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## STUDENT AND TEACHER PERCEPTION OF MORAL ATMOSPHERE IN TAIWAN SCHOOLS

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this quantitative study was to explore student and teacher perception of school moral atmosphere in Taiwan's elementary and junior high schools. Students and teachers from 48 schools filled in a questionnaire entitled "School as Caring Community Profile II". The key findings were: 1. SCCP scores of both students and teachers were above the median. Students and teachers displayed a positive attitude toward their schools. 2. Students and teachers had significantly different sense of school moral atmosphere in sub-scales for "perceptions of student respect for one another" (IA) and "Students' perceptions of student friendship and belonging" (IB). However, there was no significant difference between students' and teachers' scores in "perceptions of students' shaping of their environment" (IC). 3. Teachers' scores in "Perceptions of Support and Care By and For Faculty/ Staff" (IIA) and "Perceptions of Support and Care By and For Parents" (IIB) were higher than in sub-scales IA, IB and IC. 4. There was significantly different sense of "perceptions of school caring community for students" (sub-scales IA, IB and IC) between students and teachers on the following points: female, elementary schools, junior high schools, schools in northern Taiwan and in central Taiwan respectively. 5. Factors which most significantly affected both student and teacher perception of school moral atmosphere were their educational level, school district and school size. 6. Factors which significantly affected teachers' perceptions of school environment (SCCP total) were their gender, club leader experience in college/university, educational level of teaching, participation in administrative jobs in teaching school, teaching school type, area and sizes, and their teaching experience. Accordingly, the author offered some recommendations on how to improve students' and teachers' mutual understanding, and enhance their school moral atmosphere.

### PURPOSES

Formal moral curricula had existed in Taiwan's compulsory educational system (ages 6-14) and played a central role in moral education for the past several decades. In 1997, Taiwan's government instituted a revolutionary educational reform, which had a tremendous impact on elementary and junior high schools. The "*Guidelines*

CHI-MING (ANGELA) LEE

for a 9-Year Joint Curricula Plan" was promulgated in 1998 and scheduled to be fully implemented by the end of 2004. It recognized the absence of formal moral curricula in Taiwan's schools. Therefore, how to make up the loss and provide other strategies (such as school moral life and atmosphere) are challenges to educational systems. Several educational policies were set up by Ministry of Education, e.g. "Character Education Improvement Project" and "Human Rights and Friendly Campus". In addition, the concepts of school-based curricula, community building and modern civil society have been formally adopted in recent educational reforms.

To build school as a moral community, which is democratic, plural and intimate, is desirable. The moral atmosphere of the school becomes a key factor influencing the moral development of young people in Taiwan's present educational system. Consequently, this study focused on exploring student and teacher perception of school moral atmosphere in Taiwan's elementary and junior high schools. The purposes were as follows: to conduct a thorough analysis of the theoretical basis of school moral atmosphere, to examine the similarities and differences in perception of school moral atmosphere between students and teachers, to understand whether students and teachers have different perceptions in their school moral atmosphere due to their gender, learning/ teaching educational level (elementary school and junior high school), or school location (northern, central, southern and eastern Taiwan), to understand what factors influence student and teacher perception of school moral atmosphere; and to make recommendations for the improvement of teacher education and moral education, both in theory and in practice.

#### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND PRIOR RESEARCH

One of educational goals in Taiwan's school system is to cultivate students as morally educated people. The school moral life and atmosphere is a powerful and effective influence on students' moral aspect. From the 1970s, several dissertations, e.g. Scharf, 1973; Reimer, 1977; Wasserman, 1977; and Jennings, 1979 postulated a relationship between institutional climate and individual moral development. (Power et al, 1989) And further, F.C. Power, A. Higgins and L. Kohlberg in 1989 compiled their past research results about moral culture and published a book, "Lawrence Kohlberg's Approach to Moral Education." In the introduction of that book, the authors showed clearly that their approach to moral education was simple and direct. They attempted to establish schools, which did more than teach about democratic citizenship, were establishing themselves as democratic societies. (Power et al, 1989) Thus, they began to foster the sense of community throughout the entire school day.

