ACHIEVING QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR ALL
INSIGHTS FROM THE POLICY INNOVATION DIFFUSION RESEARCH

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INTRODUCTION

Inadequacies both in the provision and the quality of early childhood education in the United States are well documented. Over the past three decades, behaviors and expectations within society have changed dramatically so that there is growing parity among women and men in their participation in the paid work force. Nonetheless, attitudes towards early childhood care and education too often derive from assumptions that no longer hold. Underlying many workplace practices and relevant public policies is the premise that young children are raised in a family where one adult (typically, the male) is the economic breadwinner, that there is a second adult (typically, the female) available in the family to provide care for children during the day, and that gaps in child care can be filled by extended family, by friends, or by neighbors (typically, other females). To the extent that influential members of society, employers, and policymakers act and make arguments based on such assumptions, they send a powerful message to families. That is, the care and education of preschoolers is a private matter. Of course, it is not. The material well being, the care, and the education of the very young in this society -- as in any other -- will have a direct material bearing on the future well being of us all. It is deeply troubling that the quality of early childhood education in the United States continues to be treated as a matter that is more-or-less peripheral to other societal, workplace, and governmental concerns.

This paper is written for people who acknowledge that the social and economic context in the United States has undergone a sea change in recent decades and who recognize that major policy changes are required in response. I contend that individuals and groups seeking to build momentum for achieving quality early childhood education for all can learn some useful lessons from the scholarly literature on the diffusion of policy innovations. The paper contains two main parts. In the first, I review the research on state policy settings and the factors that tend to support policy change. Attention is focused on the ways that state policymakers appear to learn from what is going on elsewhere and incorporate new ideas into their policy agendas. Through this discussion of the literature I distill several strategic implications for advocates of policy change. In the second

part of the paper, I take these general strategic implications and consider in turn their relevance to the efforts being made to achieve early childhood education for all in the United States. In so doing, I suggest ways that advocates might usefully build on various promising initiatives and ideas.

In the absence of sound, systematic knowledge of the full range of current early childhood care and education practices, policy initiatives, and potential opportunities for securing rapid policy victories, agenda-changing policy advocacy will be hard to sustain. Advocates must consciously build their knowledge concerning what works and what does not work. They must acquire an understanding of the organizational and political strengths and weaknesses of alternative strategies for securing quality early education for all children. And they must keep track of those individuals and groups who are most likely to serve as supporters and as opponents of their policy ideas. Designed carefully, advocacy efforts that blend proposals for policy change with on-the-ground development of model programs can help forge good relations among people with apparently divergent interests. Such efforts can set the stage for the emergence of strong, new advocacy coalitions.

The advocacy task ahead should not be under-estimated. But the good news is that, having defined the policy goal as early childhood education for all, many exciting possibilities now exist for engaging in creative policy entrepreneurship and policy experimentation. The need is urgent for theory-driven, research-intensive policy learning regarding current arrangements in the United States and how promising initiatives might be broadly emulated. The scope of this paper is necessarily limited. However, I hope what I have to say here will prove helpful in guiding additional theoretical and empirical work to support this vital advocacy task.

I THE RESEARCH ON POLICY INNOVATIONS AND THEIR DIFFUSION

How can we explain similarities and differences in the ideas, policies, and practices found in organizations, jurisdictions, and cultures? Scholars working across the social sciences have long given a range of answers to this question, and each answer offers at least partial insights. Collectively, contributors to the study of innovation diffusion have developed approaches to thinking about the forms of communication that support convergence in ideas, policies, and practices. Since the 1960s, political scientists have generated a literature on the diffusion of policy innovations across the United States. This research contains many relevant insights for advocates of policy change.

A FOCUS ON EXPLAINING DIFFUSION PATTERNS

The political science literature on policy innovation diffusion has focused on explaining diffusion patterns. Which states are typically leaders and which are typically laggards in adopting policy innovations? In a path-breaking study of states and the diffusion of policy innovations, Jack L. Walker (1969) studied the diffusion paths of a large number of different policy innovations. Walker ranked states by the order in which they had adopted each innovation. He then developed an overall ranking of states as innovation adopters. Walker concluded that states that are innovation leaders are typically large and cosmopolitan, such as New York and California. In a challenge to Walker's effort to identify and explain broad patterns, Virginia Gray (1973) argued that diffusion patterns are not primarily determined by characteristics of the adopting states. Rather, in Gray's view, each particular policy innovation will have its own unique diffusion path.

Taken together, Walker's work and Gray's work have had considerable influence on the subsequent work of scholars of policy innovation diffusion. While few have challenged or sought to update Walker's ranking of states as innovation adopters, scholars have continued to aspire to producing general explanations of when and where innovations get adopted. Influenced by Gray's study, most subsequent research efforts have tended to focus on the adoption of one or a few policy innovations.

