

PARTICIPATION IN FAMILY DECISION-MAKING: PARENT AND CHILD PERSPECTIVES

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Introduction

Studies suggest that providing adolescents with opportunities to voice their opinions and participate in family decision-making facilitates the development of self-confidence and self-esteem (e.g., Esptein & McPartland, 1977; Yee, 1986). This paper will build on these findings in two ways. First, this paper examines the circumstances under which parents believe that their child is ready for greater participation in family decision-making. Parent decision-making practices will be examined in relation to parents' expectations for their child's transition into junior high school, and parents' general beliefs about adolescence. Second this paper will examine the relation between family decision-making practices and children's general self-esteem as well as self-confidence in three activity domains. To the extent that general self-confidence may also apply to self-confidence that is specific to particular activities, we predict that opportunities to participate in family decision-making will also facilitate the development of a positive self-concept of ability in academic, sports, and social domains.

Hypotheses

1. Parents and children will report increasing opportunities for decision-making at home.
2. Parents and children will report greater decision-making opportunities for girls than for boys.
3. Parents who hold positive expectations for their child's transition into adolescence will offer greater opportunities for decision-making than parents who do not hold positive expectations.
4. Parents who hold positive beliefs about adolescence in general will offer greater opportunities for decision-making than parents who do not hold positive beliefs.
5. Changes in children's self-esteem will be related to changes in family decision-making practices. Children who show an increase in self-esteem will also report increasing opportunities to participate in family decision-making. Conversely, children who show a decrease in self-esteem will also report decreasing opportunities to participate in family decision-making.
6. Changes in children's self-confidence in specific activities will also be related to changes in family decision-making practices. Children who show an increase in self-confidence in specific activities will also report increasing opportunities to participate in family decision-making. Conversely, children who show a decrease in self-confidence in specific activities will also report decreasing opportunities to participate in family decision-making.

Methods

Sample

The data presented in this paper were collected as part of a two year longitudinal study investigating changes in family and classroom environments and early adolescents' self-concepts and task values during the transition from elementary to junior high school. Data were collected from students and their parents in four waves during two years: the fall (Wave 1) and spring (Wave 2) of the 1983-84 school year, and the fall (Wave 3) and spring (Wave 4) of the 1984-85 school year. Students and their parents were recruited from twelve school districts in middle income communities in southeastern Michigan.

The student sample consisted of volunteering children from 143 sixth grade classrooms. Altogether 3246 students (1696 girls, 1550 boys) participated (mean age = 11 years, 5 months). All four waves of data are available for 81.4% of these students (80.8% girls, 81.9% boys).

The parent sample consisted of 1962 mothers and 1353 fathers of these student subjects. The parent sample is comprised of both parents of 39% of the participating students and one parent of an additional 23% of the participating students. All four waves of data are available for 42% of the parent sample (44.7% mothers, 38.1% fathers).

Procedures

Students were administered a questionnaire with items concerning their self-perceptions, expectancies, and values in four activity domains: mathematics, English, social, and physical. Students were also asked about their perceptions of their home and classroom environments. The student questionnaire was administered in two 30-minute sessions during the students' math classroom. Some questions were asked at all four waves of questionnaire administration; others were asked only twice, namely, once before and once after the transition to junior high school.

Parents were mailed a questionnaire with items concerning their perceptions, expectancies, and values for their child in the same four activity domains. Parents were also asked about their perceptions of the home environment and their expectations for changes in their child as s/he moves into junior high school. As with the student questionnaire, some questions were asked at all four waves, while others were asked once before and once after the child's transition to junior high school.

Measures

<u>Parent Measures</u>	# items	alpha
Expectations for Greater Responsibility	3	.43
Expectations for More Intimacy	2	.73
Expectations for More Distance	2	.55
Belief that Adolescence is a Stage	4	.58
Belief in Parent Efficacy during Adolescence	1	n.a.
Participation in Family Decision-making	3	.43,.46,.46,.50 ^a
 <u>Student Measures</u>		
General Self-Esteem	5	.67,.69,.70,.74 ^a
Self-concept of Math Ability	2	.79,.82,.84,.87 ^a
Self-concept of English Ability	2	.77,.78,.83,.85 ^a
Self-concept of Sports Ability	2	.87,.87,.89,.90 ^a
Self-concept of Social Ability	2	.63,.65,.61,.68 ^a
Participation in Family Decision-making	3	.31,.40,.42,.45 ^a

^a Alpha coefficients for scales at Waves 1, 2, 3, and 4, respectively.

Analyses

Repeated measures analysis of variance was the principal method used to test the proposed relations. For the parent level analyses, a median split was used to distinguish two groups of parents: those who did or did not endorse the stated expectations or beliefs. Repeated measures analyses of variance were performed using 2 between subjects factors, parent expectation or belief groups and child sex, and 1 within subject factor, wave. Support for the hypotheses would come from significant interactions between parent group and wave.

For the student level analyses, a median split was performed on student's scores on activity-specific self-concept measures at Waves 1 and 4 to yield groups of students expressing low and high self-concept at each of these two time points. These groups were then crossed to distinguish four groups of students according to changes in their activity-specific self-concepts between Waves 1 and 4: low-low, high-low, low-high, and high-high. The Wave 1 and Wave 4 time points were used because separate analyses revealed a steady decline in student self-concepts in these activity domains after the transition to junior high school. Analyses of the self-esteem measure revealed a sharp decline in student self-esteem at Wave 3, namely, immediately after the transition to junior high school, and then recovery by Wave 4. Therefore, for the self-esteem measure, median splits were performed on the student scores at Waves 1 and 3, and these groups of students were then crossed as outlined above for the other self-concept measures. Repeated measures analyses of variance were performed using 2 between subjects factors, student change groups and child sex, and 1 within group factor, wave. As with the parent level analyses, support for the hypotheses would come from significant interactions between student change groups and wave.

