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CiCe
Institute for Policy Studies in Education
London Metropolitan University
166 – 220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB
UK

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The influence of home environment and school climate on the participation of students in social actions

Constantinos Papanastasiou & Mary Koutselini
University of Cyprus (Cyprus)

The Civic Education Study was undertaken under the auspices of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement. Over 93,000 students from 28 countries around the world participated in this study. The population includes all students enrolled on a full time basis in that grade in which most students aged 14:00 to 14:11 are found at the time of testing (Torney-Purta, et al, 2001)

A student's home environment can be seen as an agency that aids in the construction of student political interest and political environment. School is another significant factor, determining how students learn different subjects in school, in this case civic education. It has been argued that performance is a social product and that social and cultural diversity is interpreted and evaluated as students' deficiency, mainly because knowledge and the curriculum are related to the interests of particular classes and professional groups. Other views (e.g. Parsons, 1961, 1971) deny the competition of interests and promote the idea of a central culture - rather than that of a class-culture - that must be met through schooling by all students who have an opportunity to improve their status. From this point of view it has been argued that schooling can reduce home and social inequalities instead of reproducing them. Additionally Giroux (1981, 1983) stresses the voluntaristic nature of resistance theory and the importance of self-determination in the education system, which prevent direct reproduction. Other interpretive, interactive and phenomenological attempts to understand schooling and student inequalities stress the role of teachers in coping with students' differences (e.g. Wexler, 1987; Pinar & Reynolds, 1992). All the above discourse is grounded in the fact that social and school factors affect performance (Blackledge & Hunt, 1985). The question that arises concerns the extent to which home background and school climate affect students' social and political understanding and participation.

Citizenship can be defined as participation in the civic, political and social institutions of modern society (Marshall, 1963, 1997). Citizenship is also considered as a set of provisions to counteract the negative consequences of class or social inequality (Turner, 1993). According to the results of this study a vicious circle is created when home background and school climate prevent social participation, which is one of the most important elements of active citizenship. In such a case, citizenship remains a theoretical system of rights and obligations that cannot counteract the negative consequences of home-social inequality. A further problem arises from the fact that, while human rights are universal in the sense that they belong to all rather than to members of any particular nation, race or social class, human beings are not identical and consequently do not have the same opportunities for participation. In that sense, citizenship has a subjective component: willingness to act. Legal possession of rights does not in itself ensure that individuals will feel themselves to be citizens of a country. As Heywood (1994: 156) put it: "Members of groups that feel alienated from their state, perhaps because of social disadvantage or social discrimination, cannot properly be thought of as 'full citizens'".

Data source

This paper is based on data from the student questionnaires which, in Cyprus, were collected in 1999. All 61 gymnasia (the secondary junior schools) participated in this project, with each school selecting two classes of 9th graders. Altogether, 3106 students participated in the study (about 30% of the entire population). The subset of students used in this research project was obtained as follows. Of the 3106 students only those who had completed the entire students' questionnaire were eligible. A subset of variables was chosen from the questionnaire, so that any missing data or multiple responses led to further student deletion from the data set. The two questions that reduced the number of students from 3106 to 1788 were: "Teachers encourage us to discuss political or social issues about which people have different opinions" and "An adult who is good citizen would be willing to ignore (disregard) a law that violated human rights". 4.2% of Cypriot students gave the answer "I do not know" to the first question, and 12.6% that answer to the second question.

Student indicators

Twenty-nine variables on the questionnaire were relevant to this study and these were grouped into educational background of the family (five questions), school climate (five questions), democratic values (five questions), social participation (nine questions), political interest (three questions), and home political environment (two questions). The variables used to define the conceptual areas are now briefly described (see Figure 1):

- The observed variables
 - b1 = What grade did your mother reach in school?
 - b2 = What grade did your father reach in school?
 - b3 = About how many books are there in your home?
 - b4 = Do you get a daily newspaper at home?
 - b5 = How many years of further education do you expect to complete after this year?
 are assumed to be indicators of factor F1=Educational background of the family.
- The observed variables
 - c1 = Students feel free to disagree openly with their teachers about political and social issues during class;
 - c2 = Students are encouraged to make up their own minds about issues;
 - c3 = Teachers respect our opinions and encourage us to express them during class;
 - c4 = Students feel free to express opinions in class even when their opinions are different from most of the other students;
 - c5 = Teachers encourage us to discuss political or social issues about which people have different opinions
 are assumed to be indicators of factor F2=Class-school climate.
- The variables
 - d1= When everyone has the right to express their opinions freely;
 - d2 = When newspapers are free of all government control;
 - d3 = When private business have no restrictions from government;
 - d4 = When people demand their political and social right;
 - d5 = When citizens have the right to elect political leaders freely
 are the indicators of factor F3=Democratic values.

- The variables “The good citizen is the one who...”
 - s1= participates in a peaceful protest against a law believed to be unjust;
 - s2= participates in activities to benefit people in their community (society);
 - s3=takes part in activities promoting human rights;
 - s4= takes part in activities to protect the environment;
 - s5=has the will to ignore (disregard) a law that violates human rights;
 - s6=collects money for a social cause;
 - s7= collects signatures for a petition;
 - s8= participates in a non-violent (peaceful) protest march or rally
 refer to factor F4 which indicates social participation.