ORGANIZATIONAL MOTIVATION, RESOURCES, AND OBSTACLES

In a study of innovative practices in local public health departments, Lawrence B. Mohr (1969) argued that organizational innovations emerge as a complex function of the motivation of organizational leaders, the availability of resources, and the existence of obstacles to change. Mohr argued that motivation, resources, and lack of obstacles tend to serve as mutually reinforcing factors that support innovation. For example, Mohr found that local public health officers were motivated to innovate by environmental changes and demands (i.e., changes in the health needs of the population they worked with) on the one hand, and material and status interests (i.e., a desire to be viewed by peers in their professional networks as leaders in the field and "up and coming") on the other. In large organizations, with greater levels of available resources, such highly motivated health officers could often find funds to support the introduction of innovations (whether objectively "needed" or not), while their peers in smaller organizations were less able to do so. Lack of resources in small organizations made it all the harder to overcome potential obstacles to change.

In subsequent efforts to explain state adoption of given policy innovations, scholars have tended to follow Mohr's model, arguing that, as organizational entities, states might be expected to be more likely to adopt policy innovations

when they are motivated to be adopters, when they have the available resources, and when they do not face strong obstacles to adoption. Importantly, what might constitute resources, motives, and obstacles will differ across policy areas. Thus, scholars have used a variety of factors to explain the timing of policy adoptions, but they have often subsumed these under the categories of resources, motivation, and obstacles.

From the point of view of an advocate for policy change, useful insights into the design of political strategy can be obtained by brainstorming to develop a list of potential obstacles to the introduction of a policy innovation. Once such a list has been developed, items on it could be ranked from obstacles that could be readily overcome to those that would appear to be insurmountable. A variation on the motivation, resources, and obstacles framework is provided by a popular business strategy tool called *SWOT* analysis. This approach implores organizational leaders to reflect on their internal *S*trengths and *W*eaknesses and external *O*pportunities and *T*hreats. Having identified these items, discussions can be used to explore how particular strengths might be enhanced and how particular weaknesses might be downplayed or, perhaps, transformed into strengths. Discussions of external opportunities and threats could revolve around how an organization might take advantage of opportunities in its operating environment (broadly construed), how to limit identified threats, and how to work to turn potential threats into potential opportunities. For example, such an analytical strategy could be used to explore likely public receptivity to the adoption of a particular innovation.

To the extent that those who seek to adopt policy innovations are accountable to the public, the public will can serve either as a motivation for innovation or as an obstacle, depending on the context and – perhaps more importantly – the ways in which public discussion over the relevant innovation has been shaped and guided. For example, state adoption of lotteries or support for other forms of gambling (such as casinos) will often meet with resistance, especially when the public debate is framed around questions to do with morality or family values. Then again, if the public debate is framed so that government revenue sources become the center of attention, the public will might be tapped as a resource to *support* innovation adoption. In this latter example, arguments might be made that state lotteries and the legalization of casinos will allow for “revenue enhancement,” reducing the state’s reliance on income taxes or sales taxes. By making provision for new revenues to be ear-marked for additional funding of worthy social goals, such as the repair and rebuilding of public schools, the “revenue enhancement” frame can serve to limit opposition motivated by so-called “morality” concerns. Such issues have been discussed by Frances Stokes Berry and William D. Berry (1990, 1992) and by Christopher Z. Mooney and Mei-Hsien Lee (1995). In my own work on policy entrepreneurship (Mintrom 2000), I have noted how efforts by proponents of policy change can gain popular support when evidence and

argument is used to suggest that a crisis is at hand and that the adoption of a specific policy innovation or set of innovations will serve to alleviate that crisis.

Despite what common wisdom might suggest, members of the public frequently *do* need guidance both with respect to where their material interests lie and with respect to how specific policy innovations might serve to support or undermine cultural norms. In short, then, the public will is often able to be shaped, and advocates of policy change can benefit from thinking seriously about how to educate the broader public in ways that serve to turn potential obstacles into resources for supporting the adoption of policy innovations.

DEMONSTRATION EFFECTS

In his encyclopedic study of innovation diffusion among individuals and organizations, Everett M. Rogers (1962 and subsequent editions) observed that demonstration effects are critical for supporting the diffusion of innovation. According to Rogers, individuals are most often persuaded to adopt an innovation when they have first-hand knowledge of adoption by someone with whom they closely identify (e.g., a family member, friend, or colleague). This condition holds even when the individuals in question have previously received information on the practice or product through more general, impersonal information sources. We might call this phenomenon the demonstration effect. In the study of states and policy innovation, the importance of demonstration effects has long been recognized. For example, Walker contended that states are much more likely to adopt policy innovations if a neighboring state has previously done so. He termed this "regional influences." Many subsequent studies of states and policy innovation have found additional support for this contention.