In 1993, P.W. Jackson and his fellows published a book entitled, "The Moral Life of Schools", which gave a more concrete dimension to moral life and atmosphere. They described their moral life project as seeking to investigate the ways in which moral considerations have permeated the everyday life of schools and classrooms. (Jackson, 1993, xiv) In the book, the author arrayed a set of eight categories along a continuum

ranging from the more readily visible to the less visible. They were in descending order: moral instruction as a formal part of the curriculum; moral instruction within the regular curriculum; rituals and ceremonies; visual displays with moral content; spontaneous interjection of moral commentary into ongoing activity; classroom rituals and regulations; the morality of the curricular substructure; and expressive morality within the classroom. (Jackson, 1993, 4-29) That proved moral education had broad meaning, including direct and indirect, apparent and concealed methods.

In contrast to Kohlberg's moral development and just community, caring-oriented atmosphere was originally borrowed from C. Gilligan's female "voice" and morality of caring. The publication in 1982 of Gilligan's book, *"In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development"*, marked the emergence of a discussion of gender difference which had become the basis for re-examination of the assumptions of psychological theory generally. In her view, the morality of caring and responsibility was premised in nonviolence, while the morality of justice and rights was based on equality. The morality of caring emphasized interconnectedness and emerged to a greater degree in girls owing to their early connection in identity formation with their mothers.

Broadly speaking, caring was extended beyond personal relationships to a general recognition of the interdependence of self and other, accompanied by a universal condemnation of exploitation and hurt. "Voice" was a metaphor and it was a powerful psychological instrument and channel, connecting inner and outer worlds. Voice was also a key for understanding the psychological, social and cultural order. (Gilligan, 1993) Three characteristics of voices were noteworthy: First, voices combined both emotion and content. Voices were embodied in a way that theories were not. Second, voices were described assessed in a wide range of terms, most of which had little to do with true and false or right and wrong. Third, voices might be different without excluding one another. Their voices might blend in a choir and interact with one another. (Hinman, 1994, 329) Voice of caring not only represents female or individual morality, but is also a central tenet in school moral life and atmosphere.

Additionally, N. Noddings published a series of major works regarding ethics of care, for examples, *"Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education"* (1984), *"The Challenge to Care in Schools"* (1992) and *"Educating Moral People"* (2002). She emphasized caring is a kind of encounter not only in a restricted community. She also indicated caring is a mutually satisfying relation between caregiver and cared-for persons, including both girls and boys. (Noddings, 2002) However, she distinguished two-folds of caring sources, which are natural caring and ethical caring. She mentioned *"Because we (lucky ones) have been immersed in relations of care since birth, we often naturally respond as caregivers to others... Further, ethical caring requires reflection and self-understanding. We need to understand our own capacities and how we are likely to react in various situations."* (Noddings, 2002, 15) Therefore, she pointed out moral education is an essential part of an ethic of care. The four components of moral education as Noddings' theory are modeling, dialogue, practice and confirmation. (Noddings, 2002)

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CHI-MING (ANGELA) LEE

Furthermore, several centers and organizations have been implementing programs of caring community in the US. For example, Character Education Partnership (CEP) addressed "*Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education*". One of the principles was "to create a caring school community." What that meant was that "*all school members form caring attachments to one another, and involves developing caring relationships among students (within and across grade levels), among staff, between students and staff, and between staff and families. These caring relationships foster both the desire to learn and the desire to be a good person.*" (<http://www.character.org/principles/>)

Besides, the Caring School Community (CSC) program, which has been set into action by Developmental Studies Center (DSC) for more than fifteen years, is a nationally recognized, research-based K-6 program that builds classroom and school-wide community. This program emphasized that "*students have basic psychological needs for autonomy, belonging, and competence. When children are in a school that fulfills these three needs, they will be intrinsically motivated to learn. Likewise, children's motivation is undermined to the degree to which any of these conditions is not met.*" (<http://www.devstu.org/csc/scientific.html>)

In short, the importance of positive social context/culture, including justice and caring, of the school to effective educational practice and students' moral development from both in theory and practice has been revealed. Consequently, school moral atmosphere is a central factor of moral education.

