

ECSE Practitioners' Involvement in Policy Efforts: Grassroots vs. Implementation. A Comparative Study

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Background and Previous Research

Theories of political participation such as rational actor theory and social capital theory dominate the evidence base. Interdisciplinary research investigating political participation reveals several important themes: 1) citizen contacts with government, including E-Government, demonstrate perceived needs to be the essential factor predicting engagement; 2) involvement and new media, including use of the internet and mediums of outreach and communication; and 3) the usefulness of deliberative experiences, particularly those that occur and are sustained within social networks. As it stands, there is little/no research on organizing or participation in education advocacy groups, although the importance of practitioner social networks has been solidly demonstrated in educational administration and leadership research. The potential of professional networking through advocacy organizations such as CEC, DEC, and NAEYC can easily be seen as applicable as well; that is, the development of connected, quality professional networks can be used to generate a larger educational movement. This would require dedicated leaders within educational advocacy organizations that are committed to developing policies and opportunities that promote networking and deliberative experiences relative to issues important to the field.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of the proposed study is to investigate the extent to which ECSE practitioners participate in two separate processes of policy involvement: a) grassroots and/or scaling up efforts, and b) actively shaping the implementation of policy, regulations, and/or initiatives. A secondary but equally important purpose is to examine the factors that are associated with involvement. The study will examine practitioners' past involvement in both of these processes, perceived professional and personal needs, knowledge of current educational movements and events, as well as the size, structure, and quality of their professional social networks. Demographic information will also be collected. Findings will be used to develop an action plan for garnering increased involvement from practitioners in each of these processes. Additionally, preliminary results will be discussed at the 2012 DEC conference during a roundtable session in which input from members will be used to shape the final plan. A subsequent, experimental follow-up study will evaluate the effectiveness of the approach for garnering involvement within DEC. Implications of the findings relative to the field of ECSE will be discussed. The following research questions will be explored in the present study: (a) to what extent are ECSE practitioners engaged in bottom-up vs. top-down processes of political involvement?; (b) are there demographic, experiential, knowledge-based, or professional factors that predict the political involvement of individuals involved in the field of ECSE?; (c) what issues do ECSE practitioners perceive as central to their career, the field, or their family?; (d) what do ECSE practitioners believe would motivate them to become politically involved to advance and/or shape the implementation of issues they support?; and (e) in what ways does a practitioners' professional social network influence the extent to which they are politically involved?



Figure 1. Process of influence through the lens of implementation science and social capital theory

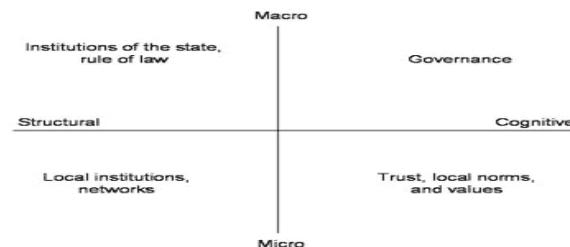


Figure 2. Conceptualization of social capital. Source: Grootaert and Van Bastelaer (2002)

Methods

Participants: Professionals/practitioners in the field of ECSE/EI from NE Ohio and members of DEC

Design: Cross-sectional survey design

Sampling: Different sampling techniques for each of two phases:
Phase 1/Pilot: Purposive sampling utilizing the ECSE/EI practitioner mailing list created by ODEC-systematic random sampling will be used to select a proportion of these contacts to send a survey invite. Additionally, participants at the ODEC mini-conference in June will be invited to participate. Further, the snowball effect is also planned given that all invitees will be encouraged to pass the link on to colleagues.

Phase 2/Formal: For the second phase of the study, a link to the survey will be provided on the DEC website in the Professionals section. All members will also be invited to participate via email. The nonprobability method of self-selection sampling will be used. Determination of necessary sample size will occur after obtaining the current number of members and looking at primary variables of interest to calculate the acceptable margins of error (Cochran, 1977).

Measure: Qualtrics online survey

Data Analysis: Cross-tabulations and other multivariate analyses, including Pearson correlations to examine the zero-order correlations between variables, as well as regressions as appropriate, will be run on the data to explore the different levels of association.

Next Steps: 1) Talk to Dr. Neisz regarding survey construction and conceptualization on 4/25; 2) finalize survey ASAP and submit IRB by the weekend; 3) construct the survey questions in Qualtrics; 4) send out pilot survey invites; and 5) determine placement or necessity of working hypothesis: findings are likely to reveal the importance of identifying and developing leaders to head organizations, schools, etc. that will initiate policies and practices that encourage the development and networking of individuals in organizations and schools, that promote open discussion and that strategically place issues and practices of importance to the field before members/practitioners.