Why do politicians and other leaders show more willingness to adopt a policy innovation if the innovation has already been adopted in a neighboring jurisdiction? The most compelling argument here is that politicians often fear the consequences of introducing policies if the likely effects of those policies are not well known. When a neighboring state adopts a policy innovation, a great deal of new information comes to light. With a policy innovation in place literally next door, advocates of policy change can point to the merits of the innovation, they can more readily dismiss arguments against the innovation, and they can play the trump card that "if it's good enough for them, then surely it's good enough for us, too."

BOTTOM-UP AND TOP-DOWN DIFFUSION

So far I have discussed the diffusion of policy innovations as if this is primarily a state-to-state, or horizontal, phenomenon. For the most part, that is exactly how

policy innovation diffusion has been represented in the literature. For reasons to do with the theoretical and methodological approaches preferred by diffusion scholars, other channels of diffusion have frequently been given scant attention. Nonetheless, thinking in terms of vertical diffusion of policy innovations can be quite helpful.

Let us begin by thinking about the problem faced by an advocate of policy change. Should the advocate seek change at the local level, at the state level, or at the national level? Obviously, the answer will depend greatly on the type of policy change being sought. But in the area of public education, for example, it is possible for people to advocate for policy change at multiple levels of government. Thus, advocates can engage in what Frank R. Baumgartner and Bryan D. Jones (1993) have termed "venue shopping." This involves deliberately looking for places to advocate policy change where that advocacy is likely to have the greatest impact. Often, advocates will turn to introducing a policy innovation at the local level prior to advocating change at the state level. In taking this approach, advocates essentially work to create a demonstration effect right in the state legislature's backyard. When efforts made at the local level evoke a response at the state level, we can talk in terms of bottom-up policy innovation diffusion.

Innovation diffusion from the bottom up can potentially involve not only local-to-state lines of influence but also advocacy from the states to the federal government. The history of welfare policy in the United States, both during the 1930s and during the 1990s, has seen the state of Wisconsin playing a pivotal role in developing policy innovations that were subsequently adopted in one form or another by the federal government.

When the federal government adopts policies that promote changes at the state or local level, it essentially engages in a process of top-down policy innovation diffusion. Such action on the part of the federal government might be undertaken to prompt wholly new practices at the state or local level or they might be undertaken with the goal of speeding the diffusion of policies that have already been shown to be of value through limited geographical application (say in a handful of states or localities).

When we think in terms of both horizontal diffusion of innovations and vertical diffusion of innovations (i.e., bottom-up and top-down) the story of how policies diffuse can become much more complicated than if we focus just on state-to-state diffusion processes. While more complicated, thinking in this way can be enormously liberating for advocates of policy change. It suggests that many opportunities exist for building support for the broad adoption of a policy innovation, even when political or other obstacles are confronted in particular policy-making venues.

POLICY NETWORKS

Scholars of federalism and intergovernmental relations in the United States have often noted the variety of ways that officials at all levels in the federal system of government interact over policy issues. In an influential essay on this matter, Hugh Heclo (1978) argued that issue networks have increasingly come to play a central role in shaping the terms of debate in the formal policymaking process, and the types of policy alternatives that receive serious attention. Building on this work, John W. Kingdon (1984) suggested that policy ideas evolve through discussions and debates in policy communities and that ideas with merit gain support during this process, long before they enter the formal political dialogue. In another body of work owing a debt to Heclo's concept of issue networks, Paul A. Sabatier (1988) has developed what he terms the "advocacy coalition framework." This framework presents a way of understanding how large groups of people (such as elected and appointed officials at all levels of government, interest group leaders, and researchers) can come over time to engage in a relatively high degree of coordinated action in support of specific policy goals.

In my own work on policy networks (Mintrom 2000), I have suggested that these relatively loosely coordinated groups of interested individuals provide a crucial conduit for the diffusion of policy ideas. Collectively, members of policy networks represent a repository of suggestions about policy innovations, stories about bureaucratic and legislative battles, and advice regarding political strategy. Through word-of-mouth, the merits of particular policy ideas and the reputations for trustworthiness of their advocates can quickly become common knowledge among interested parties. Aware of the power of networks, policy advocates can increase the likelihood of achieving political success by working to build sound relationships with others and developing their reputations.

POLICY ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Scholars of the policymaking process have occasionally noted the importance of advocates whom they term "policy entrepreneurs" for supporting policy change. In my work, I have examined the linkages between policy entrepreneurship and the diffusion of policy innovations. I contend that policy entrepreneurs are actors in the policy process who -- like their counterparts in the world of business -- must find ways to persuade others of the merit of transforming their ideas into reality. Policy entrepreneurs can be located both inside and outside of government. These individuals must be able to communicate with people in a variety of settings, argue effectively, and find ways to build teams of people who will promote policy change. Policy entrepreneurs will make good use of policy networks and the information contained within them. Therefore, in many ways, policy entrepreneurs can be seen as the very agents of change who, through their day-to-day political actions, create the conditions that support both the development and the diffusion of policy innovations.