Results

Participation in Decision-making. Consistent with our expectations, both parents and children reported that girls have more opportunities to participate in family decision-making than do boys. Contrary to our expectations, parents but not children generally perceived more participation in decision-making. Parents perceived an increase in decision-making opportunities by Wave 2, whereas children reported a consistent and lower level of decision-making opportunities at home (Figure 1).

Parent Results

Positive expectations and beliefs generally predicted greater participation in decision-making at home. However, there were no significant interactions between expectations or beliefs and changes in family decision-making (increase or decrease) during early adolescence.

Expectations of Greater Responsibility. Parents who expected their child to take on more responsibilities consistently reported more participation in decision-making at home (Figure 2)

Expectations of More Intimacy. Parents who expected a closer relationship with their child perceived more opportunities for decision-making (Figure 3).

Expectations of More Distance. Parents who expected a more disengaged relationship with their child consistently reported fewer opportunities for decision-making (Figure 4).

Beliefs that Adolescence is a Stage. Beliefs that adolescence is a difficult period that will pass did not affect parents' perceptions of the decision-making opportunities at home (Figure 5).

Beliefs in Parent Efficacy during Adolescence. Parents who believe that there are lots than parents can do to improve their relationship with their adolescents also reported more participation in decision-making at home (Figure 6).

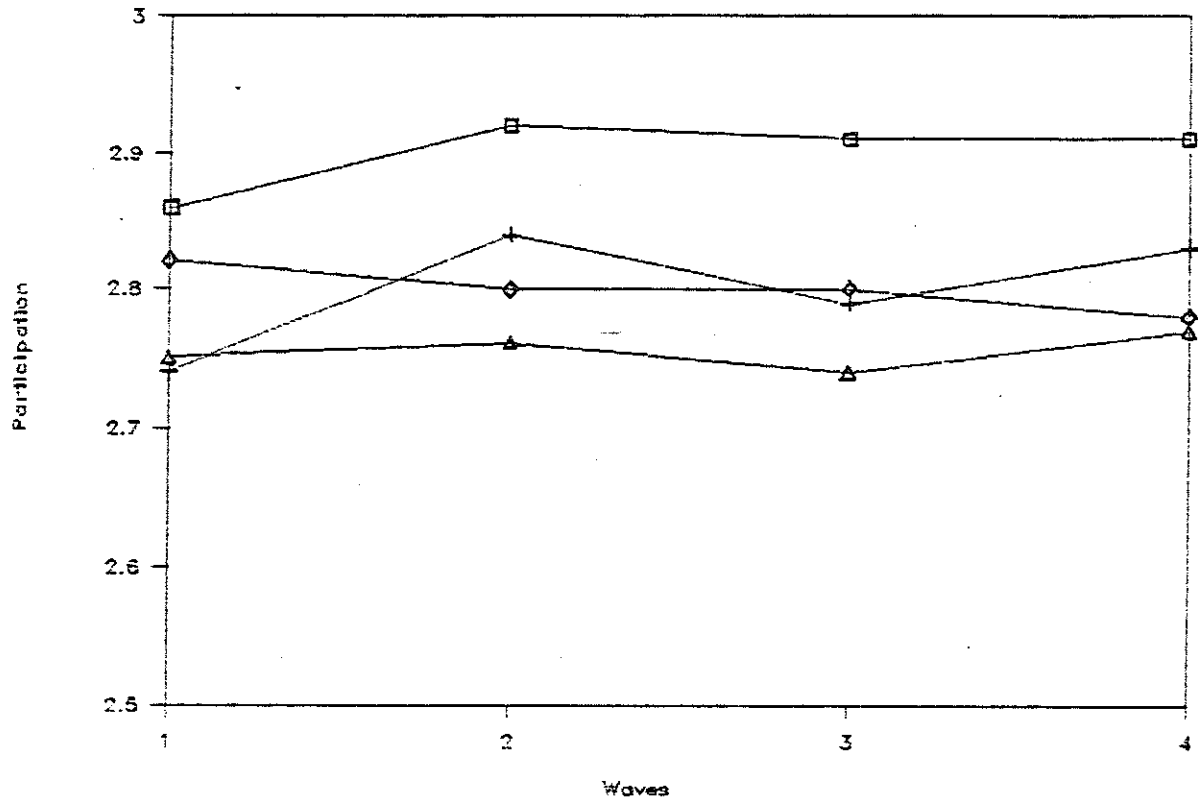
Student Results

General_Self-esteem. Children's self-esteem was related to amount of participation in decision-making at home. Children who reported continuous high levels of self-esteem reported the most participation in decision-making at home. Conversely, children who reported continuous low levels of self-esteem reported the fewest opportunities for decision-making at home. The trends in decision-making opportunities for children who show an increase or decrease in self-esteem are in the expected direction, but not significant (Figure 7).

Activity-specific_Self-confidence. Results for activity-specific self-confidence generally paralleled the results of general self-esteem. Highest levels of participation in decision-making were reported by children with consistent high levels of self-esteem. Lowest levels of decision-making were reported by children with consistent low levels of self-esteem. Children who showed an increase or decrease in activity-specific self-confidence reported an intermediate amount of decision-making opportunities, and while trends in increasing or decreasing decision-making opportunities, respectively, were in the expected direction, there were no significant interactions between change in self-confidence and change in decision-making opportunities (Figures 8-11).