## METHOD

### *Participants and procedure*

The main method of this inquiry was through questionnaire. The questionnaire was translated and derived from "School as Caring Community Profile II" (SCCP II, 2001 version), which represent perceptions of school moral atmosphere. 2701 (valid questionnaire) students (5<sup>th</sup> graders in elementary schools and 2<sup>nd</sup> graders in junior high schools) and 313 (valid questionnaire) teachers of the same 48 schools around Taiwan participated in this study in the periods from February to April 2002 and from April to May 2004 respectively. The author carried out the statistical results using SPSS-PC 12.0 software, including analyses of t-test and one-way ANOVA.

### *Instrument*

The *School as a Caring Community Profile—II (SCCP II)* is an instrument developed by Professor T. Lickona and Dr. M. Davidson at the Center for the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Rs (Respect and Responsibility), SUNY Cortland, USA to help schools assess themselves as caring communities. (<http://www.cortland.edu/character/sccp-ii.htm>) It is a 43-question survey in a 5-point Likert format, which may be taken by both children and adults. Confirmatory factor analysis supports the hypothesized break-

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STUDENT AND TEACHER PERCEPTION OF MORAL ATMOSPHERE IN TAIWAN SCHOOLS

down into five sub-scales. Sub-IA, IB and IC are for both students and teachers, while sub-IIA and IIB are only for teachers. Sub-IA and IC are more justice-oriented and the others are more caring-oriented content. Reliability alphas in the USA samples range from .73 to .86 for youth and from .73 to .88 for adults. In this study, consistency reliability alphas were from .72 to .79 for Taiwan's students and from .862 to .951 for Taiwan's teachers. Some examples of SCCP-II survey and its subscale are as follows (see table1):

*Table 1. Some Examples of SCCP-II survey and its sub-scale*

- Sub-scale IA. Perceptions of Student Respect (9 items)
  - e.g. Students treat classmates with respect.
  - e.g. Students are disrespectful toward their schoolmates. (Reverse)
  - e.g. Students respect the personal property of others.
- Sub-scale IB. Perceptions of Student Friendship and Belonging (9 items)
  - e.g. Students share what they have with others.
  - e.g. Students help each other, even if they are not friends.
  - e.g. Students work well together.
- Sub-scale IC. Perceptions of Students' Shaping of Their Environment (8 items)
  - e.g. Students resolve conflicts with fighting, insults, or threats. (Reverse)
  - e.g. When students do something hurtful, they try to make up for it
  - e.g. When students see another student being picked on, they try to stop it.
- Sub-scale IIA: Perceptions of Support and Care by and for Faculty/Staff (10 items)
  - e.g. Students can talk to their teachers about problems that are bothering them.
  - e.g. Teachers go out of their way to help students who need extra help.
  - e.g. In this school you can count on adults to try to make sure students are safe.
- Sub-scale IIB. Perceptions of Support and Care By and For Parents (7 items)
  - e.g. Parents show that they care about their child's education and school behaviour.
  - e.g. Students are disrespectful toward their parents in the school environment. (Reverse)
  - e.g. Teachers treat parents with respect.

## RESULT

The important findings of this study were as follows:

1. SCCP (IAIBIC) scores of students (mean=3.23), SCCP (IAIBIC) scores of teachers (mean=3.07) and SCCP (total) scores of teachers (mean=3.48) were all above median score. Although both students and teachers displayed a positive attitude toward their schools, there was significant difference between students' and teachers' scores in SCCP (IAIBIC). (see table 2) Students' scores were higher than teachers' scores in SCCP (IAIBIC). SCCP (IAIBIC) scores of teachers were lower than SCCP (total) scores of teachers.