Placing policy entrepreneurs at the heart of the diffusion process does not negate previous understandings of the factors that support policy innovation and innovation diffusion. But this perspective does serve to remind us of the nature of the political effort that must go into securing policy change. Analytical work that focuses on explaining broader patterns of policy diffusion has sometimes underplayed the politics of policy innovation diffusion.

Policy entrepreneurs are not super-human and they cannot easily change their political contexts. One implication is that, as Kingdon (1984) has noted, policy entrepreneurs must sometimes "lie in wait" until their "windows of opportunity" open. At those times -- such as immediately at the start of a new term of a legislature, governorship, or presidency -- policy entrepreneurs can push hard for the adoption of their pet policy innovations. Of course, lying in wait does not mean doing nothing; there are many things that policy entrepreneurs can do to set the scene for rapid policy change to occur once the conditions are right.

POLICY DESIGN FOR INNOVATION AND INNOVATION DIFFUSION

The literature on policy innovation makes little mention of the ways that policy-making institutions and various governmental and non-governmental organizations might be structured to support innovative practices. However, organizational scholars have recently begun to pay serious attention to the ways that firms and partnerships across multiple firms are organized to promote invention. Invention and innovation should not be seen as chance events or as being unmanageable. Through careful efforts to appropriately manage relevant information, to structure discussions among key players, and to diagnose successes

and failures, organizations can increase their ability to learn and also to build on their strengths. Advocates of policy change who want to demonstrate the merit of their ideas, who want to build strong networks of grass-roots supporters, and who want to speed up the diffusion of policy innovations, can take concrete steps to improve their chances of success.

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

Several implications for advocates of policy change emerge from the research on policy innovation diffusion in the United States.

- Thinking of policy innovation as a joint product of motivation, resources, and lack of obstacles is a good starting point for assessing the likelihood of securing policy change in any given jurisdiction, and for determining what actions might give the greatest boost to the likelihood of change.

- Politicians are more likely to support policy change when the consequences of such change are well known. That is why regional influences have often been found to promote the diffusion of policy innovations. Given this, policy advocates should think carefully about how to generate evidence -- either from elsewhere or through local projects -- to demonstrate the workability of their proposals.

- Policy innovations can diffuse vertically as well as horizontally. In periods when the likelihood of securing policy change in one venue (say, the state legislature) seems low, advocates should consider focusing on other venues (say, the local level), with the purpose of ultimately using changes secured in one venue to leverage change in others.

- Formal efforts to facilitate face-to-face meetings of policy advocates (such as policy conferences, leadership training, exchange visits among local innovators, and so on) can promote the development of strong, informal cross-state policy networks that support the promotion of policy change.

- Policy change, and hence the rapid diffusion of innovations, is more likely to occur when policy entrepreneurs have worked hard in their respective jurisdictions to build coalitions supportive of their policy goals. The skills required of policy entrepreneurs can be learned; local-, state-, and national-level efforts can support the development of influential policy entrepreneurs.

- Policy innovation should be viewed as an on-going process. Organizations and institutional structures can be purposefully designed to promote high levels of local legitimacy and grass roots participation. Appropriate design can also ensure the generation and careful management of information that can support policy learning within and across organizations.

II LESSONS FOR THE ADVOCACY OF UNIVERSAL EARLY EDUCATION

So far I have reviewed the research on the diffusion of policy innovations and, in so doing, I have identified several strategic implications for advocates of policy change. Now I want to place at center stage the goal of achieving early childhood education for all in the United States. In what follows, I discuss several cases of what I consider to be promising strategies now being used by advocates of quality care and education for the young.

To increase the likelihood of achieving policy victories, policy advocates need to routinely reflect on their actions. What I am saying here is intended to be catalytic, prompting new, research-intensive initiatives to document and analyze successes and failures in the advocacy of public policy to support child development.

Effective advocacy must be knowledge-based, supported by detailed information about aspects of program design and by insights concerning the political feasibility of various forms of argumentation. Instead of viewing advocacy as simply *argumentation* and the presentation of extant knowledge, we should also recognize the ways in which *action* is advocacy. By so doing, we see the importance of designing programs with the two-fold goal of achieving immediate outcomes *and* generating new information. Appropriately analyzed and presented, such new information can serve as the basis for renewed advocacy and the pursuit of even more comprehensive policy change.

ASSESSING MOTIVATION, RESOURCES, AND OBSTACLES

In a recent study of state initiatives to support early childhood education, Karen Schulman, Helen Blank, and Danielle Ewen (1999) documented disparities across the states with respect to per capita investments in this area. Ten states appear to spend nothing on the care and education of pre-school children. Among the forty others, considerable variation can be found in the amount of money being spent. To date, only Georgia has made a sufficient investment to ensure that education is available to all 4-year-old children whose families want to participate. In contrast, other states tend to have more limited programs. Often, these are targeted towards low-income children. Nonetheless, inadequate program funding often means that the availability of early childhood education is limited, even for those families that qualify for assistance.

