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## Understanding Education Policy Change in the American States: Lessons from Political Science

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Rarely have students of education policy lived at a time more dynamic than the current one. Since the mid-1980s, state education policy has undergone significant and far-reaching change. In K-12 education, states have established new curriculum and performance standards; adopted myriad new assessment and accountability regimes; pursued innovative teacher certification initiatives; litigated hundreds of school finance suits; experimented with incentive programs for teacher performance and pay; and witnessed the rise and fall (and rise again) of a cacophony of systemic reform efforts.

In higher education, evidence seems equally persuasive that the current era has been one of substantial policy change. State governments have experimented with various new financing schemes, including prepaid tuition programs, college savings plans, and the widely debated HOPE-style, merit scholarship program that began in Georgia and has since spread to 13 other states (Cohen-Vogel & Ingle, in press; Doyle, 2006; Doyle, McLendon, & Hearn, 2005). Relative to the size of state budgets and to state wealth, public investment in higher education has declined to historically low levels in many states, a development that has led some observers to characterize shifting patterns of state finance for public higher education as tantamount to a “privatization” movement (Ehrenberg, 2006; Lyall & Sell, 2005). Since the 1980s, many states have embraced distinctively new approaches to higher-education governance and accountability, as well. These include adoption of wide-ranging governance reform measures, the advent of so-called charter colleges, and the creation of performance-accountability mandates focusing on the outcomes of higher education, rather than the traditional focus on inputs alone (McLendon, Hearn, & Deaton, 2006; Zumeta, 2001).

Despite the scope and magnitude of many of these contemporary policy shifts, our understanding of the dynamics that drive educational policy change in the states remains quite limited. Why and how have some states embarked upon the policy-reform trajectories that they have undertaken? What social, economic, and political factors explain variations in the shifting policy postures of the states? In general, what are the dynamics of policy change in the K-12 and the higher-education arenas? Scholars have paid too little systematic attention to these questions and, likewise, to building, elaborating, or testing theories capable of explaining education policy change in the American states.



By contrast, scholarship on state policy making in the field of political science has undergone a renaissance over the past two decades. This development was spurred by a number of factors, including: (1) a growing awareness of the limitations inherent in existing theories of policy-making and, consequently, of the need for better explanations; (2) a revival in the study of political institutions and of the dynamics leading to institutional change; (3) a recognition of the growing influence of the states in America's federal system; and (4) a resurgent interest in study of public policy, generally (March & Olsen, 1989; Olsen, 2001; Rockman, 1994; Sabatier, 1999a, 1999b). Out of these pressures emerged new theorizing about the processes of policy change and, more profoundly, renewed thinking about the foundational nature of governmental institutions. These developments in political science have produced a growing body of research capable of helping to fill the lingering gaps in the education policy literature (Baumgartner & Jones, 1991, 1993; Berry & Berry, 1990, 1992; Gerber & Teske, 2000; Kingdon, 1984; Sabatier, 2007; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993; True, Jones, & Baumgartner, 1999).

In the remainder of the chapter, we draw upon these broader disciplinary developments in exploring three contemporary theories whose elaboration over the past 20 years make them especially well suited for framing future research into state policy formation and policy change in the K-12 and higher-education arenas. Our criteria for selecting the theories were threefold. First, we sought theories that conceptualize policy making at the systemic level, rather than at the microlevel of individual actors. Second, we focused on theories that take up the problem of *change* in large policy systems. Finally, we sought theories that have become popular among social scientists who study other policy arenas, but that have received comparatively little analytic treatment by education-policy scholars. Our criteria led us to focus on punctuated-equilibrium theory (Baumgartner & Jones, 1991, 1993; True et al., 1999), multiple-streams theory (Kingdon, 1984, 1995), and policy innovation and diffusion theory (Berry, 1998; Berry & Berry, 1990; Gray, 1994; Mintrom, 1997; Walker, 1969). In the following section, we discuss each theory's origins, distill its central tenets, and identify key works that have applied or elaborated the theory since its inception. A comparison of the theories across eight dimensions of interest may be found in Table 3.1. In the concluding section of the chapter, we assess problems and prospects for the theories' use in future study of education-related policy phenomena.

### THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON POLICY CHANGE: MULTIPLE STREAMS, PUNCTUATED EQUILIBRIUM, AND POLICY INNOVATION AND DIFFUSION

#### Multiple-Streams (Revised Garbage Can) Framework

Kingdon's (1984, 1994, 1995) Multiple-Streams model remains one of political science's most familiar and well cited contemporary policy theories, if also one of its least elaborated or systematically applied. The central focus of this model lies in explaining *agenda change*—how and why some issues move to a position of prominence on the decision agenda of government, while other issues do not. In Kingdon's own words: "How do subjects come to officials' attention? How are the alternatives from which they choose generated? How is the governmental agenda set? Why does an idea's time come when it does?" (p. vii). Using case studies of federal policy-making in the domains of transportation and health and a sophisticated panel-design consisting of 247 interviews with policymakers over a four-year period, Kingdon developed an explanation of how issues rose to the top of the federal government's decision agenda that challenged conventional understandings. His work is distinctive in at least three respects: (1) its concern with predecision policy processes; (2) its reliance on organization-theoretic perspectives as a basis for

conceptualizing policy change; and (3) its depiction of the agenda-setting process as fundamentally dynamic and prone to idiosyncratic outcomes.

First, Kingdon's conceptualizing focuses primarily on the *predecision* processes of policy-making termed *agenda-setting* (i.e., how issues come to be *issues* in the first place), rather than on the act of policy choice (i.e., authoritative enactments) or on the subsequent executing of authoritative decisions (i.e., implementation). At the time of Kingdon's writing, scholars had already observed that agenda control confers important advantages in shaping policy outcomes and, thus, had grown increasingly interested in studying it (Cobb & Elder, 1983). Kingdon, however, was among the first to theorize on the *processes* resulting in agenda change, rather than merely the factors contributing to agenda status.

A second distinctive facet of the model involves its heavy reliance on organizational theory. Organization-theoretic lenses had long been used in study of Congress (e.g., Cooper, 1977; Polsby & Schickler, 2002), but Kingdon built explicitly on an emerging conception of complex organization that emphasized the ambiguity of decision making—so-called garbage-can decision making. Drawing on the garbage-can model of organizational choice first popularized by Cohen, March, and Olsen (1972), Kingdon conceptualized the federal government as an “organized anarchy” and attributed to it the same organizational properties that Cohen, March, and Olsen had assigned to universities in their study of decision making in those institutions: (1) problematic preferences, (2) unclear means, and (3) fluid participation. Interpreting the ideas of Cohen, March, and Olsen in such a way as to fit the conditions of the federal government, Kingdon then characterized agenda setting as a process in which ambiguity runs rampant, problems and solutions are loosely tethered, and participants drift through decision venues.

