

# Effects of Student Background on Elementary School Children's Democratic Political Attitudes

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## ABSTRACT

The purposes of this study were to explore the effects of selected student background (grade, gender, SES, location of residence, perception of classroom climate, and perception of school climate) on elementary school children's democratic political attitudes (anti-authoritarianism, tolerance and support for civil liberties, and political efficacy).

Based on literature review and discussion, the main findings of this study were as follow: Generally, children in the higher grades, coming from high SES families, residing in an urban region, and perceiving an open classroom climate have a more positive attitude of anti-authoritarianism and a stronger tolerance and support for civil liberties; high SES children were found to have a more positives sense of political efficacy; and children having a more positive anti-authoritarian attitudes presented a stronger tolerance and support for civil liberties, and a greater sense of political efficacy.

Several recommendations were suggested in this study. Teachers should make an effort to foster the democratic political attitudes of children in the lower grades, coming from low SES families, and residing in the rural region; the teachers and the school administrators should create an open climate of classroom and school; the content of civil liberties guaranteed by the Constitution should be emphasized on the teaching of elementary school, consisting of the principles and its appli-

cation; any educational goal or practice should not be achieved at the expense of children's democratic values; and additional survey research should be conducted to explore possible relationships between children's political attitudes and other student background variables such as parent's political attitudes, teachers' political attitudes, school size, pattern of childrearing, family structure, religion, mass media, and birth order.

## Introduction

A significant measure of the strength of a democratic society is the degree to which citizens commit themselves to basic democratic principles and values (Curtis & Shaver, 1983). In a democracy, citizens develop attitudes toward democratic political values which are even more important than learning abundant political knowledge and skills. Previous studies indicated that anti-authoritarianism, tolerance and support for civil liberties, and political efficacy are democratic values of great importance. It is also widely accepted that the family and the school are most significant agents regarding children's political socialization. Grade, gender, socioeconomic status, location of residence, classroom climate, and school climate are reported as important family and school factors affecting the child's political socialization.

In Taiwan, democratization, a national goal which encompasses the movement from authoritarian to an increasingly democratic structure, is especially significant in recent years. It has become an important task to develop individuals who will become well-functioning citizens based on an acceptance of democratic political values. Therefore, citizenship education for a democracy is emphasized at all school levels. In addition, research on children's actual democratic political attitudes and their predictors is therefore needed. Research findings

have the potential of yielding significant implications for the reformation of the elementary school curriculum and instruction, specifically as such findings may be applied to the field of citizenship education within a democracy.

The main purposes of this study are as follows:

1. To understand elementary school children's political attitudes toward democratic values (anti-authoritarian attitude, tolerance and support for civil liberties, and political efficacy).
2. To explore the effect of selected student background variables (selected family and school factors) on elementary school children's political attitudes toward democratic values (anti-authoritarian attitude, tolerance and support for civil liberties, and political efficacy).
3. To identify information regarding children's political socialization that might be used as a basis for recommending improvements in the elementary school citizenship education curriculum, particularly in the general social studies curriculum.

Based on the review of related literature, two topics are explored and discussed in this research; (a) elementary school children's democratic political attitudes, and (b) effects of selected student background on elementary school children's democratic political attitudes. After exploring and discussing on these topics, recommendations for instruction, and suggestions for further research are made.

## **Children's Democratic Political Attitudes**

This section explores the selected elementary school children's democratic political attitudes. It consists of: (a) anti-authoritarianism, (b) tolerance and support for civil liberties, and (c) sense of political efficacy.

### Anti-Authoritarianism

Janowitz and Marvick (1974) viewed the authoritarian as,

. . . the individual who is concerned with power and toughness and who is prone to resolve conflict in an arbitrary manner. He is seen as having strong and persistent desires the others submit to his outlook.