Figure 1

Parent and Student Reports of Participation in Decision-making



- Parents of Girls
- + Parents of Boys
- ◇ Girls
- △ Boys

Parent Level Analyses:

Child Sex Effects: $F(1,1335)=30.43$ ($p<.0001$)

Wave Effects: $F(3,1333)=17.71$ ($p<.0001$)

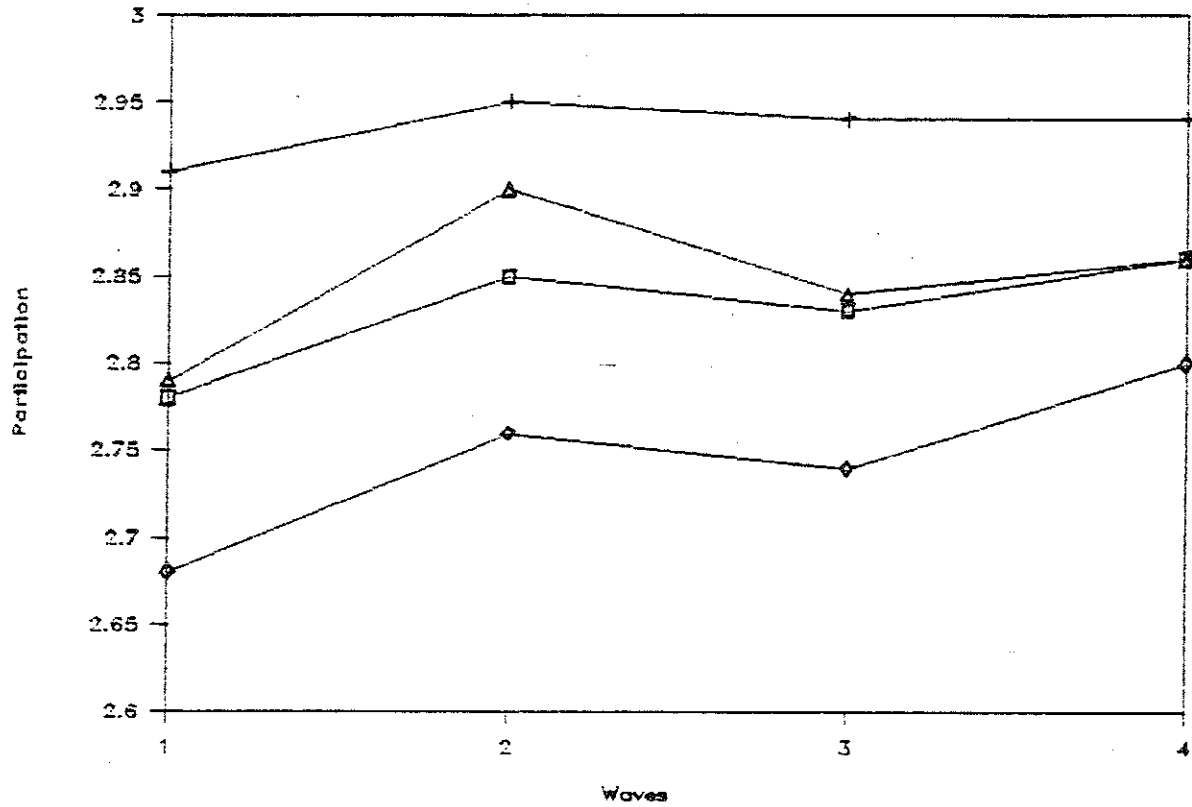
Child Level Analyses:

Child Sex Effects: $F(1,2291)=5.59$ ($p<.05$)

Wave Effects: n.s.

Figure 2

Expectations of Greater Responsibility and Participation in Decision-making

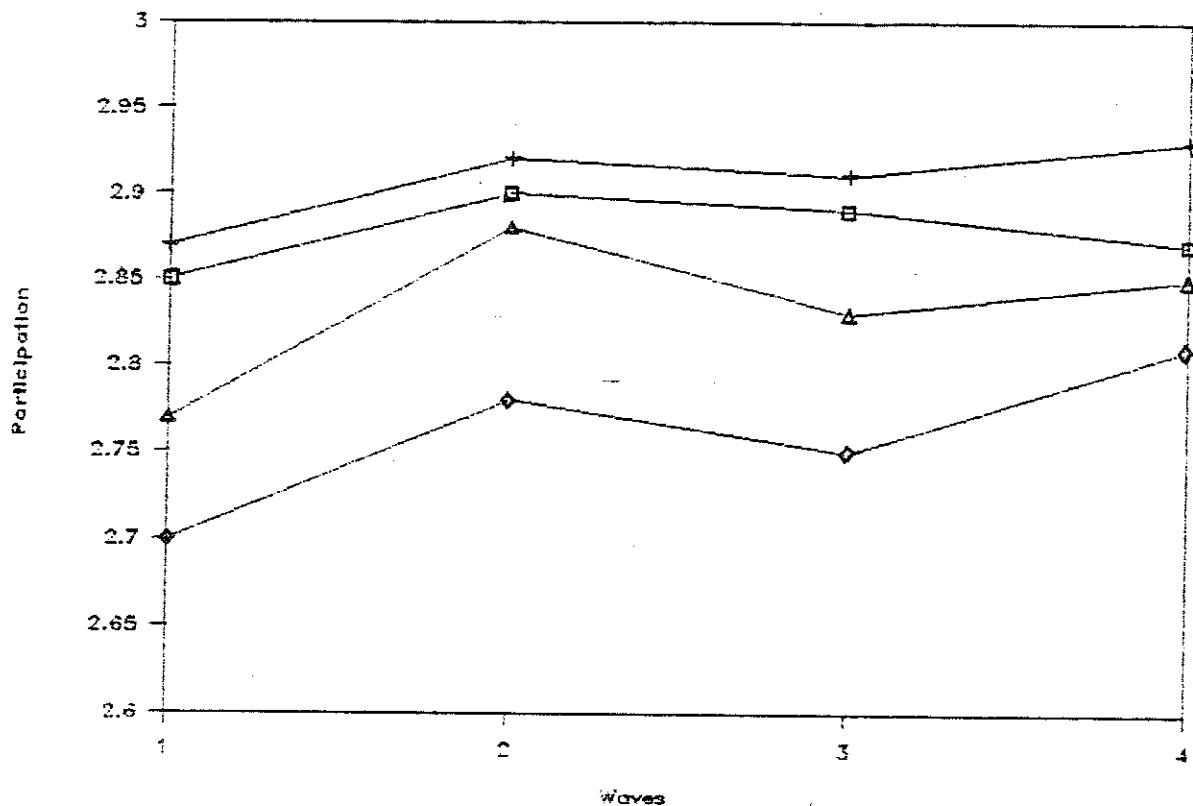


- Parents of Girls/Do Not Expect Greater Responsibility
- + Parents of Girls/Expect Greater Responsibility
- ◇ Parents of Boys/Do Not Expect Greater Responsibility
- △ Parents of Boys/Expect Greater Responsibility