Kingdon's portrayal of the federal government as a kind of organized anarchy afforded him novel ways of explaining the dynamics of agenda formation—a third distinctive facet of his model. The Multiple-Streams framework postulates a complex of processes by which problems, ideas (potential solutions), and politics each flow independently through government, combining only occasionally with choice opportunities to advance issues onto the national policy agenda. The framework Kingdon developed retains much of the spirit of the original garbage-can model in that it characterizes agenda formation as fundamentally dynamic and fluid. Yet, his revised framework also differs from the original conception in important ways, mainly in its acceptance of greater order and structure. Kingdon observes, “we...find our emphasis being placed more on the ‘organized’ than the ‘anarchy,’ as we discover structures and patterns in the processes [of agenda-setting]” (p. 86). The discussion that follows examines the model's two main constituent components: a set of (more-or-less organized) “streams” of policy activity and a set of (more-or-less anarchic) macrolevel processes involving the convergence of the separate policy streams.

According to the Multiple-Streams framework, the federal government can be viewed as an arena through which three “streams” of separate, concurrent activity flow. The *problem stream* consists of those conditions which policymakers have chosen to interpret as problems. The *policy stream* consists of the various ideas or “solutions” developed by specialists in myriad policy communities. The *political stream* consists of changes or developments involving the national mood, interest group politics, and administrative or legislative turnover. These streams of problems, policies, and politics flow, Kingdon asserts, through the governmental system largely independent of one another and each according to its own set of internal dynamics. Consequently, change within one stream may occur independently of change in other streams.

With respect to the problem stream, Kingdon maintains that a problem becomes a *problem* principally as a result of the ways in which officials learn about conditions and the ways in which conditions become defined as *problems*. As to the former, there are three mechanisms that lead officials to interpret a condition as a problem: indicators, focusing events or feedback. With

respect to problem definition, officials tend to convert conditions into problems in three ways: conditions that violate important values may be transformed into problems; conditions become problems by comparison with relevant units; and, conditions become problems through their classification into one category rather than another.

Kingdon analogizes the process of solution generation found in the policy stream to that of biological natural selection. Specialists in policy communities develop and experiment with ideas over time. Many ideas float in and around government in a “policy primeval soup,” bumping into one another to form combinations, recombinations, and mutations. Here one finds a heavy dose of incrementalism at work in the development of solutions within policy communities. One also finds a degree of rationalism inasmuch as policymakers’ use of certain decision criteria (e.g., technical feasibility, value congruence, and anticipation of future constraints) leads to the selecting-out of some ideas for survival and of others for extinction.

Lastly, Kingdon describes the forces that provide the political “softening-up” of the system that is required for an issue to move onto the agenda. Developments in this political stream may be both predictable (as in the cyclical turnover among officeholders that results from regularized elections) and unforeseen (as in the case of political scandal, sudden shifts in public opinion, or economic downturn). Regardless, interest groups play a crucial role in mobilizing over time support for, and opposition against, certain policy ideas.

How then do agendas change, if the identification of problems, the generation of solutions, and the march of politics proceed largely independently of one another? According to Kingdon, an issue attracts the serious attention of policymakers only when the three separate streams of activity conjoin, or *couple*, with a choice opportunity. This coupling of streams constitutes the single-most significant feature of the model.

Stream-convergence may occur when a window of opportunity opens and so-called policy entrepreneurs push attention to their pet problems or push their pet solutions. Yet, because of the loosely coupled nature of problems and solutions in the governmental garbage can, one finds a great deal of variability in the ways in which entrepreneurs link *particular* problems, solutions, and political conditions. An element of randomness thus is strongly present and can clearly be seen at work in the actions of policy entrepreneurs. According to Kingdon, entrepreneurs “lie in wait in and around government with their solutions [already] in hand, waiting for problems to float by to which they can attach their solutions, waiting for a development in the political stream they can use to their advantage” (p. 165). What emerges on the national policy agenda, therefore, can be viewed as a product of the mix of metaphorical “trash” that is already floating in the individual streams of the governmental garbage can at the precise moment at which a policy entrepreneur successfully marries the separate flows of activity. Whereas pattern and structure can plainly be found in the forces that guide individual stream-level activity, one finds in the processes of stream convergence a dynamic that seems sometimes arbitrary and counterintuitive. In a summary of these complex forces, Kingdon paraphrases Cohen, March, and Olsen (1972) in his portrayal of federal agenda setting as a collection of choices looking for issues, problems looking for decision situations in which they may be aired, solutions looking for problems to which they may become the answer, and politicians looking for pet problems or policies by which they may advance their careers.

The Multiple-Streams framework broke with dominant conceptions of policy formation. For example, whereas the “muddling” of policy *incrementalism* (Lindblom, 1965) emphasizes gradualism and marginal adjustments, Kingdon’s model perceives an environment wherein policy change can occur rapidly and policy outcomes may differ markedly from the past. Likewise, the Multiple-Streams framework challenges several key tenets of rationalism by rejecting fixed means-end hierarchies, linear, step-wise models of decision making, and the notion that problems

must necessarily precede solutions; sometimes in fact solutions may actually precede the problems to which they eventually become attached.

Observers have praised the Multiple-Streams framework on a variety of grounds. Some have pointed to Kingdon's work as helping to illumine the (input-output) systems perspective made famous by Easton (1965), but often criticized for its "black box" approach to understanding policy. According to these proponents, Kingdon's attempt at identifying causal linkages—rather than merely describing relationships—provided an answer to the lingering question, "How does conversion occur?" (Zahariadis, 1999). Additionally, Kingdon's work received acclaim for its use of eclectic and rigorous research methods in pursuit of understanding phenomena as messy and ill-formed as ones involving agenda change. King (1994), for example, lauded Kingdon for his use of an innovative wave of panel interviews, policy histories and case studies, and a sophisticated content-coding system for data analysis.

Of course, critics have also pointed to limitations of the framework. Several such criticisms have arisen repeatedly, including the following: (1) the allegedly separate streams of problems, policies, and politics could be less independent than interdependent; (2) the lack of precision in describing the processes by which "policy windows" occur and operate renders an essential component of the framework poorly understood; and (3) the framework is more a descriptive device than a predictive one, limiting its contribution overall (Durant & Diehl, 1989; King, 1994; Mucciaroni, 1992; Sabatier, 2007; Zahariadis, 1999). Kingdon (1994, 1995) has responded to a number of these concerns in subsequent writings.