- The variables “The frequency of.”
 - i1= reading articles(stories) in the newspaper about what is happening in my country;
 - i2= reading articles(stories) in the newspaper about what is happening in other countries;
 - i3= listening to news broadcasts on the radio
 refer to factor F5= which is named political interest.

- Finally the two variables
 - e1= The discussions with parents or other adult family members of what happening in the county politics;
 - e2= The discussions with parents or other adult family members of what happening in international politics (1= never, 2= rarely, 3= sometimes, 4=often) of factor F6
 are related to home political environment.

Incorporating accepted research, and based on the assumed latent variables, a hypothetical initial factor model is presented in Figure 1.

Model

This hypothetical structural model (Figure 1) indicates two exogenous latent variables. The home background, which includes parents, education and number of books at home, was included since it was hypothesized that parents with more schooling would place a higher value on political values and as a consequence would have a positive effect on their children’s democratic values and social participation. School climate was also a factor hypothesized to influence political values and in consequence democratic values. Two endogenous factors that were hypothesized to influence democratic values are political interest and home political environment. Finally, democratic values are supposed as a direct influence on social participation. The better the democratic values, the better the social participation of student in social actions. Table 2 presents the factors/items that were used in this study, the weighting least squares unstandardized LISREL estimates, the standard errors and the corresponding t values, which show that all lambda-X and lambda-Y are statistically significant.

Figure 2 present a path model – an unstandardised solution, based on the Cyprus data. In this model class-school climate has very strong direct effects on home political environment and student political interest. As Figure 2 and Table 2 show, the paths from class-school climate to home political environment, and student political interest were significant. The paths from home background to political environment and to student political interest were also significant. The effects from political environment and to student

political interest to democratic values were also significant. Finally the path from democratic values to social participation was statistical significant, which means that democratic values is a very strong indicator for social participation.

Figure 1: Hypothetical initial model

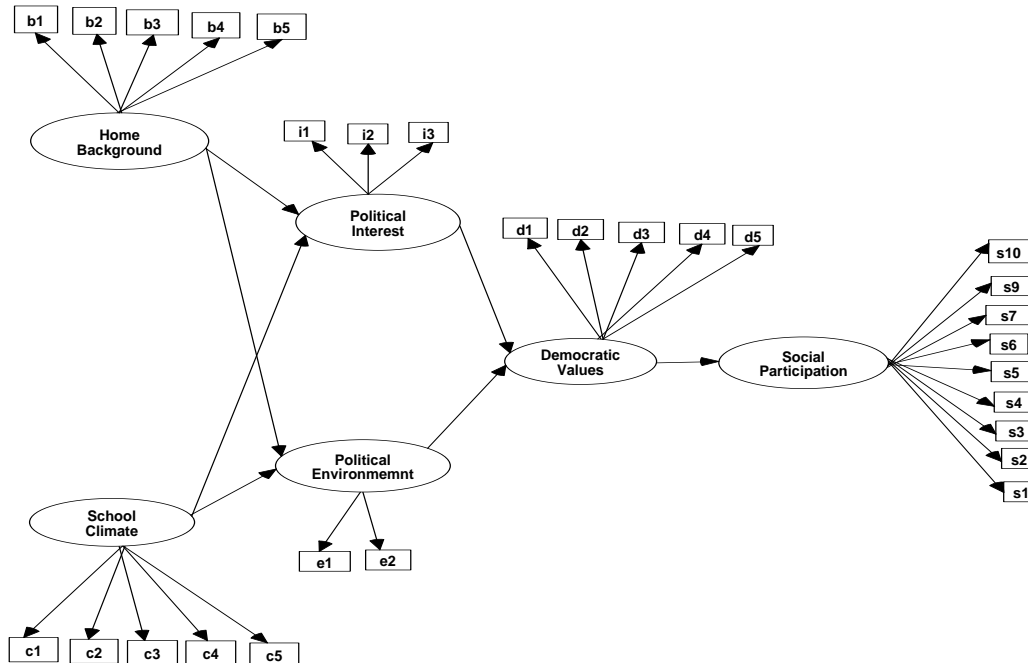
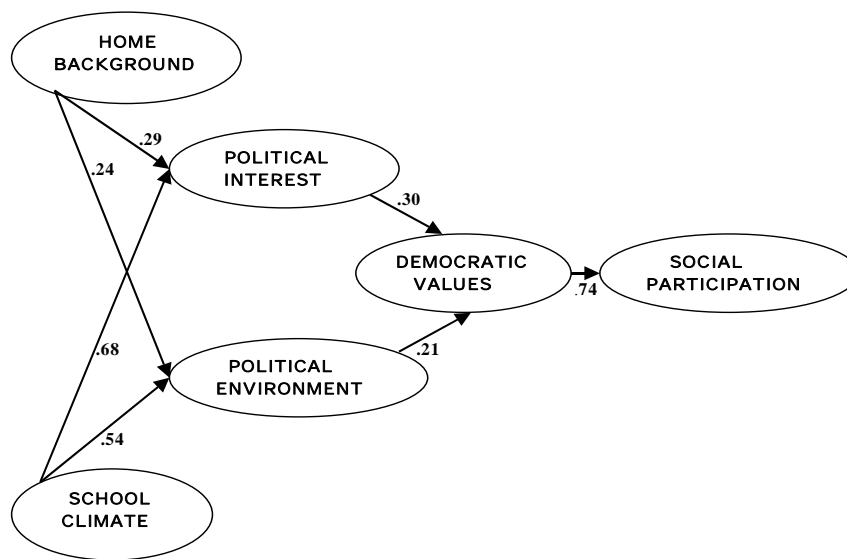