. . . He himself desires to submit to other individuals whom he sees as more powerful. (p. 306)

Authoritarianism also refers to,

. . . of, relating, or favoring a principle of often blind submission to authority as opposed to individual freedom of thought and action...[or] of, relating to, re favoring a political system that concentrates power in the hands of a leader of a small autocratic elite not constitutionally responsible to the body of the people--opposed to democratic. (Webster's Third International Dictionary, p. 146)

Sanford in *The Authoritarian Personality* reported that an authoritarian person is "submissive to powerful figures, discomforted by the ambiguity and uncertainties of democratic processes, and rejecting toward different or unfamiliar groups" (Kirscht & Dillehay, 1967, p. 57). In the concept of authoritarianism, two dimensions are considered most important: "authoritarian submission" and "power and toughness" (Janowitz & Marvick, 1976, p. 307). Lane (1955) found that anti-authoritarian respondents had a greater sense of political efficacy. The mentioned definitions indicate that authoritarianism is an anti-democratic attitude. Conversely, anti-authoritarianism is a democratic attitude.

Torney, Oppenheim, and Farnen (1975) conducted a survey in ten countries and found the following results among 14-year-olds (pp. 265-2

78): (a) students who reported that independence of expression of opinion was encouraged by the teacher were less authoritarian; (b) students who reported infrequent participation in patriotic rituals were less authoritarian in their attitudes; (c) the higher the students' grade in school the less authoritarian they were; and (d) students who reported that their civics and history classes stressed facts and memorization were more authoritarian in Ireland, Italy, and New Zealand and less authoritarian in Finland and the United States.

Banda (1981) explored the acquisition of basic political orientation and attitudes toward democratic political value using 772 kindergarten, elementary school, and secondary school children in Canada. He found that less than half of fourth grade children seemed to support anti-authoritarian democratic values and about one-third of the children appeared to have no opinion. Sixth grade children's support for anti-authoritarianism was represented by 62.4% and 19.6% of the children appeared to have no opinion. In other words, the higher the grade level, the greater the children supported anti-authoritarianism and the less the children felt they had no opinions in responding to the authoritarian items.

Lederer (1982) reviewed the literature on authoritarianism and concluded that almost all survey studies over time have indicated increasing support for democratic values such as tolerance, freedom of expression, and interest in political events. Banda (1981) suggested that "a citizen's effective participation in democratic processes or political activities in his community....depends on his positive attitude toward the democratic processes and values" (p. 65). Therefore, he emphasized that anti-authoritarian attitudes are important for a democratic society.

Chen (1993), the researcher of this study, conducted a study of 773

elementary school children of grades 4, 5, and 6 in Chiayi, and found that children express positive anti-authoritarianism (grand mean = 3.66) with scores ranging from 1 (low) to 5 (high). However, the mean scores of item related to freedom to criticize the government is low (2.65). Chen (1993) also found that children who are comparatively mature in age, coming from high socioeconomic level, residing in an urban area, and with a perception of an open classroom climate are less authoritarian.

In summary, the previously mentioned studies show:

(a) the stronger anti-authoritarianism, the greater the attitudes toward democratic value; (b) socioeconomic status is positively related to anti-authoritarianism, i.e. children from high SES families are less authoritarian; and (c) grade/age is positively related to anti-authoritarianism, i.e. older children are less authoritarian.

### **Tolerance and Support for**

#### **Civil Liberties**

Citizens have civil liberties which must be protected by government. This is a principle found not only in the constitution of the Republic of China, but also in America and other countries. "Even countries which violate individual rights have constitutions which profess in principle the rights they are in fact violating" (Levine, 1982, p. 130).

Civil liberties and civil rights are often used interchangeably to mean the same thing, but they may not be the same. Civil rights deal with group rights--race, nationality, and language, etc. Mooney (1965) defined civil liberties as "the privileges of the individual that are protected from encroachment by federal, state, and local governments" (p. 5). Researchers also refer to freedom of conscience, freedom of expression, equal protection of the law, and freedom from unreasonable and arbitrary action by the government as part of the definition

of civil liberties and civil rights. (Mooney, 1965; Levine, 1982; Butt, 1989). Levine (1982) believed that civil liberties also include those freedoms which permit maximum political participation in the political process. The most notable is the right to vote.