In our view, a more problematic question involves the lack of systematic research addressing the model's external validity. Kingdon's work is perhaps the era's most widely cited policy theory, and the notions Kingdon developed about agenda change have permeated fields far beyond that of political science (King, 1994). What is more, Kingdon's ideas influenced other contemporary theorists, notably the work of Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier (1993), on *advocacy-coalition*, and Baumgartner and Jones (1991, 1993), in the area of *punctuated-equilibrium*. Yet, in the initial decade following its publication, the Multiple-Streams framework attracted relatively little serious analytic examination. The incongruence between the apparent popularity of Kingdon's ideas and the frequency with which those ideas have been rigorously and systematically limned may be owing to the complexity of the phenomena that the Multiple-Streams framework purports to explain, or to the extensive data requirements and analytic procedures incumbent upon the analyst, or to some combination of these, and possibly other actors.

More recently, a number of studies have begun examining the model's explanatory power in various policy domains both at the national level and in the states. Analysts have critically applied the framework in the arenas of, for example, health care policy, environmental policy, and national-defense policy (e.g., Baird, 1998; Blaukenau, 2001; Durant & Diehl, 1989; Kamieniecki, 2000; Kavar, 1989; Oliver, 1991). The Multiple-Streams framework has also been pursued systematically in a number of studies on policy development cross-nationally (e.g., Peters, 1994; Pollack, 1997; Zahariadis & Allen, 1995).

A growing body of literature has critically applied the Multiple-Streams framework in investigating various policy phenomena in both the K-12 and higher-education sectors (Hearn, 1993; Larson, 2004; Leslie & Berdahl, 2006; McDermott, 2005; McLendon, 2003a; Mills, 2007; Ness, 2005; Portz, 1996; Protopsaltis, 2004; Stout & Stevens 2000; Van Der Slik, 1999). Almost all of this work has examined the suitability of Kingdon's work in the states, rather than at the federal level. Notably, every one of the studies focusing on higher education has used case-study methods in investigating governance and finance policy reform in the states (Larson, 2004; Leslie & Berdahl, 2006; McLendon, 2003a; Mills, 2007; Ness, 2005; Protopsaltis, 2004; Van Der Slik, 1999). The research designs pursued typically consist of single-case studies within a particular

state or multiple-case studies across states. In the main, these studies have tended to find support for the Multiple-Streams framework, even when competing explanations of agenda formation are considered. Several analysts of K-12 education policymaking also have found the framework capable of capturing the nature of change in that domain. McDermott's (2005) analysis of the adoption in Massachusetts of policies providing for alternative certification and pay incentives for teachers is notable in this regard.

More than 20 years after its emergence in the political science literature, the Multiple-Streams model remains a distinctive and provocative explanation for policy change in American government. Whereas Kingdon developed the framework for use in describing complex agenda-setting phenomena in the federal government, most subsequent systematic analyses have examined the model's suitability for understanding policy choice in subnational settings, principally at

**TABLE 3.1**  
**Comparison of Policy-Change Theories on Eight Dimensions of Interest**

Dimensions	Theories		
	<i>Multiple streams</i>	<i>Punctuated-equilibrium</i>	<i>Policy innovation and diffusion</i>
<i>Pioneering Work</i>	Kingdon (1984, 1995)	Baumgartner & Jones (1991, 1993); True, Jones, & Baumgartner (1999)	Walker (1969); Gray (1973); Berry & Berry (1990, 1992)
<i>Original unit of analysis</i>	U.S. national government	U.S. federal government	American states
<i>Theoretical origins</i>	Organizational studies; political science	Evolutionary biology; political science	Rural sociology; anthropology; communication theory; organizational studies; political science
<i>Policy stage of primary focus</i>	Agenda-setting	Agenda-setting and policy enactment	Policy enactment
<i>Central premise or hypothesis</i>	Agenda change a product of the convergence of only semirelated streams of problems, solutions, and politics at propitious moments in time	Policy change a product of intersecting policy venues and images, which challenge existing monopolies before giving rise to new ones	Policy adoption a product of certain factors internal to states (e.g., social, economic, and political conditions) in combination with competitive or emulative pressures between and among states
<i>Major constructs or concepts</i>	Governmental garbage cans; independent streams; loose coupling; policy windows; policy entrepreneurs	Policy images, policy venues; monopolies; negative feedback; policy stasis; policy punctuation	American states as a policy subsystem; communication networks; S-curve of policy adoption; intrastate policy determinants; interstate competition and emulation; innovation leaders and laggards
<i>Dominant methodological tradition</i>	Case studies building on elite interviews and archival data	Content analysis of archival data combined with trend analysis using various statistical techniques	Event history analysis
<i>Applications to education policy-making</i>	McLendon (2003a); Mills (2007); Larson (2004); McDermott (2005); Stout & Stevens (2000)	Sims & Miskel; Orr-Bement (2002); Robinson (2004)	Mintrom (1997); Mintrom & Vergari (1998); Cohen-Vogel et al. (2005); Doyle (2006); McLendon, Hearn, & Deaton (2006)

the state-governmental level. These works have generally found the Multiple-Streams model to hold substantial explanatory power, although the analytic treatments have been applied to a rather narrow range of policy questions.

### Punctuated-Equilibrium Framework

“Punctuated equilibrium”—often dubbed “PE”—has become a widely recognized phrase in the years since paleontologists Niles Eldredge and Stephen Jay Gould coined it (1972). Intended to represent an alternative to the Darwinian model of phyletic gradualism that dominated evolutionary theory throughout much of the 20th century, the phrase broadly describes evolutionary change as taking place over long periods of “stasis,” in which species remain virtually unchanged, punctuated by relatively brief periods of intense change when new species are introduced, old ones die out, and existing ones undergo sudden transformations. In his massive text on evolutionary theory, Gould (2002) writes: “Punctuated equilibrium addresses the origin and deployment of species in geological time.... As a central proposition, [it] holds that the great majority of species...originate in geological moments (punctuations) and then persist in stasis throughout their long durations” (pp. 765–766).

In the 1980s, these ideas began to emerge in political science as a way in which theorists came to view the dynamics of change in American governmental systems. Kelly (1994), in his discussion of PE, characterizes the term as referring broadly to a “sudden, transformative change in an otherwise stable system,” and argues that its reach extends well beyond the natural sciences, having found relevance to many phenomena in political science and policy studies, as well (p. 165). Indeed, PE now stands as one of political science’s leading models of policy change, a development attributable largely to the pioneering work of Baumgartner and Jones (1991, 1993).