Responsibility Effects: $F(1,1315)=31.12$ ($p<.0001$)
Child Sex Effects: $F(1,1315)=22.41$ ($p<.0001$)
Wave Effects: $F(3,1313)=17.82$ ($p<.0001$)

Figure 3

Expectations of More Intimacy and Participation in Decision-making



- Parents of Girls/Do Not Expect More Intimacy
- + Parents of Girls/Expect More Intimacy
- ◇ Parents of Boys/Do Not Expect More Intimacy
- △ Parents of Boys/Expect More Intimacy

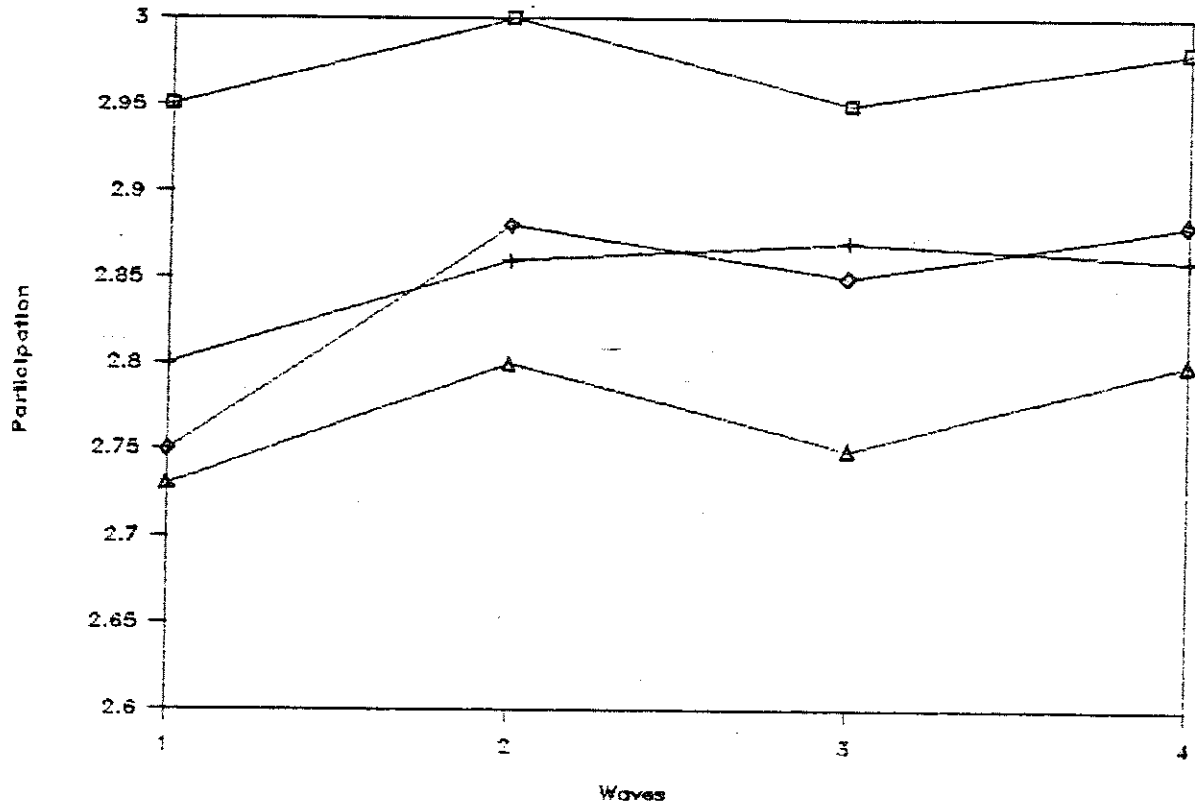
Intimacy Effects: $F(1,1316)=7.86$ ($p<.01$)

Child Sex Effects: $F(1,1316)=26.99$ ($p<.0001$)

Wave Effects: $F(3,1313)=15.65$ ($p<.0001$)