Work of the sort produced by Schulman, Blank, and Ewen is enormously beneficial to policy advocates. Systematic documentation of what states are doing in a policy area, and the amount of money being devoted to it lays the foundation for asking a variety of critical questions. Why is Georgia currently making more

of a commitment to early childhood education than all other states? Are policymakers in Georgia working to build upon past successes? If so, how? And why aren't Georgia's neighboring states also seeking to make similar commitments to this policy area? Complementing the comparative work of Schulman, Blank, and Ewen, in a detailed case study of the prekindergarten program in Georgia, Anthony Raden (1999) has provided some extremely useful insights into the program's origins and its development. For example, he notes that, unlike other states, Georgia benefited from the political leadership of Governor Zell Miller, who was strongly motivated to improve early childhood education there. Further, resources for the program were obtained from designating to it a portion of the state lottery revenues.

For advocates of early childhood education for all, the motivation, resources, and obstacles framework can be applied to thinking about a variety of issues to do with policy settings and program design. The key to successful use of the framework is to first define the unit of analysis. Do we want to think in terms of motivation, resources, and obstacles affecting local (city or county) support for early childhood education programs? Or do we want to use the framework to think about current policy settings in a given state and the possibilities for changing those settings in positive ways? Once the unit of analysis has been defined, it is extremely useful to think comparatively about motivation, resources, and obstacles. Given that Georgia has found a creative, yet sustainable, way to support education for all 4-year-olds whose families desire it, why haven't other states? Comparatively speaking, what obstacles exist in other states that do not exist in Georgia? What resources did Georgia have available that are not existent in other states? And, why have policymakers like Governor Zell Miller in Georgia apparently been more motivated in this policy area than policymakers elsewhere? Of course, asking questions of this sort inevitably means that advocates will need to work at carefully defining their terms. As I noted earlier, public opinion might be termed as a resource in some instances and as an obstacle in others, even when the policy issue in question is virtually identical across jurisdictions.

Working with the motivation, resources, and obstacles framework, and doing so by comparing across jurisdictions, can help us to identify possible levers of policy change. Given the obstacles that have been identified, which ones could be most readily removed? Which obstacles could seriously impede progress towards our policy goal? How could those apparently intransigent obstacles be gotten around or removed? This might mean turning to other (higher) levels of government for support. Many current proposals for improving the provision and the quality of early childhood care and education contend that states need incentives from the federal government to support good-quality early-learning programs. But perhaps this strategy should be considered as just one of several that could be pursued to reduce state-level obstacles to policy change and to increase motivation for action.

For example, thinking in terms of public and private partnerships as a means to tap the enormous resources of the corporate sector might lead to new ways of thinking about pressuring state governments to adopt desired policy changes.

The key lesson contained in the motivation, resources, and obstacles framework is that advocates of policy change need to have a firm grasp of the broader policy environment that they are working within, and a clear sense of how that environment might be manipulated in positive ways. Description and diagnosis are not substitutes for taking decisive action to achieve policy change. But it is very hard to be effective as a change agent if you do not have a reservoir of policy knowledge and strategic thinking to draw upon. The on-going monitoring and analysis that is required to make accurate, comparative assessments of motivation, resources, and obstacles can be a great support for creative thinking about aspects of advocacy and details of program design. In addition, bringing together advocates from different jurisdictions from time to time with the immediate purpose of sharing ideas and information about steps taken to secure policy change can have many spillover benefits with respect to the building of strong network ties in the early childhood care and education community.

DEMONSTRATING THE WORKABILITY OF PROPOSALS

For several reasons, politicians are often reluctant to support new programs. One reason is that, when resources are scarce, politicians are more likely to fund established programs with well-entrenched and well-organized supporters as opposed to proposals for new projects that -- since they are yet to be put in place -- necessarily lack a strong constituency. This suggests that advocates for new programs must work doubly hard to secure funding, and they must recognize the extent to which their lobbying efforts will be in competition with those of groups who are working to maintain or increase funding for programs already in existence. Aside from this problem of securing well-organized support for their program ideas, advocates of policy innovations face a major conceptual problem. That is, they must find ways to argue that a program yet to be implemented will in fact work; that it will yield the promised benefits and that it will not produce unintended -- and potentially damaging -- consequences. Clearly, making arguments for a program that is wholly new is an extremely difficult task.