These analysts contend that many areas of U.S. policymaking exhibit long periods of “relative gridlock” interspersed by brief episodes of “dramatic change” (p. 1). Rejecting “an overemphasis on incrementalism” found in many then-current theories of policymaking, and drawing on the case of civilian nuclear policy in the post-World War II era, Baumgartner and Jones (1991, 1993) argued that public attention tends to focus narrowly on one aspect of an issue to the exclusion of others at any given time but that, over time, public attention may shift from “virtual euphoria” [over a particular policy image] to “an equally one-sided preoccupation with negative aspects of the same policy or industry.” Their punctuated-equilibrium model seeks to explain how this process unfolds.

The punctuated-equilibrium perspective on U.S. policymaking holds that policies tend to be processed quietly within “policy subsystems,” but occasionally attract considerable attention when struggles are played out on the “macropolitical” agenda. Baumgartner and Jones propose that periods of equilibrium in policymaking are those in which issues become captured by a subsystem of policy actors and issue experts and “policy monopolies” become established. Periods of disequilibrium, by contrast, occur when policy monopolies are challenged or overthrown and issues are thrust into the macropolitical arena. At the heart of PE’s explanation for how this process occurs is the notion of intersecting policy *venues* and *images*.

Baumgartner and Jones propose that a policy monopoly is associated strongly with both a “definable institutional structure,” a venue, in which advocacy and conflict over the policy occurs and a “powerful supporting image.” Venues may include federal agencies, state and local authorities, interest groups and professional associations, the open market, and various other institutions. When such venues involve governments, they are referred to as policy subsystems. A subsystem is characterized by the lack of interference by broader political forces, which tend to be dominated by small groups of issue specialists in the government bureaucracy, congressional

committees and subcommittees, and interest groups that operate out of the public eye. Policy monopolies also tend to be associated with a powerful supporting image that is powerful enough to induce only support among those involved or indifference by those not involved.

According to Baumgartner and Jones, it is when issues move from the subsystem arena into the macropolitical arena that large-scale policy change can occur. Precisely how does an issue move from the policy subsystem to the macropolitical arena? The “venue shopping” efforts of strategically minded political actors play a crucial role in this process. Because the American political system is replete with policy venues, there are multiple sites at which to gain control of a policy. By formulating new ways of understanding old problems, disadvantaged issue advocates “shop” for new venues in which different political actors and governmental institutions can claim jurisdiction over issues previously of little interest to them. As policy images become redefined, new participants become drawn to the emerging debate and different venues surface as legitimate arenas for deliberation of the issue. Soon, macropolitical institutions begin to intervene as national institutions “grapple with [the issue] and with each other in an effort to resolve the new ‘hot’ issue” (True, Jones, & Baumgartner, 1999, p. 102). This process, moreover, is iterative: “as venues change, images may change as well; as the image of a policy changes, venue changes [also] become more likely” (Baumgartner & Jones, 1991, pp. 1046–1047). The net effect of these shifts in policy image and venue is the crumbling of existing monopolies of policy ownership, substantial bursts of new policy activity, and the subsequent return to steady-state as the previously marginalized becomes newly institutionalized.

Since the mid-1990s, PE has found application to a variety of political phenomena and substantive policy domains. Turning to one of the core interests of political science, voting and elections, Kelly (1994) draws connections between the PE cycle and eras of divided government, reasoning that the American political cycle of stasis broken intermittently by “compressed periods of rapid transformation” surrounding presidential elections adheres to the principles of PE. He describes several notable periods of punctuated change in American political history—from the Jacksonian period (1824) to the New Deal era (1930–1932). Changes in the nature of divided government, Kelly argues, occur very much in line with the principles of PE.

In public-sector economics, Jordan (2003) proposed a model of PE’s influence on local-government budget expenditures. He cites the many opportunities for nonincremental change that exist within local-government budgeting as evidence of “punctuations” in the arena. He further draws a connection between the rhythm of punctuated equilibrium and that of the budget process, in which agendas tend to remain static during the implementation phase but are broken sporadically in other phases. Jordan (2003) concludes: “Punctuated equilibrium theory...is an agenda-based theory that offers a theoretical foundation for large budget shifts” (p. 345).

The literature on PE’s application to educational policymaking is less robust than that on such topics as electoral politics (Kelly, 1994), environmental policy (Baumgartner & Jones, 1991, 1993), or budget setting (Jordan, 2003), but a growing body of work has emerged. Robinson (2004), for example, studied the relationship of PE theory to the twin phenomena of “bureaucratization” and school budgetary change by comparing changes in instructional spending per pupil among schools facing different levels of bureaucracy. He found that more bureaucratized school systems better adjust their expenditures to fiscal realities than do less bureaucratic ones, possibly because bureaucracy enhances the acquisition and processing of information, and that the cycle of expenditure management in schools bears a strong resemblance to the vicissitudes of the PE cycle. In a series of applications of PE to education policy, Miskel and colleagues (Sims & Miskel, 2001, 2003) find strong support for the PE framework in explaining children and adult literacy policies at the national level. Employing content analysis, these authors measure changes in the images of literacy conveyed by various national media and track the introduction of major

reading legislation across policy venues at the national level over a period of nearly three decades. Sims and Miskel (2001, 2003) interpret their findings as lending support for one key tenet of P-E: as policy images change over time, advocates will find new policy venues more suitable and, thus, the locus of policy activity within a given policy domain shifts accordingly.

The PE model has rarely been applied to policy change in higher education, though examples of its use do exist (McLendon, 2001; Orr-Bement, 2002). In one particularly rigorous undertaking, Orr-Bement (2002) applied the Baumgartner and Jones framework to study legislative decision making toward higher education in the state of Washington. Using content analysis, she studied some 3,600 bills passed by the Washington state legislature between 1977 and 1998, including 346 bills pertaining to higher education. Through various analyses of the trend data, Orr-Bement found strong support for the PE model: higher education legislation behavior during the period exhibited patterns of stability, punctuated by bursts of change, as legislative attention shifted from higher education to other agenda issues.

Far from being limited in scope to the process of speciation in evolutionary biology, PE appears to hold promise as a framework by which to understand educational policymaking in the American states. Through a pattern of issue definition and redefinition, agenda formation, shifting images and venues, and the establishment and destruction of policy monopolies, the PE cycle provides a plausible and intriguing rationale for the rise and fall of policies over time.

### Policy Innovation and Diffusion Framework

Among political scientists generally and state policy scholars in particular, Policy Innovation Diffusion is a well-known contemporary lens for studying public policy, as demonstrated in its inclusion in Paul Sabatier's *Theories of Policy Process* (1999a; 2007forthcoming). Over time, the framework has been refined both conceptually and methodologically, and today is used to explain *policy innovation* or the factors that lead governments to adopt something new.