Figure 4

Expectations of More Distance and Participation in Decision-making

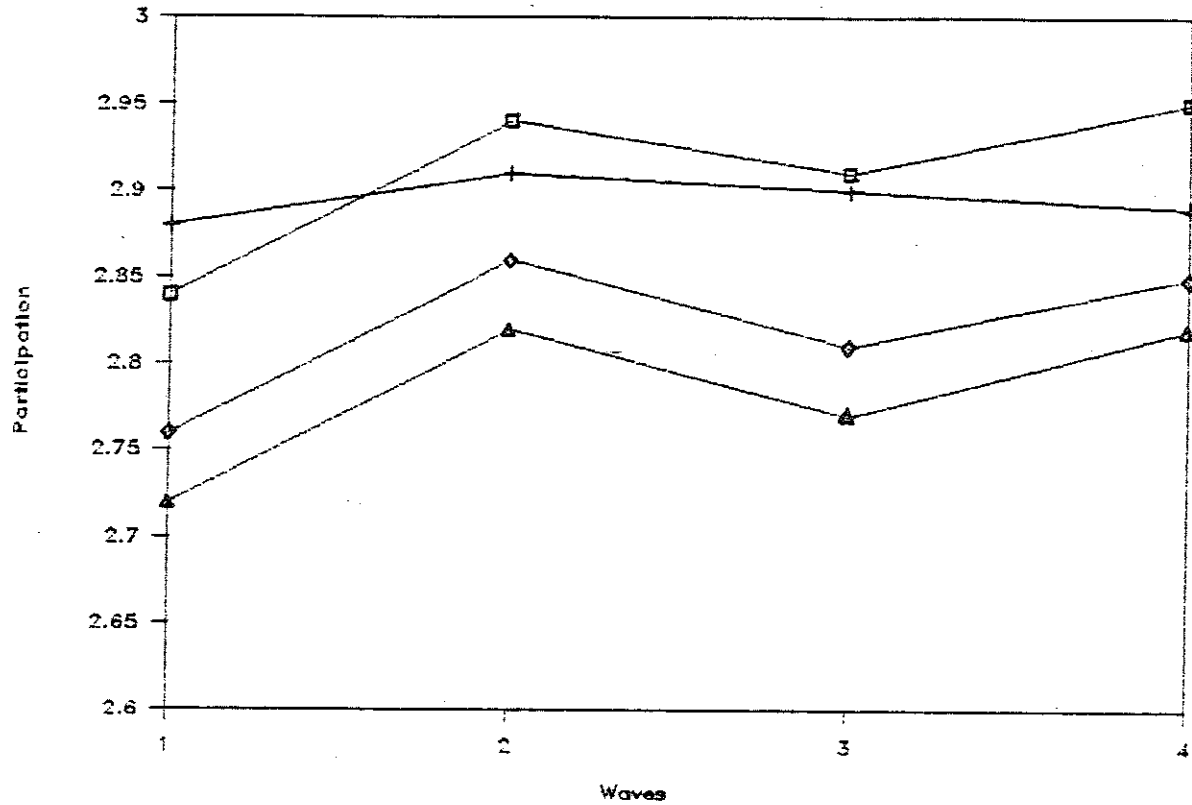


- Parents of Girls/Do Not Expect More Distance
- + Parents of Girls/Expect More Distance
- ◇ Parents of Boys/Do Not Expect More Distance
- △ Parents of Boys/Expect More Distance

Distance Effects: $F(1,1319)=28.30$ ($p<.0001$)
Child Sex Effects: $F(1,1319)=28.30$ ($p<.0001$)
Wave Effects: $F(3,1317)=17.68$ ($p<.0001$)
W X C X D Effects: $F(3,1317)=3.29$ ($p<.05$)

Figure 5

Beliefs that Adolescence is a Stage and Participation in Decision-making



- Parents of Girls/Do Not Believe Adolescence is a Stage
- + Parents of Girls/Believe Adolescence is a Stage
- ◇ Parents of Boys/Do Not Believe Adolescence is a Stage
- △ Parents of Boys/Believe Adolescence is a Stage

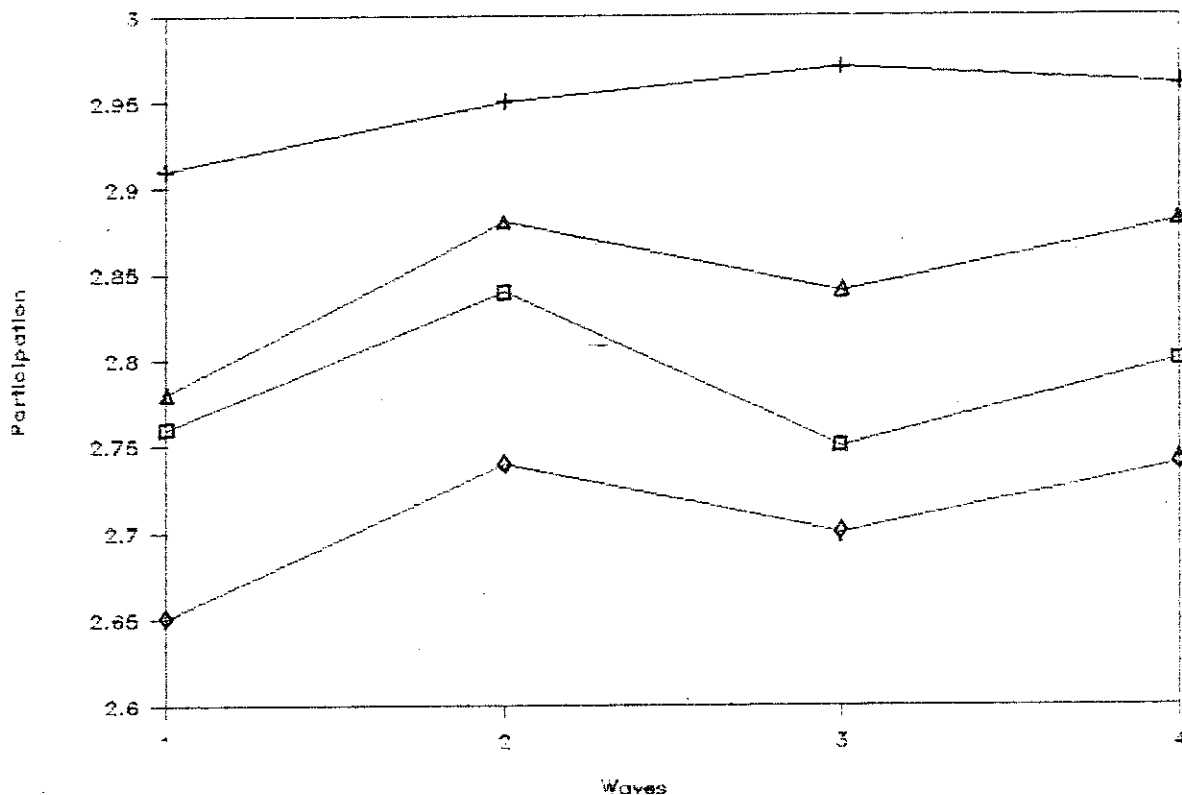
Stage Effects: n.s.