In a democratic society the majority decides on the "proper" course of action. However, must we not protect the rights of the individual and the members of minority groups? Does the majority always protect the rights and privileges of others? These questions should be answered (Leinward, 1968, p. 17). Only then can we understand whether citizens support civil liberties or not, and we can know whether our society is really democratic or not. For this reason, it seems to be necessary to understand the child's attitude toward support for civil liberties.

Zellman and Sears (1971) studies how children acquire supportive attitudes for basic civil liberties with a sample of 9-through 14-year-old children in California. They found that 60% of their subjects supported the right of free speech. They believed in free speech for all, no matter what their views might be. Fifteen percent did not believe in free speech. Twenty-five percent responded with "don't know." This study also showed that the most common pattern for the individual was tolerance of the abstract principle of freedom but intolerance for concrete extension of the principle. for example, 30% endorsed free speech in the abstract but would at the same time refuse to allow a communist "to make a speech in this city saying communism is good" (p.118). In other words, most children's attitudes toward rights of free expression for specific dissenting political groups depended more upon their attitudes toward the groups than upon their acceptance of the general principle of free speech.

In short, an inconsistency exists between support for democratic abstractions and application of the principles to specific persons or

events. Several studies of adults' political attitudes have also revealed this contradiction (Patrick, 1977). It was found that students today seem to be more positive in their attitudes toward the government and law, but less willing to extend the constitutional freedoms to all citizens (Sidelnick, 1989).

Banda (1981) found that differences of perception and attitudes toward civil liberties existed among fourth, sixth, eighth, tenth, and twelfth grade children. Only 52.0 percent of fourth grade children expressed support for civil liberties' but about 71.7 percent of tenth grade children supported civil liberties. The results indicated that the higher the grade level, the greater the children's support for civil liberties. Banda (1981) believed that

The differential support for the civil liberties among children seems to indicate that the children's perceptions and attitudes toward civil liberties are influenced by their different ages and their associated stages of intellectual development. (Banda, 1981, p. 168).

Curtis and Shaver (1983) developed a Freedom Scale to measure high school students' predispositions toward the rights and freedoms enumerated in the Bill of rights. They found that age and location of residence were not related to respondents' attitudes toward fundamental rights and freedoms. However, scores on the Freedom Scale were found to correlate positively with intelligence.

Sidelnick (1989) used the Freedom Scale developed by Curtis and Shaver (1983) to test high school students' beliefs in the equality of all individuals and the constitutional rights of all citizens. He suggested that low ability subjects are more dogmatic and consequently less likely to support fundamental freedoms embodied in the freedom Scale and the Bill of Rights. Females had a slightly higher mean score on the



freedom Scale.

Chen (1993) found that elementary school children in Chiayi possess a moderate tolerance and support for civil liberties (grand mean = 3.21) with scores of items ranging from 1 (low) to 5 (high). Children positively felt that all citizens irrespective of race, religion, or nationality should be treated equally. However, Scores of items related to freedom to criticize the government and freedom of the mass media were low (less than 3.0). Chen (1993) also found that children who are comparatively mature in age, coming from high SES family, residing in urban area, and perceiving an open classroom climate have more positive attitudes regarding tolerance and support for civil liberties.

In short, the findings of children's support for civil liberties are mixed. However, grade and age seem to be positively related to elementary school children's support for civil liberties. In addition, an inconsistency exists between children's support for the principle of civil liberties and application of the principles to specific persons or events.

### **Sense of Political Efficacy**

The concept and measure of political efficacy have a history of nearly forty years. Among many indicators of general political attitudes, Sense of Political Efficacy (Campbell et al., 1954) is "one of the most theoretically important and frequently used" (Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991, p. 1407).