Table 2 Lisrel estimates (Weighted Least Squares)

Factors/Items	lambda-X	s.e	t	Items	lambda-Y	s.e	t
Educational Background				Democratic Values			
b1 (mother)	1.00	----	----	d1 (opinions)	0.60	.06	10.08
b2 (father)	0.96	.04	24.76	d2 (news-control)	0.43	.05	8.4
b3 (books)	0.48	.03	16.41	d3 (restrictions)	0.10	.05	2.22
b4 (newspaper)	0.52	.03	15.39	d4 (rights)	0.59	.06	10.48
b5 (further-ed)	0.53	.03	19.29	d5 (elections)	1.00	----	----
Class Climate				Social Participation			
c1 (disagree)	0.95	.05	18.11	s1 (protest)	0.68	.03	20.55
c2 (encouraged)	1.00	----	----	s2 (benefit)	0.91	.03	28.51
c3 (respect)	0.77	.04	17.43	s3 (promoting H.R)	0.95	.03	28.63
c4 (express)	0.87	.05	18.24	s4 (prospect-envir.)	0.71	.03	23.12
c5 (discuss)	0.86	.05	18.30	s5 (ignore)	0.13	.03	4.06
				s6 (voluntarily)	0.88	.03	29.50
				s7 (collects money)	1.00	----	----
				s8 (petition)	0.71	.03	23.34
				s9 (peaceful)	0.75	.03	24.77
				Political Interest			
				i1 (nat-articles)	1.00	----	----
				i2 (int-articles)	0.96	.03	29.50
				i3 (radio)	0.35	.03	13.82
				Political Environment			
				e1 (nat-politics)	0.96	.05	20.47
				e2 (int-politics)	1.00	----	----

Figure 2 Model of social participation process

Fit statistics

Various statistical “goodness of fit” tests were applied to the model: the goodness-of-fit index (GFI=0.97), adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI=0.96), comparative fit index (CFI=0.95) and the root mean square of approximation (RMSEA=0.050). The three fit indexes GFI and AGFI and CFI with values above 0.9 (in general) represent reasonable fit (Broome *et al.*, 1997). The CFI is the least affected by sample size (Hu & Bentler, 1995), and the RMSEA index, with its value less than 0.05, reflects a close fit. Browne and Cudeck (1993) believe that RMSEA values between 0.0 and 0.05 indicate a close fit, less than 0.08 reflect reasonable fit, and greater than 0.08 reflect poor fit. All remaining goodness of fit indices also demonstrated an acceptable fit.

Discussion

The study explored how social participation is stimulated by predictors related to family and school. We began by posing a simple question: How can we best explain student social participation, based on the IEA CIVIC data, in relation to home background, school-class climate, political environment, political interest and democratic values? To answer this, we chose to elaborate on a model comparing various background factors. The model (Figure 2) seems to indicate that the strongest direct influence on social participation is democratic values. Another strong effect on political environment and political interest was exerted by the school climate. Between political interest and political environment, the strongest influence on democratic values is political interest.

The results of this study indicated that two exogenous factors — school-class climate and home background — define a second-order factor structure which includes three endogenous predictors; democratic values, political interest, and political environment. These results indicate that the problem of social participation is multidimensional. It would be interesting to see if the model can be applied to other countries with varying

degrees of students social participation, and of varying levels of achievement and students civic knowledge.

Democratic values were found to be a very strong predictor of social participation; because democratic values can be taught, this finding could be important for educational objectives. The findings of this study are based on a single sample, but generalisation of the model would provide considerable support in the modeling of social participation process. Further investigation into the role of social participation, as well as into the compatibility of the present model with other models for different countries, could be explored.

This study revealed that home background and school climate affect the political environment within which students acquire democratic values and the willingness to participate. Thus, both can become obstacles that stand in the way of personal development and self-realisation.

These results have important implications in schooling and teaching. It can be argued that effective citizenship can be increased by the acknowledgement of students' differences in cultural, social and family capital, differences that cannot be met through an undifferentiated curriculum and instruction, or without any extra-curricular opportunities for participation. Differentiated citizenship is a means for real universal citizenship. As Young (1997: 257) put it: "Differentiated citizenship' is the best way of realizing the inclusion and participation of everyone in full citizenship. Otherwise the notion of global citizenship remains utopian".

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