Child Sex Effects: $F(1,1301)=28.65$ ($p<.0001$)

Wave Effects: $F(3,1299)=19.57$ ($p<.0001$)

Figure 6

Beliefs of Parent Efficacy and Participation in Decision-making

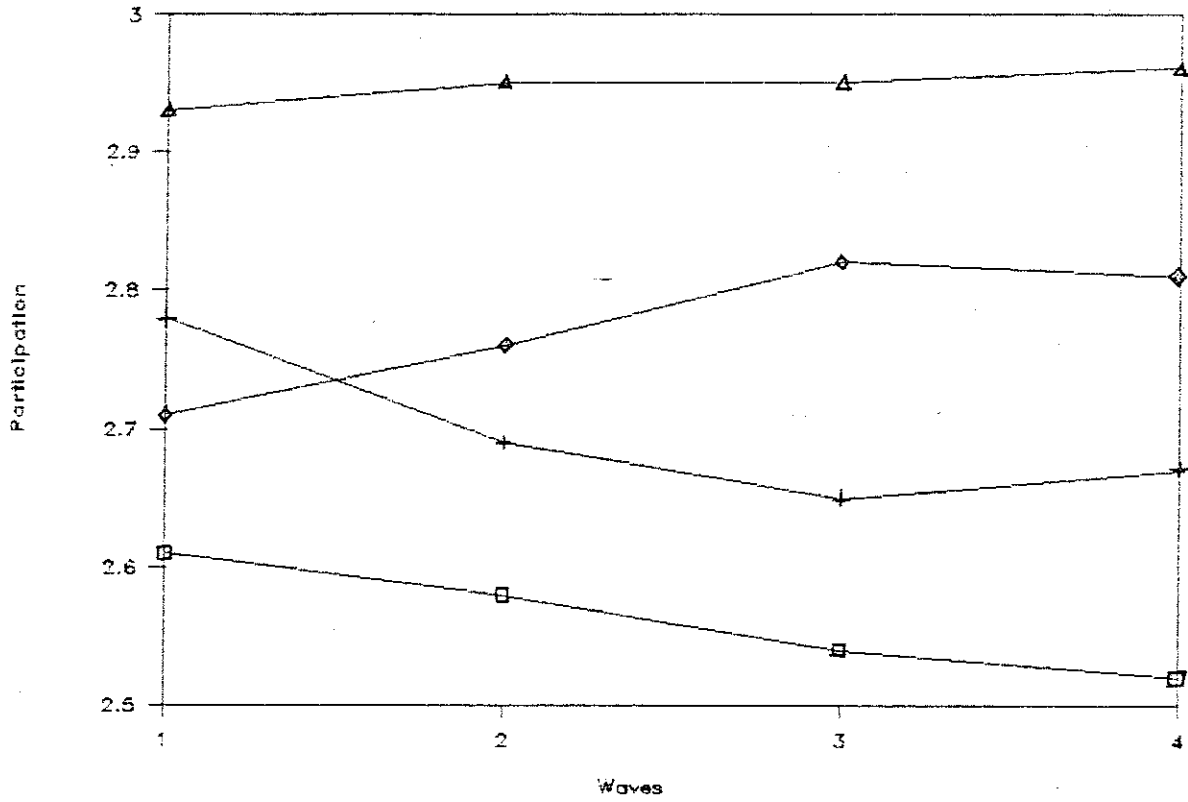


- Parents of Girls/Do Not Believe in Parent Efficacy during Adolescence
- + Parents of Girls/Believe in Parent Efficacy during Adolescence
- ◇ Parents of Boys/Do Not Believe in Parent Efficacy during Adolescence
- △ Parents of Boys/Believe in Parent Efficacy during Adolescence

Efficacy Effects: $F(1,1321)=59.33$ ($p<.0001$)
Child Sex Effects: $F(1,1321)=21.53$ ($p<.0001$)
Wave Effects: $F(3,1319)=14.94$ ($p<.0001$)

Figure 7

Change in Student Self-Esteem and
Student Reports of Participation in Decision-making