Political efficacy was first investigated in systematic and operational form by the authors of The Voter Decides--Angus Campbell, Gerald Gurin, and Warren E. Miller. They defined the concept as follows:

Sense of political efficacy may be defined as the feeling that individual political action does have or can have an impact upon the

political process, i.e., that it is worthwhile to perform one's civic duties. It is the feeling that political and social change is possible, and that the individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change. (Campbel) et al., 1954, p. 187)

Efficacy is the most immediate attitudinal explanation of political action. According to Wolfsled (1985), it reflects the person's basic belief that the authorities do or do not respond to different modes of action. Citizens who feel there is no way to influence the political process will not participate at all. Of course, "citizens can feel extremely competent and still have a low sense of efficacy." However, "If civic competence is a necessary condition for activity, efficacy is the sufficient one" (Wolfsled, 1985, p. 620).

Researchers believed that political efficacy contains at least two separate components--internal efficacy and external efficacy. Internal efficacy refers to "beliefs about one's own competence to understand, and to participate effectively in politics." External efficacy refers to "beliefs about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizen demands" (Niemi et al., 1991, p. 1407). Easton and Dennis (1967) pointed out the elements which might serve as part of the meaning of political efficacy were,

. . . a sense of the direct political potency of the individual' a belief in the responsiveness of the government to the desires of individuals' the idea of the comprehensibility of government; the availability of adequate means of influence; and a general resistance to fatalism about the tractability of government to anyone, ruler or ruled. (p. 29)

As to the instrument for measuring political efficacy, Campbell, Gurin, and Miller's scale has been thoroughly investigated, applied in numerous studies, and has been found to be a reliable and valid instru-

ment (Gunther, 1976; Wolfsled, 1985).

Campbell et al. (1954) found that education, income, and occupation are highly related to sense of political efficacy. Easton and Dennis (1967) found that feelings of political efficacy increase with grade level. Among third graders, only 16% scored high on the political-efficacy scale. This percentage was 18% among fourth graders, and 44% among sixth graders. They also found that socioeconomic status was significantly related to children's political efficacy. Among the third grade children there was a 7% difference between the children of low- and high-status families in the attainment of high political efficacy scores. This difference was increased to 25% by the eighth grade (pp. 32-35).

White (1968) examined children's sense of political efficacy and found that the best predictors of political efficacy were grade level and intelligence of a child. Langton (1969) reported that the school has more effect on students with low to medium efficacy than on those of high efficacy. Glenn (1972) found that positive feelings of classroom participation are related to a higher sense of political efficacy, but the relationship was weak.

Singh (1983) studied students at the secondary school, college, and university levels in India. He found that a sense of political efficacy was higher among those students who are comparatively mature in age, male, coming from affluent families, having service as their occupation, residing in an urban area, and coming from highly political families (p. 85).

Garcia (1973) conducted a survey of 683 Hispanics and 544 Anglos in the third through ninth grade in California. The results showed that 39% of the Anglos scored high on sense of political efficacy while only 22% of the Hispanics had high scores. Lamare's (1974) study of El Paso el-  
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elementary school children also found Hispanics to have lower levels of sense of political efficacy than do Anglos (Abramson, 1983). These findings indicate that there are racial and subcultural differences regarding children's sense of political efficacy.

In Japan, Kawata (1987) reported that young Japanese children develop a sense of political efficacy by 12 years of age. Liao (1989) conducted a study with samples of junior high school students in Taipei, Taiwan. It was found that residence, grade, family size, religious beliefs, family income, and parents' education variables are related to the student's sense of political efficacy. The higher the student's grade level, family income, and parents' education, the greater sense of political efficacy. Students from extended or two-parent families have a greater sense of political efficacy than those from non-extended and non-two-parent families. (pp. 110-111, 114-115).

In Taiwan, Yuan (1972) found that elementary school and junior high school children have a tendency for a downward shift in the sense of political efficacy as they reach the higher grades, i.e., the higher the grade level of children, the less the sense of political efficacy. Children's sense of political efficacy is on the low side in view of average score. A significant difference exists between elementary school children and junior high school children. Approximately 21% of elementary school children (grades 4-6) scored high on the political efficacy scale, while only 12.27% of junior high school children achieved high scores. There was no significant difference because of gender, family origin, parents' education, and socioeconomic status. No significant correlation exists among rearing practices, personality structure, and a sense of political efficacy (pp. 54-54).