Everett Rogers (2003), in the fifth edition of *Diffusion of Innovations*, defines innovation diffusion as the "process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system" (p. 11). Political scientists have adapted Rogers's definition, viewing the "social system" as consisting of the governments of the 50 American states (McLendon, 2003b). When plotted cumulatively, the rate of innovation adoption—whether the innovation is a new seed, a new medical technology, or a new public policy—often results in an S-shaped curve. The diffusion curve rises slowly at first, when relatively few individuals or, in the case of policy diffusion, governments adopt it. Then, as interpersonal and interorganizational networks become activated and more members of a system learn about the innovation, the diffusion curve takes off. After the surge in adoption, communication channels become exhausted and most potential adopters have either adopted or rejected the innovation. The diffusion curve then begins to level off (Rogers, 2003).

Diffusion studies in anthropology constitute the oldest of the diffusion research traditions. Beginning in the 1920s, anthropologists predominantly used participant observation to study the transfer of technological innovations from one society to another, and emphasized the importance of culture on the success and rate of diffusion. Since that time, diffusion has been the subject of research in sociology, public health, geography, and marketing, and other fields that rely generally on quantitative methodologies. To date, the highest percentage of diffusion studies have been published in rural sociology, communications, and marketing (Rogers, 2003).

Two distinctions characterize the way that diffusion researchers from the different research traditions approach their work: the innovation type and unit of analysis. First, each tradition typically investigates the diffusion of a particular type of innovation (Rogers, 2003). Rural soci-

ologists, for example, concentrate on agricultural innovations; communication researchers focus on news events. Second, diffusion studies may differ across research traditions in terms of their unit(s) of analysis (Nice, 1994). While anthropologists are primarily concerned with the diffusion of ideas among tribes or villages, for example, public health researchers study the spread of innovations (e.g., a new drug or medical equipment) among individuals (e.g., doctors) and healthcare organizations (e.g., hospitals).

In political science and policy studies, the primary unit of analysis is governments—local, state, and national. While some political scientists have examined the transfer of policies and programs among local governments (e.g., Clarke, Wilson, Cummings, & Hyland, 1999; Perry & Kraemer, 1979; Samuels & Glantz, 1991) and even cross-nationally (e.g., Collier & Messick, 1975; Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996; Robertson & Waltman, 1993; Rose, 1991), much of their diffusion work has concentrated on state level policy adoption. Here, an innovation is defined as a policy that is new to the state adopting it regardless of its age, whether it exists elsewhere, or how many other states have adopted it (Berry & Berry, 1990; Gray, 1973, 1994; Walker, 1969).

Since Jack Walker's pioneering work in 1969, state policy innovation research has exploded. Since 1990 alone, over 40 studies have been published testing the explanatory power of the policy innovation diffusion framework (Berry & Berry, 2006). Primarily, scholars have used the framework to identify both intra-state and interstate influences on policy adoption. By studying policy adoption across space and time, they ask "What combination of (1) state political, economic, and socio-demographic factors, and (2) interstate diffusion dynamics account for patterns of policy adoption among the American states?" (McLendon, 2003b).

This two-part question mirrors the two principal explanations offered for whether and when states innovate (Berry & Berry, 1990; Clark, 1985; Mintrom & Vergari, 1998; Nice, 1994; Savage, 1985). The *internal determinants* explanation argues that state governments innovate when their political, economic, and social environments are favorable (Gray, 1994). Researchers have found that adoption is generally faster among larger, wealthier states (with more resources with which to experiment); among states with more electoral competition, higher turnover in political office, more professional legislatures; and among more urban and educated states (Berry & Berry, 1990; Morgan & Watson, 1991; Walker, 1969). A critical assumption of this model is "that states do not influence one another to any meaningful extent" (McLendon, 2003b, p. 113).

In contrast, *diffusion* explanations suggest that "policy innovation is intrinsically intergovernmental in nature; states emulate the policy adoption behavior of their peers" (McLendon, 2003b, p. 113). The regional diffusion model attributes a state's policy innovation to the policy behaviors of its geographically proximate neighbors. In 1969, Walker documented a regional clustering pattern, and described state policymaking behavior as a "system of emulation" (p. 898). He ascribed regional patterns in policy innovation to the imitation of proximate, bellwether states. In his studies, certain states emerged as opinion leaders within each region of the United States. Once these opinion leaders adopted a new policy or program, other states in their region followed suit. In some cases, followers copied, word for word, legislation adopted in a nearby state—typographical errors and all (Walker, 1969). A regional effect has been found for tort laws, tax increases, hate crime legislation, and lottery adoption, among others (Canon & Baum, 1981; Berry & Berry, 1990, 1992; 1994; Grattet, Jenness, & Curry, 1998).

Berry and Berry (1990) note that, "as pure models, internal determinants explanations and diffusion explanations are deficient" (Berry, 1994, p. 443). Empirical tests of the two models (i.e., cross-sectional regression and factor analysis, respectively) have been "single-explanation" methodologies shown to detect effects when none exist (Berry, 1994). Thus, the authors introduced a pooled cross-sectional time-series approach to state policy innovation research. The objective of Event History Analysis (EHA), as it is known, is to explain a change in adoption behavior among

U.S. states. The dependent variable is dichotomous: whether a state adopted the said policy in a given year. The independent variables typically include a host of conceptually relevant sociodemographic (e.g., race/ethnicity, population distribution), economic (e.g., wealth, unemployment levels, etc.), and political (e.g., partisanship, electoral competition, ideology) characteristics of states, along with a variable indicating the past policy behavior of a state's neighbors (diffusion). Since the mid-1990s, EHA has become the dominant analytic approach used to study state policy adoption.

Studies that employ EHA have in general found that both internal and regional influences can be important in predicting policy adoption. In their research on state lotteries, for example, Berry and Berry (1990) show that if the "fiscal health [of a state] remains moderate and it is an election year, the effect of previously adopting neighbors on the likelihood of adoption is stronger" (p. 420). In their study of tax innovation two years later, they (Berry & Berry, 1992) arrive at similar conclusions. A tax hike is more likely among states with long periods between elections, the existence of a fiscal crisis, and whose neighbors have recently increased taxes. Overall, the studies imply that the adoption behavior of border states has a stronger effect on the likelihood of innovation when the internal characteristics of a state are favorable.