Advocates of a policy innovation can do several things to improve the likelihood that politicians will show serious interest in their proposal and, ultimately, adopt them. All of these things have to do with developing convincing evidence of the workability of the proposal. When advocates in one jurisdiction manage to secure adoption of a policy innovation they greatly increase the chances that advocates elsewhere will be able to successfully promote adoption of a similar innovation. In effect, as soon as a policy innovation is put in place -- no matter where it is put

in place -- the advocates who have secured that policy change solve a critical information and credibility problem for advocates elsewhere. No longer must advocates rely upon forceful argument and the credulity of the politicians they need to convince. Now they can point to concrete evidence of a working program. If that new program has been appropriately designed, it will also be subject to evaluations that generate information regarding how well it is working.

Knowing that they must find ways to provide politicians with compelling evidence concerning the workability of their proposals, policy advocates can do several things. First, they can build their knowledge of similar programs elsewhere. They can then think of compelling ways to argue that evidence available from those programs justifies introduction of the new program in their jurisdiction. For example, evidence from the Abecedarian Project (see Campbell and Ramey, 1999), a longitudinal study of the effects of early childhood intervention, could be used to support arguments made to state legislatures that spending more money on providing early childhood education for all is likely to yield a variety of long-term benefits for the social and economic development of the state. Furthermore, several teams of researchers have recently made impressive efforts to aggregate, analyze, and present evidence of the effects of many disparate early childhood care and education programs. Good examples of such work are provided by Lynn A. Karoly and her colleagues (1998) and by Deborah Lowe Vandell and Barbara Wolf (2000). Second, advocates can look to current programs in their jurisdictions and consider ways that their proposals for new programs could be introduced as extensions of those existing programs. For example, new early childhood education programs could be introduced simply as a reduction in the age at which children enter current kindergarten programs. Third, advocates can think of ways to establish time-limited local demonstration programs to generate the evidence of workability that politicians typically desire. Over the years, an impressive array of local demonstration projects have been introduced across the United States with the purpose of generating evidence that could be used to support more comprehensive program adoption. Some examples are documented by Sheila B. Kamerman and Alfred J. Kahn (1995).

Despite mounting research evidence about the effectiveness of various early childhood education programs, it seems that so far this evidence has not been used effectively to support arguments for comprehensive policy change. Thus, an urgent task of research brokerage is at hand. That is, new ways must be found to link knowledge creation with the support of effective policy advocacy. Huge mountains of evidence are not what is required to make convincing arguments to state or federal politicians. Rather advocates need to have the ability to rapidly recall key findings associated with various studies and with various programs. In a sense, the conclusions of the researchers need to become embedded as “folk lore” in the minds of advocates. In addition, if advocates have access to well-

organized databases that summarize relevant evidence, then they can readily retrieve those items of evidence that are most appropriate for them to showcase to politicians, given the particular advocacy task before them.

THINKING CREATIVELY ABOUT VENUES FOR POLICY CHANGE

Support for early childhood education across the United States is currently provided in differing degrees by a variety of governmental and non-governmental entities. Advocates seeking to achieve early childhood education for all thus face some strategic questions. Given limited resources, where should they direct the bulk of their advocacy energies? Should they focus their attentions on lobbying the federal government, or state governments, or local governments in pursuit of policy changes? In addition, should they think about working more closely with various non-profit and corporate entities to implement new community-based and work-based practices that help ease the many child care burdens that families face? Evidence can be found in both the agenda setting and innovation diffusion literatures suggesting that advocates who have confronted obstacles to achieving their policy goals in one venue can benefit at times from channeling their energies into other venues.

Recent efforts by early childhood education advocates in Pennsylvania indicate the merits of thinking creatively about venues for policy change. According to the Children's Defense Fund (2000), leaders of the Focus on Our Future initiative have been pressuring national and state legislators to increase public funding for early childhood programs. Among other things, this has resulted in state funds in Pennsylvania being made available to emulate a training program for child care workers first established in North Carolina. But Focus on Our Future has augmented this national and state government-focused lobbying effort with a highly creative local strategy. Using sponsorship from sources such as the local chapter of United Way and the local branch of the state university, Focus on Our Future has sponsored local teacher training and certification programs in York County, Pennsylvania and it has worked to help local child care homes and centers earn national accreditation. Paralleling these training and accreditation initiatives, Focus on Our Future has also facilitated a commission made up of business leaders, city, county, and state legislators, school superintendents, and others and charged it with developing a comprehensive financial plan for the delivery of quality early childhood care and education in the county.

Clearly, an effort of this sort that is focused on ameliorating problems in the delivery of early childhood education within a tightly defined geographical area could be criticized as being too localized. After all, don't Pennsylvania's problems of provision and quality extend well beyond the boundaries of York County? Such criticism could be leveled at many local initiatives across the

United States. But the benefits of such initiatives can be considerable, and they can have important ripple effects going well beyond their immediate area. For example, in bringing together a diverse body of politicians, administrators, and civic leaders and asking them to work together to solve a tangible, well-defined problem, the leaders of Focus on Our Future have devised a form of partnership-based problem-solving that could readily be emulated in other localities. Further, since this problem-solving commission brought together state and local politicians in Pennsylvania, it essentially created new opportunities for raising the awareness of state-level actors with respect to problems the delivery of early childhood care and education. This commission could also be seen as a new building block in the creation of a state-wide coalition to achieve more state-level support for the educational development of the very young.