Yuan (1974), with a sample of 1,077 children through grades four to nine, found that sense of political efficacy was higher among those chil-

dren who were comparatively mature in age (higher grade), boys, residing in an urban area, Mainlander, coming from families having a comparatively high level of parents' education and socioeconomic status, and high family income. The higher the tendency of authoritarianism, the lower the sense of political efficacy (p. 12). On the other hand, Wang (1992) found that most students were in the middle in terms of a sense of political efficacy. In addition, grade, gender, and residence did not significantly affect children's sense of political efficacy. Chen (1993) found that elementary school children possess a moderate sense of political efficacy (grand mean = 3.23) with scores ranging from 1 (low) to 5 (high). Among the six selected independent variables (grade level, gender, location of residence, perception of classroom climate, perception of school climate, and SES), only SES appeared to have a significant effect on children's sense of political efficacy.

Tsai (1994), exploring political attitudes and orientation of senior high school students in Taipei, found that a sense of political efficacy was higher among those students who are male, more participation, and coming from schools of more contribution in citizenship education.

In summary, the previously mentioned foreign literature indicates: (a) sense of political efficacy was higher among those children who are comparatively mature in age, male, coming from high socioeconomic level, and residing in an urban area; (b) an open classroom climate and school climate seemed to be positively related to children's sense of political efficacy; and (c) sense of political efficacy was positively related to political participation. However, the literature of Taiwan showed that the findings were mixed concerning the level of sense of political efficacy, and the impact of grade, gender, and residence on the sense of political efficacy. Therefore, the fouthter study is needed.

## Effects of Selected Student Background on Elementary School Children's Democratic Political Attitudes

This section discusses the effects of selected student background on elementary school children's democratic political attitudes. It consists of: (a) grade, (b) gender, (c) socioeconomic status, (d) location of residence, (e) classroom climate, and (f) school climate.

### Grade

Easton and Dennis (1967) surveyed children's sense of political efficacy, using subjects of grades three through eight. The results indicated that sense of political efficacy increased with grade level. White (1968) found that grade was one of the best predictors of political efficacy. Singh (1983) showed that a sense of political efficacy was higher among those students who were comparatively mature in age.

Connell (1971), using Australian children, ages 5 to 16, found that children's perceptions and attitudes toward five political orientations--their community, political figures, political order, party choice, and ideology--vary according to age level (Banda, 1981). Glenn (1972) showed the grade level was related to children's political attitudes.

Banda (1981) found that the children's level of support for these values tended to vary according to their age levels. The higher the grade level and age, the stronger the support for these democratic values. Sidelnick (1990) also found the grade level was related to the student's scores on the Freedom Scale.

Chen (1993), the author of this study, found that there was a statistically significant difference among different grade levels regarding elementary school children's anti-authoritarianism, and tolerance and

support for civil liberties. Pupil at the higher grade levels appeared to have a more positive attitude.

The findings of the foregoing reviews indicate that grade and age are highly related to children's political attitudes. The children in higher grades have the stronger support for democratic political values. The older children are more aware of the governmental institutions and political process.

### **Gender**

Many early studies established clear differentiation in behavior which would be indicative of political interest. Hyman (1959) reviewed the existing data and concluded: "Already at an early age, boys are directed toward politics and here lie the seeds of the adult differentiations everywhere found in studies of political participation" (p. 31). Hess and Torney (1962) studied the development of political attitudes in second to eighth grade children. They found that although many of the sex differences in political attitudes and activities were not great, they were consistent across grades. Boys acquire attitudes more rapidly than girls. Boys report more political activity than do girls. In addition, girls tend to be more attached to personal figures of the system than boys.

Easton and Dennis (1969) found that the female child typically enters into the aggregate consciousness of political authority and incorporates its more abstract attributes at a lower rate than does the male. The politicization of boys starts on the average a little earlier than that of girls. However, they found that sex differences are small. (p. 343).

