorado at Boulder Education and Public Interest Center (EPIC). This project puts think tank scholarship through a process of peer review, and often reveals faulty methodology, and incoherent findings (Welner, Hinchey, Molnar, & Weitzman, 2010). It remains to be seen whether threats to the organizational legitimacy of conservative think tanks in the educational policy arena will cause them to change their institutional practices. It is more likely that the organizational success of the advocacy-oriented conservative think tank, will serve as a model for other organizations who are trying to gain quick entry into a policy field.

This research not only indicates that conservative think tanks have greater presence in the media over centrist and liberal think tanks on education issues, it also brings into question whether or not progressive perspectives in education have been completely marginalized in the think tank arena given that think tanks (regardless of categorization) are working within a narrow paradigm informed by neoconservative and neoliberal thought.

As discussed in the methodology section of this research, there are several limitations to classifying think tanks based on their own mission statements and self-perception of where they stand politically in the Washington, DC policy world. While the way in which think tanks self-define should not be taken as a given, it nonetheless gives insight into what it means to be on the “Left” or “Right” in education policy today compared to 30 years ago.

An analysis of think tank website documents as well as media citations for this study, reveals that several think tanks that are labeled “centrist” or “progressive” (places like Education Sector, the Progressive Policy Institute, Center for American Progress, and the Brookings Institution) are working within the same standards and educational choice paradigm supported by some conservative think tanks. The policy positions of several centrist and liberal think tanks on issues such as merit-based pay, charter schools, and alternative credential processes for teachers are indistinguishable from those supported by the conservative Fordham Institute and American Enterprise Institute. This is consistent with the findings of other scholars who have noted the consensus around educational issues in Washington, DC (Kovacs & Christie, 2008; DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009).

In their analysis of policymaking coalitions DeBray-Pelot, Lubienski, and Scott (2007) note that “advocacy coalitions in support of school choice now encompass left and centrist groups as well as those from the New Right” (p. 216). The alliance they describe includes the libertarian Cato Institute, the

center/left Center for American Progress, neoconservative Heritage Foundation, Fordham Institute, and American Enterprise Institute, neoliberal Center for Education Reform, and “New” Civil Rights groups such as the Black Alliance for Educational Opportunities and Hispanic CREO (Debray-Pelot, Lubienski, & Scott, 2007). Other scholars directly contest the way in which think tanks self-classify, noting that places like the Center for American Progress support right-of-center education policy positions despite identifying as “progressive” (Bracey, 2007; Gabbard, 2007; Welner, 2011). This fact complicates the way in which researchers study and classify think tanks, and indicates the importance of examining not only how organizations self-define, but also how their actions are influenced by the dominant paradigm at a particular historical point in time.

As Welner (2011) notes, “conservative education policy is now pervasive and deeply ingrained among a growing faction of powerful and wealthy Democrats” (p. 40). This shift is represented by policies supportive of deregulation, free market entrepreneurialism, and antiteacher’s union initiatives (Welner, 2011). So while the data of this research reveal that conservative think tanks garner more media attention on education stories when compared to centrist or liberal think tanks, the impact is even greater when the nature of the education policy positions taken at many centrist and several liberal/progressive think tanks are consistent with those of conservative think tanks. It also reveals that most education policy research that is critical of market-based solutions is not found at think tanks, but instead within academia.

Conclusion

The findings of this research indicate that there has been a drastic increase in the number of conservative think tanks concerned with education policy over the past 25 years, and a significant representation among these organizations in the media. These findings add to the limited academic research on think tanks and the media (Altheide & Grimes, 2005; Haas, Molnar, & Serrano, 2002; Grimes, 1997; Haas, 2004, 2007; Rich, 2001; Rich & Kent, 2000; Yettick, 2009; Yonghoi, 2004) by examining conservative think tanks within a historical context and theoretically understanding the conservative movement’s use of both think tanks and the media as a means for gaining organizational legitimacy.

This research serves as an important case study for understanding how the conservative movement has used the advocacy think tank model and the media as mutually reinforcing institutions for gaining entry into a complex educational field filled with dozens of other organizations attempting to influence the education policy process. It is additionally significant for

understanding how conservative think tanks and the handful of staff who work in them have gained disproportionate media presence by focusing on “ideas” and discourse rather than the production of research.

The findings also support prior studies that have examined the disproportionate representation of advocacy-oriented think tanks over university research in stories of education (Yettick, 2009), and the media’s use of think tank materials that promote “similar conservative and market-based education policies” (Haas, 2007, p. 92). What it adds to these important studies is a broader based picture of the entire conservative think tank landscape engaged in education policy work and the way in which neoconservative and neoliberal educational ideas have gained entry into education policy discourse through think tanks.