CHI-MING (ANGELA) LEE

2. Students and teachers had significantly different scores in sub-scales for “perceptions of student respect for one another” (IA) (student mean=3.27, teacher mean=2.89, students scored higher than teachers) .There was no statistical significance between students’ and teachers’ scores in “Students’ perceptions of student friendship and belonging” (IB) (student mean=3.21, teacher mean=3.15) and “perceptions of students’ shaping of their environment” (IC) (student mean=3.22, teacher mean=3.19). (see table 2)

Table 2. The SCCP scale and sub-scale scores of students (s) and teachers (t)

Scale		Mean	SD	Sig
SubIA. Perceptions of student respect	s:	3.27	0.624	p <sup>***</sup> .001
	t:	2.89	0.284	
SubIB. Perceptions of student friendship and belonging	s:	3.21	0.644	n.s.
	t:	3.15	0.393	
SubIC. Perceptions of students' shaping of their environment	s:	3.22	0.715	n.s.
	t:	3.19	0.504	
SCCP IAIBIC score	s:	3.23	0.600	p <sup>***</sup> .001
	t:	3.07	0.290	
SCCP total score	t:	3.48	0.460	

3. Teachers’ scores in “perceptions of support and care by and for faculty/staff” (IIA) (mean=3.77, SD=0.528) and “perceptions of support and care by and for parents” (IIB) (mean=3.74, SD=0.545) were higher than in sub-scales IA (mean=2.89, SD=0.284), IB (mean=3.15, SD=0.393) and IC (mean=3.19, SD=0.504). The score of “perceptions of support and care by and for faculty/staff”(IIA) by teachers was the highest among them.

4. There was significantly different sense of “perceptions of school caring community for students” (sub-scales IA, IB and IC) between students and teachers on the following points: female, elementary schools, junior high schools, schools in northern Taiwan and in central Taiwan respectively. Students scored higher than teachers in all of above points. In particular, female students scored highest in gender variable both students and teachers, as well as elementary students in educational level variable, northern Taiwan students in school location variable and small school students in school size variable. (see table 3-6)

STUDENT AND TEACHER PERCEPTION OF MORAL ATMOSPHERE IN TAIWAN SCHOOLS

Table 3. The difference of SCCP (IAIBIC) scores in gender between students and teachers

variable		N	Mean	SD	Sig
male	s:	1388	3.18	0.601	n.s.
	t:	86	3.07	0.293	
female	s:	1313	3.29	0.584	p <sup>***</sup> .001
	t:	197	3.06	0.294	

Table 4 the difference of SCCP (IAIBIC) scores in educational level between students and teachers

variable		N	Mean	SD	Sig
elementary school	s:	1285	3.31	0.610	p <sup>**</sup> .01
	t:	136	3.17	0.265	
junior high school	s:	1416	3.17	0.572	p <sup>***</sup> .001
	t:	148	2.97	0.290	

Table 5 the difference of SCCP (IAIBIC) scores in school location between students and teachers

variable		N	Mean	SD	Sig
northern Taiwan (metropolis)	s:	1240	3.31	0.597	p <sup>***</sup> .001
	t:	1203	.07	0.314	
central Taiwan	s:	557	3.27	0.562	p <sup>**</sup> .01 0.280
	t:	73	3.06		
southern Taiwan	s:	727	3.10	0.597	n.s.
	t:	70	3.01	0.258	
eastern Taiwan (rural district)	s:	177	3.12	0.567	n.s.
	t:	19	3.26	0.274	

Table 6. The difference of SCCP (IAIBIC) scores in school size between students and teachers

variable	N	Mean	SD	Sig
small (less than 13 homeroom classes)	s:	94	3.40	n.s.
	t:	17	3.25	
middle (13-36 homeroom classes)	s:	1144	3.23	p <sup>ns</sup> .01
	t:	96	3.05	
large (more than 36 homeroom classes)	s:	1463	3.23	p <sup>ns</sup> .001
	t:	171	3.05	