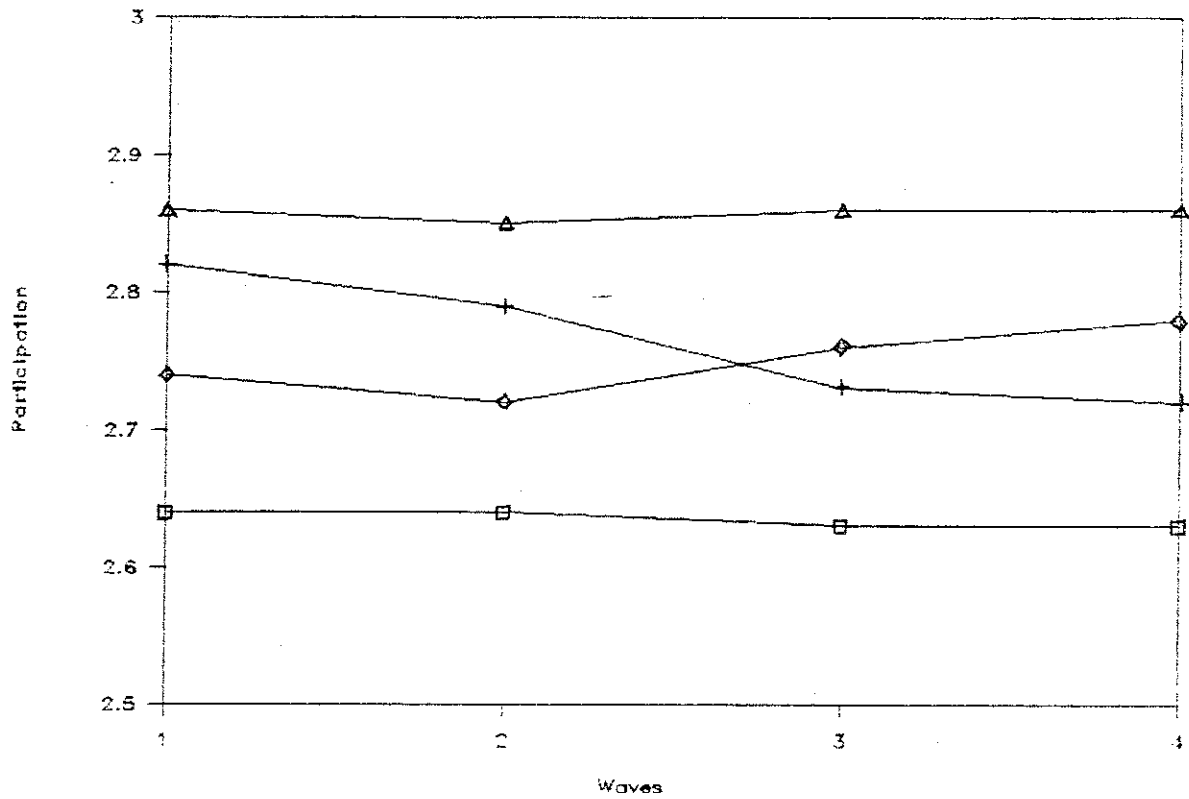


Change in Self-Esteem:
□ Low/Low
+ High/Low
◇ Low/High
△ High/High

Esteem Effects: $F(3,1973)=89.55$ ($p<.0001$)
Child Sex Effects: $F(1,1973)=15.95$ ($p<.0001$)

Figure 8

Change in Student Self-Concept of Math Ability and
Student Reports of Participation in Decision-making



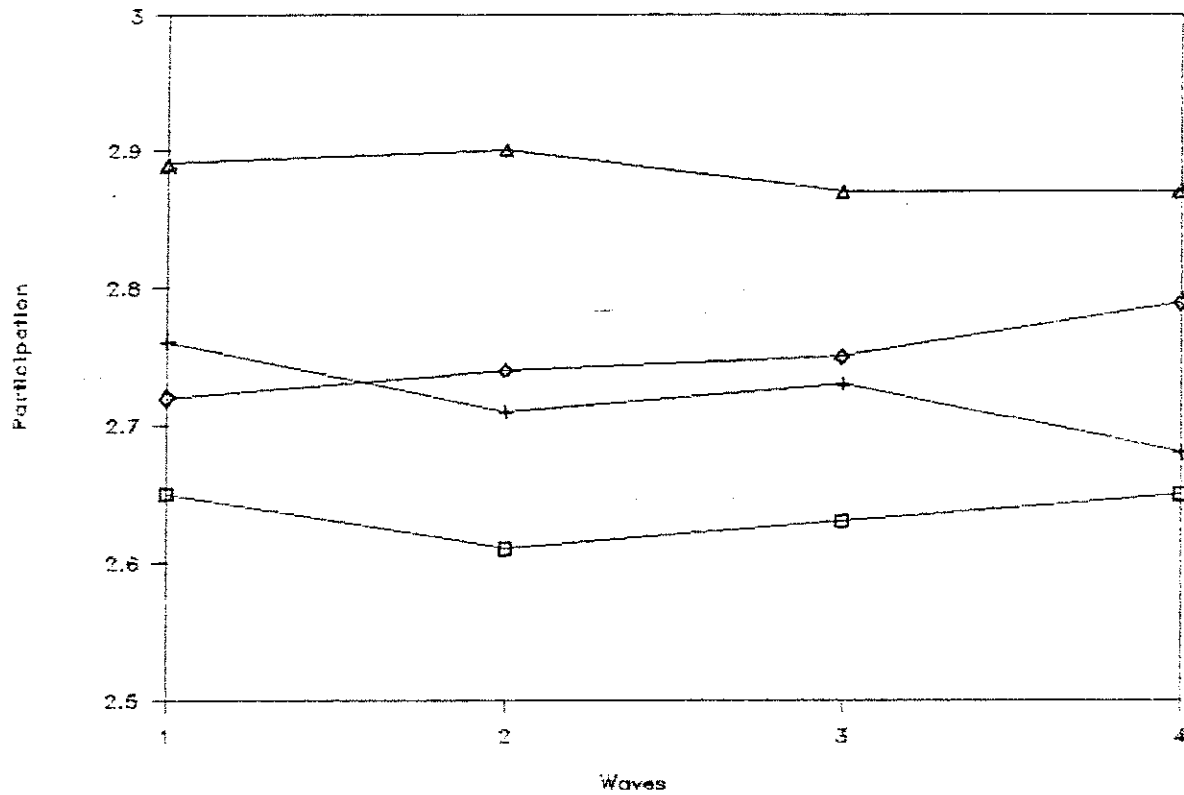
Change in Self-Concept of Math Ability:
□ Low/Low
+ High/Low
◇ Low/High
△ High/High

Self-Concept Effects: $F(3,2234)=28.54$ ($p<.0001$)

Child Sex Effects: $F(1,2234)=7.71$ ($p<.01$)

Figure 9

Change in Student Self-Concept of English Ability and
Student Reports of Participation in Decision-making