The achievement of local successes, even when somewhat limited in scope, can be an important morale-booster for advocates. Also, it can be an excellent means of generating new evidence to demonstrate the workability of ideas concerning how state governments might better serve the educational and care needs of young children. As such, local efforts of this sort can often serve to accelerate policy innovation diffusion even when venues more traditionally associated with the diffusion of policy innovations, such as state and national governments, appear to be reluctant to initiate anything more than incremental policy changes.

DEVELOPING STRONG, INFORMAL CROSS-STATE POLICY NETWORKS

Throughout this discussion I have several times mentioned the benefits that can emerge when practitioners and advocates from different jurisdictions are given opportunities to learn from each other, and to think comparatively about policies and practices. Quite often, ideas for change, and knowledge of innovative policies and practices, spread among advocates and practitioners in haphazard ways. Nonetheless, ideas picked up almost by chance can serve to inform aspects of policy and program design in critical ways. Advocates seeking to attain early childhood education for all in the United States could further that cause by consciously working to develop strong, informal cross-state policy networks of advocates and child care practitioners.

The major benefit of supporting informal networks is that, when working effectively, such networks can provide rich opportunities for people from a range of positions and with a variety of backgrounds and experiences to tap into each-other's knowledge and know-how with the purpose of improving their local practices. Carefully nurtured, cross-state policy networks can be used to support both advocacy efforts and citizen-based, or partnership-based efforts to establish new local programs. Effective policy networks serve as the conduits through which ideas for policy change and suggestions for political strategy circulate. Thus, time taken to develop strong, cross-state policy networks can be viewed as an investment that will eventually speed the diffusion of desirable policy innovations.

A number of formal activities could serve to support the creation of new networks as well as strengthen and extend existing ones. The most effective initiatives of this sort involve bringing people from different states together for face-to-face meetings of one sort or another. While it is often the case that face-to-face meetings are not highly efficient as means of communicating detailed knowledge, they are crucially important for giving people opportunities to become acquainted and to develop a degree of familiarity with each other. This time spent together can greatly increase the ease with which people subsequently communicate by telephone, e-mail, and so on.

A range of efforts could be made to nurture informal policy networks. Indeed, some efforts are already being made by foundations and by the federal government. Small conferences can be organized to bring 10 to 20 people together to talk about common problems and to share strategies for addressing them. Actors who have worked to devise a new program or who have succeeded in achieving legislative adoption of a policy idea can be invited to share their insights and lessons learned with actors from another state who are currently preparing to launch a similar initiative. Workshops can be held to train advocates

or practitioners from several states in skills needed to work with politicians, or with the media. Other workshops can be held to introduce people to meeting skills and conflict resolution strategies that could be used to improve their ability to negotiate policy changes or to help establish new, local-level programs. Ideally, all efforts of this sort should be designed so that the people in attendance are learning from others who they can readily identify with and who can give advice and suggestions on topics that range beyond those for which the workshop was organized. Considering ways that groups of people might be reconvened on future occasions can also serve to increase the likelihood that these formal initiatives will prompt on-going, informal communications among the people concerned. Providing opportunities for several meeting participants to subsequently work together on solving common problems can also serve to consolidate strong cross-state working relationships among people with shared interests.

Potentially, on-going initiatives to support face-to-face meetings could be funded by foundations, non-profit organizations, by governmental entities, or by a mixture of all three. Although the costs of such initiatives might be considerable and the immediate benefits might not be so apparent, to the extent that they establish conditions for on-going sharing of quality information among a wide variety of actors, they can have potentially important payoffs in terms of building solidarity among advocacy groups. My contention here is that formal efforts can support informal networking in quite subtle ways. But such a contention could also serve as a justification for on-going funding of initiatives that yield far fewer marginal benefits than other initiatives devised to serve the same purpose. Given that, a key task for funders of formal efforts to encourage informal networking should be to develop ways of evaluating the comparative cost-effectiveness of alternative strategies.

ENCOURAGING STATE AND LOCAL POLICY ENTREPRENEURS

In my scholarly work on policy change, I have paid considerable attention to the actions of a class of people who I term policy entrepreneurs. In my view, these people -- these movers and shakers in the policymaking process -- are often critical for ensuring that ideas for policy change receive wide attention and become part of the policy discourse in their jurisdictions. In thinking of ways to promote the cause of universal quality early education and care, advocacy groups would do well to consider supporting the development of a national cadre of policy entrepreneurs who could work closely with others over a long period of time to create the conditions for achieving significant policy change.