Merelman's (1971) study indicated that high school senior girls are slightly more efficacious than boys. Sidelnick (1989) found that gender was related to high school students' scores on the Freedom Scale.

Hepburn, Napier, and Krieger (1988), in a study on political attitudes, found that both German and American female high school students show a strong commitment to democratic principles. Jennings and Niemi (1981) reported that there was no significant difference regarding political efficacy between boys and girls.

In Taiwan, Yuan's (1974) study indicated that elementary school boys had a significantly higher sense of political efficacy than girls in the Taipei area. Wang (1992) had an opposite finding. Chuang (1981) found that there is no significant difference in political belief between senior high school males and females. On the other hand, Yu (1985) indicated that junior high school girls had a higher score on the political belief scale than boys. Chen (1993) found that there was no statistically significant difference between different genders regarding elementary school children's anti-authoritarianism, tolerance and support for civil liberties, and political efficacy.

In short, existing literatures have mixed findings. However, they indicate that, more or less, there is a difference in democratic political attitudes between boys and girls.

#### **Socioeconomic Status**

Like gender, socioeconomic status (SES) has long occupied an important place in political socialization. Easton and Dennis (1969) found that socioeconomic status shows several modest yet suggestive differences in how children relate to political authorities. Children from American families with higher social status, like their parents, have higher political efficacy.

In Greenstein's (1970) New Haven Study. Subjects consisted of 659 fourth through eighth grade children in New Haven, Connecticut. Social class differences were found in political learning.

Langton and Karns (1969) found that in both Jamaica and the



United States the economic status of the parents influences political attitudes. Hess and Torney (1967) showed that there is a significant social class difference in perception of the legal system. Although young children almost uniformly perceive the law as absolute and unchangeable, more middle-class children perceived that laws can be changed, and are sometimes unjust. Weissberg (1976) reviewed a considerable amount of literature and suggested that the middle-class child is more politicized, more sensitized and involved with the surrounding political system than those of the lower-class. As a middle-class child begins depersonalizing and de-idealizing political authority, the lower-class child persists in his or her more naive and benevolent imagery.

Marker (1970), in an experimental study, found that there is a positive correlation between a student's socioeconomic status and his or her willingness to accept traditional democratic values. Jennings and Niemi (1981) viewed education as a powerful discrimination among youth in political attitudes and behaviors.

Campbell et al. (1954) found that socioeconomic status, education, income, and occupation are highly related to a sense of political efficacy. Easton and Dennis (1967) also suggested that the higher the SES, the higher the children's sense of political efficacy. In Taiwan, Yuan's study of elementary school students and Liao's study of junior high school students had similar findings (Yuan, 1974; Liao, 1989).

Chen (1993) found that there was a statistically significant difference among different levels of SES regarding elementary school children's anti-authoritarianism, tolerance and support for civil liberties, and political efficacy. High SES children were found to be more positive than those of medium/low SES in both anti-authoritarianism and political efficacy. Low SES children appeared to have weaker

attitudes than those of high/medium SES in regard to tolerance and support for civil liberties.

In short, most studies found that socioeconomic status is positively related to children's democratic political values.

#### **Location of Residence**

Glenn (1972) conducted an investigation of elementary school children's attitudes toward politics. He found that suburban children and rural children were slightly more efficacious than inner-city children. Jaros, Hirsch, and Fleron, in their study "The malevolent Leader: Political Socialization in an American Subculture" (1973), examined the political attitudes of students in grades 5 through 12. They found that students in the relatively poor, rural Appalachian region of the United States are dramatically less favorably inclined toward political objects than students in other portions of the nation.

Yuan's (1974) survey of fourth through ninth grade children in Taiwan showed that location of residence is related to children's sense of political efficacy. Wang (1992) had an opposite finding. Singh (1983) found that a sense of political efficacy was higher among those students who are residing in an urban area. Liao's (1989) study in Taipei, indicated that junior high school students residing in the inner-city had a greater sense of political efficacy and stronger attitudes of political participation than those residing in a suburban region.

