

*Affecting Positive Political Change for Texas Educators:
Preservice Teachers' Perceived Efficacy toward the Political Process*

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The purpose of this study was to determine if a correlation exists between politically-oriented experiences and teacher candidates' sense of efficacy for political advocacy. Pre-service teacher candidates in a Texas university completed the Political Advocacy Scale of Efficacy for Teachers (PASET), a survey instrument designed to measure one's degree of efficaciousness toward political advocacy. Following this, students attended an international conference on education, which included a specific workshop on political advocacy and met with politicians in a variety of settings. Data collected from the post administration of the PASET suggested that targeted interventions may affect a pre-service teacher's sense of efficacy for political advocacy. Given a pervasive culture among Texas teachers that does little to positively impact political decisions which affect education, changing preservice teachers' efficacy toward political advocacy could benefit education as a whole.

Affecting Positive Political Change for Texas Educators:

Preservice Teachers' Perceived Efficacy toward the Political Process

Historically, Texas public school teachers have maintained a culture that does little to positively impact educational decisions made by state and federal government officials. As significant stakeholders in the field, a change in this culture among teachers could benefit the educational system as a whole.

A potential key to unlocking this dilemma may lie within the theoretical construct of self-efficacy. As opposed to self-esteem, self-efficacy describes one's perceptions of capability. Self-efficacy perceptions impact "human functioning because it affects behavior not only directly, but by its impact on other key determinants, such as goals and aspirations, outcome expectations, affective proclivities, and perception of impediments and opportunities in the social environment" (Bandura, 1997, p. 2).

Noting efficaciousness specifically for teaching began with the publication of a RAND study that examined the success of various reading programs in California (Armor et al, 1976). Since that time, numerous instruments designed to measure a teacher's sense of efficacy for teaching have been developed (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy & Hoy, 1998). This research has explored teachers' sense of efficacy for teaching (Armor et al, 1976; Ashton et al 1983; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990; Guskey & Passaro, 1993; Allinder, 1994; Coladarci & Breton, 1997; Deemer & Minke, 1999) and for teaching specific subjects (Ritter, Boone, & Rubba, 2001; Milson & Mehlig, 2002, Brenowitz & Tuttle, 2003; Martin & Kulinna, 2003; Estes, 2005), as well as linked a teacher's sense of efficacy in regard to teaching with student achievement gains (Armor et al, 1976; Ashton et al, 1983; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Ross, Hogaboam-Gray, & Hannay, 2001).

Teaching is a multicontextual occupation. As such, context-specific efficacy scales may more appropriately describe one's self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Research (Smith & Fouad, 1999) indicates that a teacher's efficacy varies according to distinct subject matters and that the constructs of academic self-efficacy, outcome expectancies, and goals are specific to subject-matter domains. Consequently, teacher efficacy research has led to the design of instruments that are subject-specific. Instruments to measure a teacher's efficacy for teaching specific subjects, such as computer science, science, reading, character education, nutrition education, and physical education (Ritter, Boone, & Rubba, 2001; Ross, Hogaboam-Gray, & Hannay, 2001; Milson & Mehlig, 2002; Brenowitz & Tuttle, 2003; Martin & Kulinna, 2003; Estes, 2005) have proven effective in adding precision to the construct of teacher efficacy.

Self-efficacy within the context of the teaching profession has garnered considerable research (Armor et al, 1976; Ashton et al 1983; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990; Guskey & Passaro, 1993; Allinder, 1994; Coladarci & Breton, 1997; Deemer & Minke, 1999; Ritter, Boone, & Rubba, 2001; Milson & Mehlig, 2002, Brenowitz & Tuttle, 2003; Martin & Kulinna, 2003; Estes, 2005). However, an extensive review of the related literature has revealed that no instrument has been designed to measure a teacher's sense of efficacy for political advocacy. The purpose of this study was to design the Political Advocacy Scale of Efficacy for Teachers (PASET), implement the measure, and describe teacher candidates' sense of efficacy for political advocacy. Further, this study sought to examine if personal experience with politicians and policy-makers would affect a teacher candidates' sense of efficacy for political advocacy.

Using the PASET, a questionnaire based on Bandura's (1977) model of personal efficacy, the students' beliefs about their ability to influence political decision making were measured.

Based on the recommendations of Bandura (2001) for constructing self-efficacy scales, as well as the revisions suggested by Deemer and Minke (1999) of the Gibson and Dembo (1984) Teacher Efficacy Scale, the Political Advocacy Scale of Efficacy for Teachers (PASET) was developed for this study. According to Bandura (2001, p. 1), “the efficacy belief system is not a global trait, but a differentiated set of beliefs linked to distinct realms of functioning.” Global measures have limited predictive value; therefore the 10 items in the final version of the PASET were designed to measure a teacher’s beliefs about his/her ability to advocate for political change. The PASET prompts were modified to be context-specific for political advocacy utilizing the prompts from the Gibson and Dembo (1984) Teacher Efficacy Scale.

The pilot instrument for the PASET contained nineteen questions. Teachers candidates (N=110) at a small, private university in central Texas completed the pilot survey. Three groups of participants in the pilot study voluntarily completed the survey during regularly-scheduled classes. Participants were selected based on enrollment in three randomly-selected university education courses. The teacher candidates who participated were predominantly juniors or seniors who would graduate with a degree in education in one to three semesters. As a result of their program of study, these teacher candidates had extensive classroom-based field experience in Texas public schools. Given this educational background, and the convenience of the sample, this group was determined to have the qualifications to appropriately understand and respond to the prompts of the PASET for the purposes of the pilot study.