Policy entrepreneurs must be highly committed to bringing about social change. They must believe in the power of ideas to change the habitual ways that people think and act concerning early childhood education as a social issue. Beyond

those basic requirements, however, much about what it means to be a policy entrepreneur can be learned. Knowing how to work with others in teams, how to manage conflict, how to effectively frame policy problems, how to devise potential solutions, how to build coalitions of supporters, how to transform ideas into practice, and how to make sound use of policy networks can all be learned through a combination of experience and appropriate training.

Foundations could do a considerable amount to encourage the emergence and development of state and local early childhood education policy entrepreneurs. Some of the ideas set out above for supporting policy networks could be viewed as ways to help people develop into policy entrepreneurs. Facilitating skill workshops, providing mentoring opportunities, and assisting local initiatives to put new programs in place can all be seen as ways to invite potential change agents to identify themselves and to subsequently develop the knowledge and skills required to be highly effective at working with others and becoming powerful advocates for policy change.

VIEWING POLICY INNOVATION AS AN ON-GOING PROCESS

A great deal of what I have had to say here about advocacy for early childhood education for all has focused on *process* matters. I do not know what particular actions will be taken and what the content of the arguments will be that will eventually lead to this desired social outcome. Right now, nobody can tell. But I do know that thinking carefully about the procedural steps that might support effective advocacy, even if we are thinking in quite general ways, can be enormously beneficial for moving policies and practices in desired directions. The process matters that I have talked about here typically involve making a lot of effort to carefully gather and manage -- and hence learn from -- information about policies and practices across different jurisdictions and different programs. Such information emerges out of reflection on current practice, out of deliberate analysis of activities and outcomes, and out of on-going conversations. This suggests an important point. That is, effective advocacy must be grounded in carefully-orchestrated efforts to encourage problem-focused, informed conversations among people with a shared interest in achieving early childhood education for all.

Done well, efforts to learn through conversation represent the very embodiment of democratic practice -- finding ways to bring interested parties together to engage in intensive discussions with the goal of addressing shared, pressing social concerns. I suggest that this model should inform program design for early childhood education. Continuous improvement in the quality of program activities and outcomes occurs when information from various stakeholders is routinely elicited and analyzed with the goal of addressing immediate problems and

building on program strengths. Program-based information can be augmented with information and ideas learned from similar programs operating elsewhere. Here, a clear role exists both for governmental entities and for foundations. Such organizations could serve to routinely bring groups of people from diverse local settings together to share ideas, share stories of program successes, and to brainstorm together over ways to address pressing problems. To increase the likelihood that meetings of this sort would effectively add to knowledge of what works and what doesn't work in various program activities, the organizers would need to make sure that invited guests were well-briefed and well-prepared before attending the meetings. To make sure that knowledge generated in the meetings could contribute to the accumulation of wisdom in the field, care would also have to be put into the production of meeting reports. Organizers could augment such events with small grants encouraging collaborative efforts to solve common problems and through initiatives that showcase innovative programs and explain what makes those programs successful.

All the social networks, information systems, and structured opportunities for discussion that can serve to support effective advocacy can also serve to support learning towards the continuous improvement of early childhood care and educational practices. Conscious effort should be made to ensure that this occurs. When it does occur, the linkages between *advocacy* and *action* are made all the stronger. This is a good thing.

CONCLUSION

The academic literature on policy innovation diffusion has been developed in ways that primarily emphasize contributions to social scientific theory and methodology. Yet efforts to secure policy changes in states and localities always involve a great degree of practical political action, such as policy advocacy, coalition building, and grass-roots mobilization. In my recent contributions to the scholarly literature, I have attempted to integrate our understanding of the policymaking process and the process by which policy innovations diffuse. That work has tended to give prominence to practical political action. In this paper, my purpose has been to be even more explicit in this regard. Here, I have sought to draw out some key insights from the research on states that might inform the actions of advocates for policy change. I have then considered ways in which efforts to gain early childhood education for all might be informed by the strategic implications that emerge from that research literature.

For those seeking early childhood education for all in the United States, the advocacy task ahead is considerable, although it need not be considered daunting.

In fact, there is a lot to be excited about. Much scope now exists for policy entrepreneurship and creative local experimentation with the purpose of changing attitudes and policies regarding early childhood care and education. These efforts should be underpinned with theory-driven, research-intensive policy learning regarding current arrangements and how promising initiatives might be broadly emulated.

Effective advocacy must encourage people from a range of backgrounds, who hold a range of positions in society, and who sometimes see their interests as divergent, to put their differences aside and begin working together for a common goal. This is never easy. But hard work and occasional good fortune can generate policy victories, and with time these victories can stack up in impressive ways. A major challenge for advocates and for early childhood education providers alike is to find ways to leverage small, geographically limited policy victories in the service of securing larger, more comprehensive changes. On this point, the scholarly literature holds an important lesson. Policy leverage is achieved through strategic use of information on current outcomes to support on-going, intensifying advocacy.

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