Political scientists were relative late-comers in applying the diffusion framework systematically to phenomena in their fields of interest, but their work has yielded substantial methodological and conceptual insights for understanding governmental behavior, policy change, and the spread of policy ideas over time. Having found some evidence that public policies diffuse across the American states, these scholars set out to answer why one state's policymakers are influenced by the policy choices of another's. Several rationales have been proposed. Two of the most common are policy learning and economic competition (Berry & Baybeck, 2006; Boehmke & Witmer, 2004; Walker, 1969). According to the first rationale, state officials take cues from one another in an attempt to simplify the choices of alternatives from which they choose. Such cue taking, what Mooney and Lee (1995) have termed "policy learning," reduces political risk by turning to solutions that have proven successful somewhere else (Simon, 1997). The second rationale attributes policy diffusion to competition (Walker, 1969). States are said to make policy choices to gain an economic advantage or avoid a disadvantage over proximate states (Cohen-Vogel, Ingle, Albee, & Spence, 2005; Dye, 1990). Specifically, they compete to attract or keep "goods" (e.g., workers, taxpayers) and to discourage "bads" (Bailey & Rom, 2004; Berry & Baybeck, 2005; Peterson & Rom, 1990).

Some critics have alleged that policy innovation diffusion studies (1) largely overlook the why's of policy diffusion, concentrating instead on demonstrating its existence; (2) focus on the correlates of policy adoption, ignoring other stages in a policy's journey; and, (3) emphasize a positive regional effect (McLendon, Hearn, & Deaton, 2006; Mintrom & Vergari, 1998; Mooney, 2001). First, political scientists have not systematically explored explanations for how and why diffusion occurs (Mintrom & Vergari, 1998). As a result, there is little common "understand[ing of] how policymakers learn from the policies adopted by their neighbors" (p. 104). Second, almost exclusively, state policy diffusion research has focused on the factors leading states to adopt new policies (i.e., enactment) rather than on the determinants of problem identification, agenda formation, policy formulation, implementation, and policy termination. Put another way, policy diffusion researchers, limiting their analyses to a single, dichotomous dependent variable (e.g. adoption/nonadoption), have largely failed to consider at what stage(s) in the policymaking process pressures from neighboring states are brought to bear. Two recent exceptions are worth noting.

By interviewing state policymakers, Cohen-Vogel and Ingle (2007in press) concluded that the influence of neighboring states is most pronounced during the agenda-setting and proposal formulation stages and least pronounced during adoption. They found evidence that policy entrepreneurs working across states attempt to build awareness about problems and link those problems with

particular solutions. The authors found little to suggest that policymakers in nearby states borrowed political strategies from one another to build support (or opposition) for a given policy.

A study by Mintrom and Vergari (1998) also examined diffusion pressures at various stages of the policymaking process. In exploring the role that policy networks, and the policy entrepreneurs within them, play in the diffusion of policy innovations, the authors found that external networks of advocates from other states increased the likelihood of legislative consideration but did not affect the likelihood of legislative approval. The findings suggest that the reasons policy innovations gain attention differ from those that lead to their adoption. External networks may be a source of new ideas but may lose significance as state policymakers attempt to secure legislative approval. To ensure approval, policymakers instead turn inward and rely on their own knowledge of local context and intrastate politics.

The third critique of policy diffusion research contends that state policy scholars have emphasized a positive regional effect even though evidence for it is mixed (e.g. Lutz, 1987; McLendon, Hearn, & Deaton, 2006) and others have found that information learned from a neighbor can enhance *or diminish* the chances of adoption (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996). In fact, Mooney (2001) reported that only half of the twenty-four EHA models reported in studies of state policy diffusion and published during the 1990s in top-tier political science journals contained positively and statistically significant coefficients for the regional effect. Mooney attributes at least part of the positive bias to fundamental flaws in the statistical models used to assess the effect. The current standard approach for testing regional diffusion—pooled discrete-event EHA—requires that the probability of adopting a given policy for states that have not yet done so, or the “hazard rate,” be constant across time and conditional on the values of the independent variable. According to the author, “Since the number of previously adopting neighbors increases steadily over time, as the hazard rate for policy adoption typically does (Rogers 1995; ch. 2), the slope estimate for the regional effect is biased towards a positive regional effect” (p. 107). By including a trend variable or annual dummy variables in the model, the hazard rate can be stabilized and the problem fixed (Beck, Katz, & Tucker, 1998; Mintrom, 1997; Mooney & Lee, 1995). Much of the early scholarship using EHA to model state policy diffusion (Berry & Berry, 1990, 1992), however, did not stabilize the hazard rate (Mooney, 2001).

The first educational diffusion studies, conducted by researchers at Teachers College in the mid-20th century, were concerned with whether local control and educational spending led to school and district innovativeness (e.g., Gray, 1957; Cohen et al., 2005). Later research focused on the teacher as the unit of analysis to explore within-school diffusion (Rogers, 2003). Only a handful of scholars have used an innovation diffusion lens empirically to study educational policymaking among the American states (Cohen-Vogel, Ingle, Albee, & Spence, 2004; Cohen-Vogel & Ingle, 2007 in press; Doyle, 2006; Hearn & Griswold, 1994; McLendon, Hearn & Deaton, 2006; McLendon, Heller, & Young, 2005; Mintrom, 1997; Mintrom & Vergari, 1998). Almost all of this work has been produced since the mid-1990s, and together represents a variety of methodological approaches (e.g., EHA, survey, interviews with key policy actors). Notably, all of these studies investigate state education governance and finance reforms and overall have found mixed support for the framework.

### FRAMING FUTURE RESEARCH ON EDUCATION POLICY CHANGE USING THE THREE LENSES

Even as scholars have focused more attention on states’ involvement in matters related to schooling (Kirst, 2006), the role of state governments in K-12 and higher education remains enigmatic

for state officials and the local institutions with which they are engaged (McLendon, 2003c). Scholarship in K-12 education has focused primarily on the elements of state content and performance standards, and on the capacity of state-level government agencies to reform the system. In higher education, studies have emphasized the campus–state relationship, with attention in recent years to the varied, fast-paced policy innovations and reforms of the 1980s and 1990s. Relatively few studies by K-12 and higher education scholars have systematically examined the public policy processes by which the American states attempt to reform their systems of education.

In this final section of the chapter, we explore how each of three contemporary theories from political science might be used to frame future research on state-level policymaking in K-12 and higher education. Specifically, we identify central research questions that connect the study of state educational reform to larger streams of research in political science—both conceptual and empirical—on comparative state policy. In addition to articulating the different questions emerging from each framework, we discuss the data sources and analytic approaches through which these questions might be answered.