A statement was read aloud to participants prior to involvement in the pilot study that clarified the purpose of the study, level of confidentiality, and the participant’s right not to participate. Participants in the pilot study were given an opportunity to leave the room if they chose not to participate. No participants did so. Surveys were distributed by the researcher

within these university classrooms. Participants were asked to voluntarily complete the survey and return the survey to the researcher at the same meeting.

Data collected from the surveys were coded numerically using an ordinal scale for each response. Responses to negatively stated prompts on the pilot version of the PASET were coded inversely in order to have consistency in scoring. Coded data were then input into the statistical analysis software JMP 5.0 for analysis.

Cronbach's Index of Internal Consistency (Kirk, 1999) was used to determine the internal reliability of the pilot version of the PASET. Given the results, nine items were determined to undermine the internal consistency of the overall scale and were removed. Using the remaining ten questions, the results from the pilot study ($\alpha = .7065$) indicated acceptable internal reliability. Additionally, the final version of the PASET reflected a balance between positively and negatively stated items. This culled version of the PASET was used for the full study (see Figure 1).

The validity of the PASET was confirmed through expert review. Education professors from a small, private university in central Texas ($n=3$) reviewed the PASET. Recommendations from the expert review included restatement of some prompts, as well as the reorganization of prompts.

In addition to the PASET, the final survey questionnaire used for the study included a variety of demographic questions/prompts. These questions/prompts were included in order to describe participants in the study, as well as determine certain characteristics for data analysis. Selection of the prompts for data analysis was based on a review of the relevant literature.

In the final study, participants ($N=4$) were preservice teacher candidates currently enrolled in the teacher education program at a private, religiously-affiliated university in central

Texas. Given study limitations, the participants were purposefully selected by a committee of education professors based on candidates' overall GPA, professor's perceptions of candidates' ability to follow through with study requirements, and demographics. Attempts were made to best represent the population. Of the participants, two were female and two were male. One participant was Hispanic and three were Caucasian. Of the four participants, three described themselves as 18-25 years of age and single/never married; the other participant self-reported as 36-45 years of age and married. All participants reported study toward Texas teacher certification. Two planned certification in the area of EC-4th Generalist, one 4th-8th Social Studies, and the final a combination of All-Level Physical Education and 8th-12th Mathematics.

Each participant was a self-described registered voter. Two participants identified themselves with the Republican Party, while the remaining participants indicated no particular party affiliation. Two reported a conservative political philosophy and two reported a moderate political philosophy. Pre-survey results indicated moderate degrees of self-efficacy for political advocacy. The mean score for the study group was 32.25 out of a total possible score of 50. The lowest PASET score reported was 25 with the highest at 38.

Accompanied by faculty from the university's education department, the students participated in the Summit on Public Education held in Washington, D.C. Sponsored by Phi Delta Kappa, the Summit promoted quality education essential to the development and maintenance of a democratic way of life. In addition to professional development based on scientific-based research and best practices, the Summit provided multiple opportunities for the participants to personally interact with elected state and federal government officials. Visits were made with two federal congressional legislative aides and meetings with two Texas state legislators were held in conjunction with attendance at the Summit.

Upon return from the Summit, participants were invited to complete the post-survey. Results from the post administration of the PASET indicated a minimal gain with a 35.3 mean score out of the possible 50 points. Three participants' PASET scores were higher at the post-test, with one participant's PASET score lower.

The participants with a higher PASET post-assessment score reported a greater degree of satisfaction with the overall experience. Both interactions with policy makers, as well as advocacy focus at Summit were reported as beneficial. One participant reported a pervasive dissatisfaction with the Summit general and break-out sessions. Participant predisposition toward a particular political philosophy may account for the lower post-assessment of the PASET.

The present study explored the use of the PASET as a promising tool to define political advocacy beliefs among teachers. Data suggest that targeted intervention may impact a teacher's efficacy for political advocacy. Far reaching significance of the present study exists for researchers, practitioners, K-12 schools, and teacher preparation programs. The long-range effects of the use of the PASET may help to identify targeted intervention and to better prepare teachers to advocate for their profession. Advancements in professional development and teacher preparation which lead to more highly involved teachers have the potential to positively affect the future of public education.

Figure 1 Political Advocacy Scale of Efficacy for Teachers (PASET)

1. When an elected official introduces or supports certain governmental issues, it is usually because citizens made an effort to contact him/her regarding their views on that specific issue.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

2. When all factors are considered, a citizen is a powerful influence on governmental decision-making.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. Volunteer work is not an important component of the governmental process.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

4. When an elected official has difficulty determining whether to vote for or against a specific governmental change, s/he relies on the viewpoints of his/her constituency.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. An elected official has little incentive to consider the needs and concerns of his/her constituency.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. Service is the primary reason an individual seeks an elected office.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. Even though lobbyists and campaign contributors have a strong influence on the choices made by elected officials, my viewpoint is important.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

8. The needs and rights of individuals are not considered by elected officials when they are making governmental decisions.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

9. Elected officials consider the needs and rights of minority groups when they are making governmental decisions.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

10. In our democratic society, decision-making is not in the hands of the citizens.

Strongly Agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

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