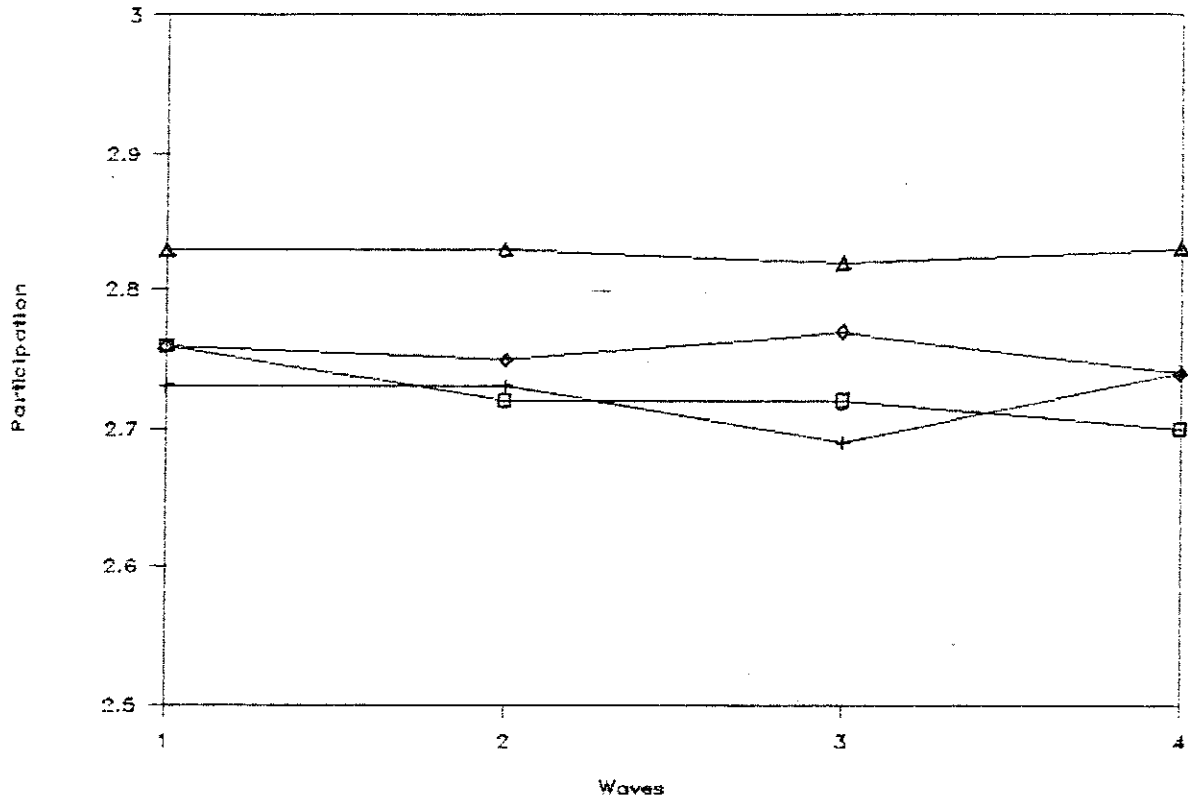
Change in Self-Concept of English Ability:
□ Low/Low
+ High/Low
◇ Low/High
Δ High/High

Self-Concept Effects: $F(3,2235)=37.79$ ($p<.0001$)

Child Sex Effects: $F(1,2235)=4.34$ ($p<.05$)

Figure 10

Change in Student Self-Concept of Physical Ability and
Student Reports of Participation in Decision-making

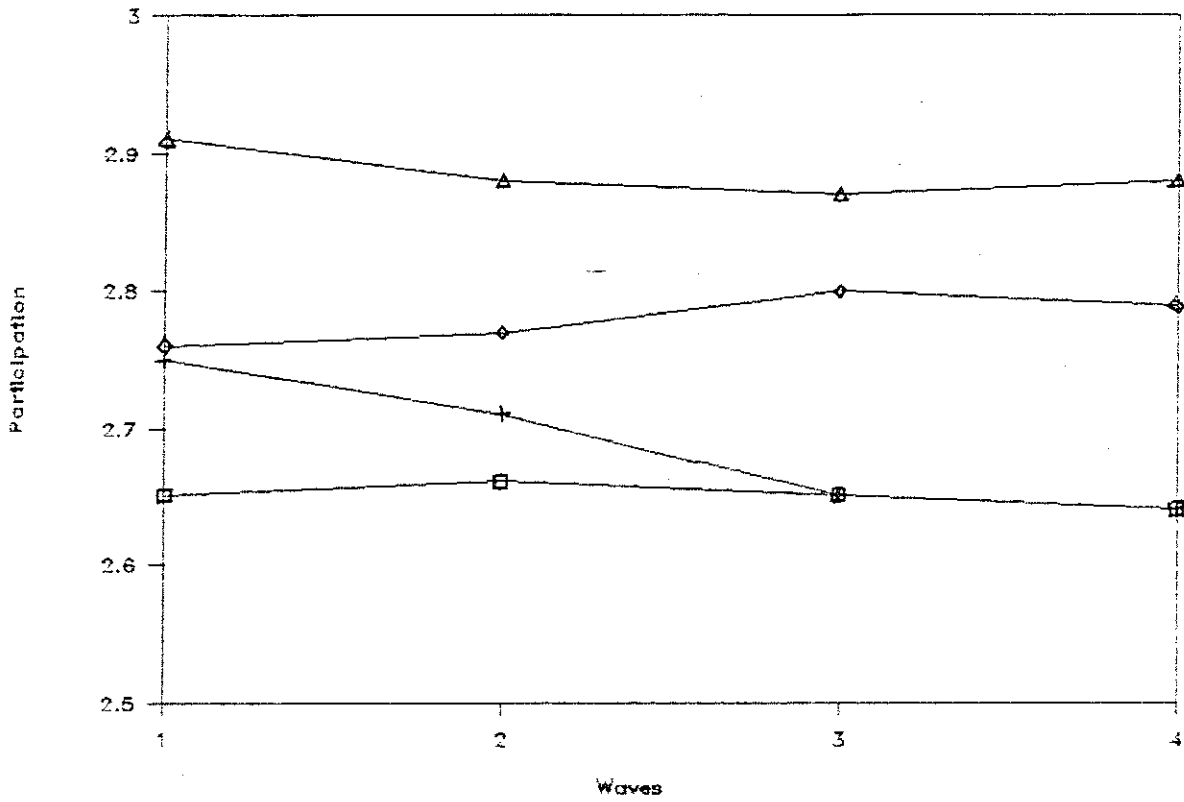


Change in Self-Concept of Physical Ability:
□ Low/Low
+ High/Low
◇ Low/High
Δ High/High

Self-Concept Effects: $F(3,2204)=11.86$ ($p<.0001$)
Child Sex Effects: $F(1,2204)=19.73$ ($p<.0001$)

Figure 11

Change in Student Self-Concept of Social Ability and
Student Reports of Participation in Decision-making



Change in Self-Concept of Social Ability:
□ Low/Low
+ High/Low
◇ Low/High
△ High/High

Self-Concept Effects: $F(3,2163)=33.33$ ($p<.0001$)