### K-12 and Higher Education Reform through a Multiple-Streams Lens

As an explanatory lens, the Multiple-Streams framework invites the analyst to conceptualize government as an organizational “garbage can” (Cohen, March, & Olsen, 1972), focusing attention on intersections of unrelated or, only marginally associated, sets of forces involving the availability of solutions, the awareness of problems, and the propitiousness of political contingency. As noted, studies have found the lens capable of explaining a variety of policy-reform phenomena across the education domain (e.g., Larson, 2004; McLendon, 2003a; McDermott, 2005; Mills, 2007; Ness, 2005; Protosaltis, 2004; Stout & Stevens 2000; Van Der Slik, 1999). Yet, these studies have left key facets of the Multiple-Streams model poorly explicated. For instance, why precisely do policy windows open at the times at which they do? While a number of studies have provided in-depth descriptions of the forces leading up to agenda change, the precise causal mechanisms at work in “stream convergence” remain elusive. How does the *content* of a prospective solution influence its viability and credibility to policy entrepreneurs when choosing among available options? Stated differently, in what ways does the content of proposals help to elevate some of the available solutions up out of the “primeval policy soup” and consign others to continued floating? In what ways, specifically, do policy entrepreneurs facilitate policy change? In much of the extant literature, entrepreneurs tend to appear on the scene at critical moments to help shepherd policies in publicly visible ways. In what other kinds of ways might entrepreneurs influence change, beyond that of navigating stream convergence? More work also is needed in specifying the roles that organized interests play in the Multiple-Streams model. Kingdon’s (1984) original formulation at the national level, like most subsequent applications to education policy, relegates interest groups to the role of system-softening. Might not the role of special interests differ, however, in the states, where term limits for elected officials, recent shifts in party control of government, and policies of increasing technical complexity threaten to overwhelm the independence of politicians, making them more dependent on lobbyists throughout the policy process? Each of the questions raised here addresses gaps in our understanding of the power of the Multiple-Streams model to explain policy change in state education systems.

Despite its attractiveness conceptually, the Multiple-Streams model imposes upon the analyst heavy burdens pertaining to data collection and analysis. For example, a central, provocative assertion of the lens involves the loosely coupled nature of problems, solutions, and environmental conditions. Because virtually any solution (policy idea) can become bound up with any one or more problem of the day, the Multiple-Streams model implies that everything may be related

to everything else—and often in unexpected ways. Most studies that have rigorously examined the Multiple-Streams framework have relied on historical-comparative methods as a means for investigating these complex relationships. Such analyses typically use case-study methodology, building on large numbers of elite interviews and historical documents as the evidentiary basis for conclusions drawn. Elite interviewing, of course, presents notable challenges both in terms of access to participants and validity concerns. Also, because of the element of loose-coupling, the boundaries among policy domains, episodes, issues, and actors over time can appear indistinct or highly permeable. These conditions may compel an analyst to collect copious amounts of interview and archival data as one attempts to triangulate competing or incomplete understandings in search of a coherent explanatory narrative.

Future research on education policy reform using the Multiple-Streams lens would benefit from two methodological improvements, each capable of shedding insight into one or more of the substantive questions we raised earlier. First, more sophisticated sampling approaches are needed. Much of the Multiple-Streams scholarship in the education literature has relied on single-case studies within a particular state or multiple-case studies across states. Both designs have yielded valuable perspective. Yet, important insights could also be gained by examining multiple episodes within an individual state over time (Nicholson-Crotty & Meier, 2002). Such an approach would permit the analyst to assess, for example, the dynamics of policy windows under consistently *similar* structural conditions (e.g., demographic, economic-development, and politico-institutional patterns), but meaningfully *dissimilar* contextual ones (e.g., across specific reform initiatives or changes in political leadership). Second, future applications of the Multiple-Streams model to education policy change would profit from the use of more diverse data-collection techniques. In this regard, we could learn more from studies such as Mintrom's (1997), which used mail surveys of state education experts to examine the activities of policy entrepreneurs in advancing school-choice legislation. Mintrom found that policy entrepreneurship is complex, multifaceted, and indirect in its influence. He also identified policy entrepreneurship as being critical throughout the policy process. Traditional case-study approaches may be ideal because they permit the combining of eclectic modes of field-research (e.g., in-depth interviews, archival data, observations, etc.). Yet, integrating these insights with survey data in one or more states would permit analysts better to gauge the full nature and scope of activities associated with advancing policy reform in both K-12 and higher education.

### K-12 and Higher Education Reform through a Punctuated-Equilibrium Lens

As a lens for framing future research on education policy change, PE theory provides both a conceptual foundation upon which to test propositions about how reform initiatives move dynamically among governmental institutions over time and an analytical framework with which to track changes in the agenda status of issue and policy initiatives. Future research on state education policy reform could build on the PE model in a number of ways. First, one might examine relationships between policy punctuations and partisanship by collecting and analyzing data on bill sponsorship and the sponsors' party affiliation and district. Second, the existence of multiple policy venues is a critical component of the PE framework, as those excluded from a monopoly must have other venues to which they may appeal. What are the alternative policy venues that educational reformers in states use to bypass existing policy monopolies and how do the different venues pursued pay off in terms of advocacy success? One such alternative venue could be the statewide ballot election, an arena of growing significance for education policy but one too little understood (McLendon & Eddings, 2002).

Third, tracking the agenda status of education-reform legislation across both chambers of

state legislatures, rather than aggregating data for the legislature as a whole, would permit one to assess the relative suitability of the upper and lower chambers as venues for different education reform efforts. Also, adding information on committee deliberations and floor debates would permit one better to assess how political rhetoric and technical information are used by advocates in promoting policy change. Finally, from a research-design perspective, collecting information on all bills introduced across a number of states, rather than merely data on bills enacted in a single state, would allow one to draw even stronger inferences about the conditions under which proposals for reform advance onto and retreat from the governmental agenda and about the explanatory power of the PE framework.

Yet, the data requirements the PE model imposes on the analyst also can be quite burdensome. At the heart of the framework resides the notion of shifting policy images and venues over time. Collecting, organizing, and coding trend data on media coverage of education reform in the states (i.e., the conventional approach to appraising changes in policy image) presents a time-consuming challenge, but one made easier over the past decade with the continued enhancement of electronic databases of newspaper articles published in each state. Assessing change in policy venues poses a more formidable undertaking. For research at the national level, the Policy Agendas Project, a new publicly available data archive housed at the University of Washington, provides researchers a vital data resource. At the wWeb site (<http://www.policyagendas.org/>; <http://www.policyagendas.org/>), one may find archived historical data on the U.S. budget; House, Senate, and joint-committee hearings of the U.S. Congress; Executive Orders; Gallup Poll information; State of the Union addresses; Supreme Court cases; New York Times Index Data; and data on public laws passed between 1948 and 1998.