On the other hand, Curtis and Shaver (1983) used the Freedom Scale to measure high school students' attitudes toward civil liberties. The subjects were selected from a number of communities varying in size and degree of urbanization. Comparisons were made among the mean scores of students from the various communities. The results indicated that place of residence was not a factor in the respondents' attitudes toward fundamental rights and freedoms, as assessed by the Freedom

Scale. "This finding is discrepant from those of prior studies, but the reason is unknown" (p. 14)

Chen (1993) found that there was a statistically significant difference between different locations of residence regarding elementary school children's anti-authoritarianism, and tolerance and support for civil liberties. Urban children had a more positive attitude in these areas than did usual children.

In summary, the findings are mixed. However, most existing literature indicates that location of residence has, more or less, an impact on the political attitudes of elementary school children and secondary school students. Urban students are more favorably inclined toward political objects than those of usual areas. Of courses, the further study is needed.

### **Classroom Climate**

Classroom climate refers to how teaching is carried out and how class decisions are made. It exists in the intersection of teacher behavior and classroom curriculum factors. Classroom climate has been shown to have an effect on children's political outcomes. There are two kinds of classroom climate--open and closed. According to Ehman (1980):

When students have an opportunity to engage freely in making suggestions for structuring the classroom environment, and when they have opportunities to discuss all sides of controversial topics, the classroom climate is deemed "open." When the teacher uses authoritarian classroom tactics, it is considered "closed." Open classroom climate has been found to foster a range of positive political attitudes, and a closed climate is associated with negative attitudes. (p. 108)

Torney, Oppenheim, and Farnen (1975) analyzed their national

sample of 9-, 13-, and 17-year-old and asserted that.

On the whole, the results showed that specific classroom practices were less important than what is often called the "classroom climate." More knowledgeable, less authoritarian, and more interested students came from schools where they were encouraged to have free discussion and to express their opinions in class. (p. 18)

A research project compared attitudinal changes toward civil liberties in open discussion classes with more traditional teacher-centered classes, and found positive attitude changes in 20% more of the experimental students than the control students (Galvin, 1985). Harwood (1991) investigated three high schools and found that classroom climate variables are related to political attitudes although they are probably not the most salient factor in determining students' political interest or involvement. Open classroom climates are correlated with positive democratic attitudes. Chen (1978) indicated that democratic classroom climate and school climate were positively related to college students' political participation.

Chen (1993), the researcher of this study, found that children who perceived an open classroom climate appeared to have a more positive attitude than those who perceived a closed climate relative to anti-authoritarianism. Children perceiving a open climate had a strong tolerance and support for civil liberties than those perceiving a medium climate.

Based on the foregoing review, an open climate of opinion expression in which controversial issues are discussed is positively related to students' political attitudes. The closed classroom climate has an opposite influence on students' political attitudes.

#### **School Climate**

There is considerable evidence to support the linkage between

school political participation and political attitude. Lewis (1962) found that the more memberships in extracurricular activities students have, the higher their sense of political efficacy, their belief in the legitimacy of and satisfaction with political institutions, and their interest and expectation of future participation in politics. Studies found that there is a consistent relationship between school participatory behavior and political attitudes. Also, student participation in school governance and extracurricular activities can be fostered by both teachers and school administrators (Ehman, 1980).

Studies have indicated that school organizations are related to students' political attitudes (Wasburn, 1986). Ehman and Gillespie found the more participant the school, the higher the students' political efficacy, trust, and social integration (Ehman, 1980). Several researchers characterized schools as closed (or authoritarian) and open (or democratic). Waring (1975) investigated 28 Iowa schools and found that an open climate is slightly associated with higher student efficacy scores. Rafeledes and Hoy (1971) found the higher the open school climate, the less the students' alienation. However, Chen's study (1993), in Taiwan, found that there was no statistically significant difference among different school climate regarding elementary school children's anti-authoritarianism, tolerance and support for civil liberties, and political efficacy.

In summary, the findings of the previously mentioned studies are mixed. However, many literatures indicated that school climate is, more or less, related to children's political attitudes. The more participant and less authoritarian the climates, the more positive the political attitudes and behavior of the children toward the system. The further study is needed.