5. Factors which most significantly affected both student and teacher perceptions of school moral atmosphere (SCCP-IAIBIC) were their educational level (p<sup>xxx</sup> .001, elementary > junior high), school location (p<sup>xxx</sup> .001, northern & central > southern & eastern) and school size (p<sup>x</sup> .05, small > middle & large). In other words, Elementary school students and teachers perceived their school atmosphere more positively than junior high school students and teachers did. Northern and Central Taiwan school students and teachers perceived their school atmosphere more positively than their counterparts in southern and eastern Taiwan schools. Small school students and teachers perceived their school atmosphere more positively than in middle or large schools did. In addition, students' gender significantly affected their perceptions of school moral atmosphere (p<sup>xxx</sup> .001, female > male). Female students perceived their school atmosphere more positively than male students. There was no significant difference for teachers' scores of school moral atmosphere when referenced by gender.

6. Factors which significantly affected teachers' perceptions of school environment (SCCP total) were their gender, educational level of teaching, participation in administrative jobs in teaching school, teaching school type, area and size, and their teaching experience. More specifically, male teachers' SCCP score (mean=3.55, SD=0.433) was higher than female's (mean=3.42, SD=0.478); elementary school teachers' score (mean=3.6, SD=0.410) was higher than junior high school's (mean=3.34, SD=0.483); score of teachers with administrative jobs (mean=3.63, SD=0.460) was higher than those without (mean=3.39, SD=0.456); score of teachers teaching in private schools (mean=3.82, SD=0.307) was higher than those in

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#### STUDENT AND TEACHER PERCEPTION OF MORAL ATMOSPHERE IN TAIWAN SCHOOLS

public schools (mean=3.43, SD=0.466). In addition, score of teachers teaching in small schools was higher than those teaching in middle and large schools; and score of teachers who had more than 16 year teaching experience was higher than those whose teaching experience was less than 5 years. In particular, SCCP total scores of teachers teaching in eastern and central Taiwan were higher than those teaching in northern and southern Taiwan. This result was different from SCCP-IAIBIC scores mentioned above. There were no significant difference among several factors, including learning moral curricula in college/university, club leader experience in college/university, interaction between professor and student in college/university experience, educational background, in-service educational training and teaching subjects.

#### DISCUSSION

*1. Students and teachers perceived above median score about school moral atmosphere* Statistical analyses in this study indicated SCCP II scores of students and teachers were above median score. M. Davidson's original research on SCCP in 1998 showed that elementary school teachers' average score was 2.44 while students' average score was 3.04 (Davidson, 1998). Accordingly, Taiwan's student and teacher perception of school moral atmosphere scored higher than that of the USA. In other words, both Taiwan's students and teachers displayed a positive attitude toward their schools. This finding fits well in Taiwan's educational context. Students from elementary to high schools have their own homeroom classes in which 30-40 fixed classmates study and play together all school day. Consequently, most students have strong sense of belonging to their homeroom class and close relationship with other classmates. Elementary and high school teachers in Taiwan have moderate salaries and prestige, so they often devote themselves to teaching over a long period of time, usually until retirement. They usually have close attachment and deep identification with their schools, too. Hence, the score of their perceptions of school environment was above median score. Particularly, the scores of sub-scale IIA (Perceptions of Support and Care By and For Faculty/Staff) and IIB (Perceptions of Support and Care By and For Parents) were high. This is similar to Roberts et. al (1995) paper which was shown "*For teachers, sense of community is largely determined by relationships with other teachers and participation in activities outside of the classroom (e.g. faculty meetings).*"

*2. Similarity and difference between students' and teachers' scores in SCCP (IAIBIC)* Statistical analyses in this study revealed SCCPII-IAIBIC scores of students and teachers were significantly different, particularly in sub-scale for "perceptions of student respect for one another" (IA). Students scored higher than teachers in both SCCP-IAIBIC and sub-scale IA. This is like Davidson (1998) research result, too. In other words, teachers and students usually have their own "voices". Besides, this study discovered that female students scored highest in gender variable both students and teachers, as well as elementary students in educational level variable,

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CHI-MING (ANGELA) LEE

northern Taiwan (metropolitan) students in school location variable and small school students in school size variable. This is similar to Roberts et. al (1995) research results which showed female students scored higher than male and sense of community among students declined significantly with increasing grade. However, there was no significant difference in sub-scales IB and IC scores between students and teachers.