The broader implications of the study speak to both the media’s role in deciding what constitutes “research” and the role that conservative think tanks have played in helping to change the education policy paradigm to one focused on market mechanisms as the solution to perceived educational failure. It also brings into question the dissemination of education research to the media and policy makers. While previous 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, 1991) 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, Weiss argues that in some instances social scientific research does have the ability to shift debates however the process is diffuse and occurs slowly over time.

Although this research illustrates that conservative think tanks have been successful at garnering media attention and legitimacy through the “think tank brand,” it should be noted that many efforts on the part of conservative think tanks have failed. For example, the Heritage Foundation’s and Cato Institute’s early efforts to eliminate the Department of Education and the Hoover Institute’s and Fordham Institute’s efforts to turn Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act into a voucher program (DeBray-Pelot, 2007; McGuinn, 2006).

Further research is needed to see the extent to which the legitimacy gained by conservative think tanks in the education policy arena has marginalized university-based research and influenced education policy discussions in Washington, DC to be framed in neoliberal and neoconservative terms. Only one Washington, DC based think tank, the Economic Policy Institute, definitively makes education policy recommendations critical of the neoliberal

market-based paradigm, as well as the neoconservative outcomes assessment paradigm.

Given that most university researchers do not have public relations teams, direct media access, or relationships with members of congress, it shouldn't be surprising that a progressive paradigm which critiques the for-profit testing/assessment industry and is critical of neoliberal solutions, has been mostly absent from federal level policy discussions.

Appendix

Conservative think tanks

- Acton Institute
- 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

- Cato Institute
- Center for Equal Opportunity
- Center of the American Experiment
- Commonwealth Foundation
- Education Policy Institute
- Ethan Allen Institute
- Evergreen Freedom Foundation
- Fordham Foundation
- Georgia Public Policy Foundation
- Goldwater Institute

- Grassroot Institute of Hawaii

Conservative think tanks (continued)

- Sutherland Institute
- Tennessee Center for Policy Research
- Texas Conservative Coalition Research Institute
- Texas Public Policy Foundation
- The Independent Institute
- Virginia Institute for Public Policy
- Washington Policy Center

- Wisconsin Policy Research Institute

- Yankee Institute for Public Policy

- 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

(continued)

Appendix. (continued)

Conservative think tanks	Conservative think tanks (continued)
Heartland Institute	National Bureau of Economic Research
Heritage Foundation	National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education
Hudson Institute	National Center on Education and the Economy
Independence Institute	New America Foundation
Institute for Policy Innovation	North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research
James Madison Institute	Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation
John Locke Foundation	Progressive Policy Institute
Josiah Bartlett Center for Public Policy	Public Policy Institute of California
Kansas Public Policy Institute	RAND
Mackinac Center for Public Policy	The Century Foundation
Maine Public Policy Institute	Urban Institute
Manhattan Institute for Policy Research	Utah Foundation
Maryland Public Policy Institute	
National Center for Policy Analysis	Liberal/progressive think tanks
Nevada Policy Research Institute	Applied Research Center
New Mexico Independence Institute	Center for American Progress
Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs	Center for Law and Social Policy
Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy	Center for National Policy
Pennsylvania Family Institute	Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
Pioneer Institute	Economic Policy Institute
Reason Foundation	Institute for America's Future
Rio Grande Foundation	Institute for Higher Education Policy
Rockford Institute for Public Policy	Institute for Wisconsin's Future
Show-Me Institute	Political Research Associates
South Carolina Policy Institute	Vermont Society for the Study of Education

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Notes

1. The term *conservative* which is used to define a set of think tanks for purposes of this study is not synonymous with either the term *neoconservative* or *neoliberal*. Instead these perspectives inform, to varying degrees, the positions taken by different conservative think tanks on education.
2. "Classical Liberalism" is commonly referred to by academics in the education and social science fields as "neoliberalism." Classical liberalism should not be confused with the term *liberal* used in contemporary political discourse and in this research to describe think tanks that support liberal/progressive education policies.
3. In 2007 the Fordham Foundation became the Fordham Institute.
4. The *New York Sun* is regarded as "conservative" based on the positions taken by its editorial staff which promote limited government, free enterprise, and school vouchers. They are critical of progressive educational policies, "government run schools," and teachers' unions.
5. The Harvard Civil Rights Project was moved to UCLA in 2006.

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