## Recommendations for Instruction

Based on the literature review and discussions of the study, the following recommendations are suggested for the curriculum used in and the instructional practices of elementary school citizenship education related to political attitudes.

1. The content of civil liberties guaranteed by the Constitution should be emphasized on the teaching of elementary school, consisting of principles and its application.

2. The teachers and the school administrators should create an open climate of classroom and school. Educators should ensure that climate and instructional practices contribute to the growth of children's democratic values and attitudes. Children living in a democracy should have democratic experiences during the schooling processes. Therefore, a democratic and participatory school environment should be designed to foster children's democratic political attitudes. Children would be better served if they experienced democratically oriented teachers, democratically organized classrooms, and democratic school governance. Children should be encouraged to participate in class decisions, extracurricular activities, student council, and community service. Class leaders should be elected by pupils. Class affairs should be determined as much as possible by majority decision. In addition to obedience to the rules, honest criticism toward teachers, peers, and school administrators should be permitted.

3. Any educational goal or practice should not be fostered at the expense of children's democratic values.

4. Teachers should pay more attention to helping children residing in rural regions and coming from low SES families to develop a more

positive democratic political attitude regarding anti-authoritarianism, tolerance and support for civil liberties, and political efficacy. Teachers need to help low SES pupils foster a greater sense of political efficacy.

5. Teachers and school administrators should foster for themselves positive democratic attitudes concerning anti-authoritarianism, tolerance and support for civil liberties, and the sense of political efficacy. They should make themselves examples for the children.

6. The teaching objective of fostering children's democratic political attitudes should permeate the entire elementary school curriculum.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

Several suggestions are recommended for further research:

1. Survey studies, including elementary school children residing in all regions of Taiwan, should be conducted periodically. Findings from such studies would allow further comparison, and provide the basis for a more thorough understanding regarding children's democratic political attitudes.

2. A longitudinal study could provide better evidence for the effect of student background on the elementary school children's democratic political attitudes and an understanding of the influence of social and political changes.

3. In order to get a more complete understanding regarding the effect of student background on children's anti-authoritarianism, tolerance and support for civil liberties, and political efficacy, additional studies could be conducted by investigating other variables such as family structure, birth order, family origin, pattern of childrearing, re-

ligion, school size, and mass media.

4. A content analysis and cross analysis, is needed. The results could provide information needed for determining which content should be altered/included to meet the needs of a changing society and to foster children's democratic attitudes.

5. Additional research should be conducted to explore possible relationships between children's political attitudes and parents' political attitudes as well as possible relationships between children's political attitudes and teachers' political attitudes.



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# 學生背景與國小兒童民主政治態度

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## 摘 要

本文旨在探討國小兒童的民主政治態度，及學生背景與兒童民主政治態度之關係，並就探討結果提出教學及進一步研究之建議。在本文中，學生背景包括年級、性別、社經地位、居住地區、班級氣氛、和學校氣氛，民主政治態度包括反權威態度、公民自由權之容忍與支持、和政治功效感。

本文採文獻探討法，結果顯示年級較高、家長社經地位較高、城市地區、有開放班級氣氛知覺的兒童，其反權威態度及公民自由權之容忍與支持程度較強；家長社經地位較高的兒童，有較強政治功效感；反權威態度較強的兒童，其公民自由權之容忍與支持程度及政治功效感亦較強。

依據研究結果，本文主要建議為：教師應加強年級較低、家長社經地位較低、鄉村地區的兒童之民主政治態度的培養；教師及學校行政人員應營造開放的班級氣氛及學校氣氛；憲法保障的公民自由權其內容原則及應用在國小教學應予重視；任何教育目標及實際教學皆不應以犧牲兒童的民主價值觀念之發展為代價；對其他學生背景如父母政治態度、教師政治態度、學校規模、教養方式、家庭結構、宗教信仰、大眾傳播媒體和出生序等與兒童民主政治態度之關係進行調查研究。