*3. Factors related to SCCP scores of students and teachers* Factors which significantly affected both student and teacher perception of school moral atmosphere (SCCP-IAIBIC) were their educational level, school location and school size. That is, elementary students and teachers perceived more just and caring atmosphere than junior high school students and teachers did because of different student development. Metropolitan school students and teachers perceived more just and caring atmosphere than their counterparts in rural schools due to different resources. Small school students and teachers perceived more just and caring atmosphere than middle or large school students and teachers did because of intense contact. In addition, students' gender significantly affected their perception of school moral atmosphere. There was no significant difference between male and female teachers' SCCP-IAIBIC score, while the former scored higher than the latter in SCCP (total). Teachers' result was opposite to students'. Besides, the statistical result in school location of SCCP total score of teachers was different from SCCP-IAIBIC score of teachers. This revealed that teachers in eastern Taiwan (rural district) displayed less positive attitude toward their students and more positive attitude toward the support and care from their staff and parents than other districts' teachers did, while teachers in northern Taiwan (metropolis district) was the opposite. Furthermore, most college /university characteristics and experience for teachers had no relation to their scores. However, teaching school characteristics and teaching school experience had significant influence on teacher perception of school moral atmosphere. This indicates the importance of teachers' socialization in their teaching schools and their school characteristics to elementary and junior high school teacher perception of moral atmosphere.

#### CONCLUSION

This paper sought to provide an objective analysis and comparison between student and teacher perception of school moral atmosphere in Taiwan schools. It also examined several factors which influenced student and teacher perception of school moral atmosphere respectively. Finally this paper offered some recommendations on how to improve students' and teachers' mutual understanding, and their school moral atmosphere which may foster both students' character formation and quality education for schools. However, in reviewing the findings from this study, readers may become aware of several limitations. First, the author didn't specifically define several terms used in this study, e.g., school environment, school culture,

#### STUDENT AND TEACHER PERCEPTION OF MORAL ATMOSPHERE IN TAIWAN SCHOOLS

school moral atmosphere and school as caring community. Moreover, the author couldn't obviously differentiate "actual" school moral atmosphere and "perception" of school environment. Thirdly, several factors impacted in perceptions of school moral atmosphere by students or teachers still need to be testified through more scientific researches.

In Taiwan's case, although the scores of both students and teachers in perception of school moral atmosphere were above median score, students and teachers had different perception within several items. There were some factors in this study affected students and teacher perception of school environment. Hence, there are four recommendations for Taiwan's or other countries' academia and government. Firstly, they should concern and promote stronger identity or participation of those students, who are male, junior high, studying in middle or large schools, and in southern or eastern (more rural district) Taiwan's schools. Secondly, they should also pay attention and encourage stronger sense of identity or participation of those teachers, who are female, teaching in junior high, middle or large, public and metropolitan schools (northern Taiwan), and who don't take part in school administrations now, and whose teaching experience are totaled less than 5 years. Thirdly, government and schools themselves may actively reshape school moral atmosphere/culture for both students and teachers and enforce their mutual understanding, e.g., offering more opportunities for school members to participate and intensely interact with one another in their schools and in order to form a strong sense of justice and caring community. Finally, government should concern itself with how to relate moral education and teacher education, particularly in-service professional development, in order to promote teachers' competence of understanding students and cultivate better school moral atmosphere in classes and schools.

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CHI-MING (ANGELA) LEE

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