At the state level, no such comprehensive set of historical data yet exists, necessitating extensive archival work in the one or more states of interest. Whereas in many states complete bill information from the early 1990s forward is available online, elsewhere the record is messy (e.g., the format for reporting bill information may change over time, limiting comparisons) or incomplete (e.g., may only cover a short span of time, omit particular years of interest, or provide only bill names, numbers, and topical information, rather than full-text access). Yet, the strategy of selecting a small number of states, chosen for their theoretical relevancy, and concentrating attention on publicly available data sources within them does seem feasible. Notwithstanding the challenges of collecting bill histories from state legislative databases, state departments of education and statewide coordinating and governing boards for higher education in most cases serve as good data repositories for archival information on various policy initiatives. A few data banks hosted by national policy organizations, such as the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO), the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), the Education Commission of the States (ECS), and the National Conference on State Legislatures (NCSL), also provide key information on the governance patterns of the states and of their education systems. When combined with governors' annual state-of-the-state addresses, executive budget notes, and indicators of state political systems derived from other reliable archives (McLendon & Hearn, 2007in press), these data provide the necessary information for testing key tenets of the PE framework and for elaborating new conceptions distinctively tailored to studying education policy change in the states.

#### K-12 and Higher Education Reform through a Policy Innovation and Diffusion Lens

In a study of state policy processes around K-12 and higher education, a policy innovation and diffusion approach would focus attention on the intra- and interstate influences on states' adoption of a specified education reform. Specifically, such a study, would seek to answer:

*To what extent are decisions to adopt an education innovation influenced by a combination of (1) a state's socio-demographic, economic, and political conditions and (2) the policy choices of other states?*

For the K-12 education researcher, the question might be whether patterns in school voucher initiatives among the American states, for example, are influenced by internal state characteristics (e.g., religious composition of populace; teachers' union strength; party competition) or interstate diffusion pressures. The question for students of higher education might be whether certain intrastate determinants (e.g., tuition changes; party control; legislative professionalism) influence adoption of emerging market-oriented financing schemes and, if so, whether they do so independently of neighboring states' previous policy decisions.

Because innovation diffusion researchers focus on patterns of policy adoption across states and over time, studies applying the framework call for datasets with temporal and spatial dimensions. Researchers must assemble adoption data for the American states from a variety of secondary sources. Data for the dependent variable(s)—state adoption decisions—are typically compiled from information from the Education Commission of the States; various think tanks (e.g., Center for Education Policy, Carnegie Foundation, Heritage Foundation), and other research centers (e.g., Consortium for Policy Research in Education); regional compacts (e.g., Midwestern Higher Education Compact; Southern Regional Education Board), media outlets (e.g., *Education Week's* annual "Quality Counts" report; *Chronicle of Higher Education*), and, in some cases, the U.S. Department of Education (e.g., Digest of Education Statistics). Issue-specific policy information may be available from other sources. For example, information on state charter school legislation is collected and housed by the Center for Education Reform. The U.S. Bureau of the Census is a source for state sociodemographic information. State economic data can be assembled from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, or the Bureau of Economic Analysis, among other sources. Political information about the American states is available from various sources including the Council of State Governments' *Book of the States*, National Conference of State Legislatures, Congressional Quarterly's *Campaigns and Elections*, the Democratic and Republican Parties (e.g., Democratic Governors' Association's online election database), the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, and various Secretary of State offices.

For educational researchers interested in the interaction of internal determinants and diffusion dynamics associated with state policy adoption, EHA is the appropriate analytic technique. K-12 and higher education scholars using EHA can use the coefficient estimates it generates to calculate probabilities that a state with specified characteristics will adopt an educational innovation in any given year. Included among the independent variables will be some measure of the number (or percentage) of neighbor states that previously adopted the innovation. Alternative specifications of diffusion may also be modeled (Berry & Berry, 2007in press). Fixed-region models, for example, assume that state officials are inclined to emulate educational policies of states within their region and, therefore, will include the number (or percentage) of other states from the region that have previously adopted (Allen, Pettus, & Haider-Markel, 2004; McLendon & Hearn, 2007in press; Mooney & Lee, 1995). K-12 and higher education researchers might also include in their models a set of variables indicating whether a state had previously adopted other complementary policies (Balla, 2001; Soule & Earl, 2001). In estimating the probability that a state will adopt a charter school policy in a given year, for example, researchers might decide to include a measure of the state's other school choice legislation.

Comparative state politics scholars rely almost exclusively on quantitative approaches. But, the qualitative methodologies commonly employed by K-12 and higher education scholars may represent important tools for considering at once multiple, competing explanations for adoption.

Qualitative techniques may also hold promise for future research on public policy processes and the reasons some educational policies diffuse. Following Cohen-Vogel and Ingle (2007in press), for example, educational researchers might interview key policy actors in adopting and non-adopting states to unpack the role of policy entrepreneurs, preferences for tried and tested policy solutions, networks of professional educators, and interest group competition in the innovation diffusion process.

## CONCLUSION

The chapter began with the premise that the current pace of education policy change compels researchers to pay closer attention to the dynamics that shape K-12 and higher education reforms in and among the 50 states. Understanding state policymaking in education may very well become even more critical as states continue to be charged with more and farther-reaching responsibilities. As we draft our final conclusion, the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce (2007) has just released its well-publicized report *Tough Choice or Tough Times*, a report whose bold recommendations have been likened to those of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). In it, the Commissioners recommend that the local funding of schools be abandoned and that elementary and secondary schools instead be funded directly by the state under a pupil-weighted funding formula. Schools would receive monies from the state according the number and categories of students they served. All students would be assigned the same base funding and additional amounts would be added if the student had special needs, was from a low-income household, or spoke a language other than English at home.

Today, at least two factors position scholars of education policy and politics to make substantial contributions to the study of policymaking among the American states. First, with K-12 and higher education representing one-third of state total expenditures, there is no shortage of policy phenomena to study. Although some secondary data sources exist, the study of state education reforms will likely involve primary data collection activities. Politics of education scholars should build comprehensive state policy databases capable of cataloging education bills, legislation, rules and regulations, court decisions, and executive orders by state and be made available to researchers online. Second, educational researchers collectively have experience with mixed methodological approaches, experience that could enable both a deeper and broader analysis of the reasons behind state attempts to reform education.

To build on scholars' existing capacity, the chapter describes three contemporary theories from political science; namely, Punctuated-Equilibrium theory, Multiple-Streams theory, and Policy Innovation and Diffusion theory, and their potential for framing future research on the politics of state education policy. The chapter also poses different questions that might be answered using each framework, and identifies data sources and analytic approaches for examining factors that condition state education policymaking. In their applications of these frameworks, K-12 and higher education experts, with their considerable knowledge of organizational processes and constraints, may be poised to elaborate and extend theoretical explanations of the role of state government institutions and actors in education politics.

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