

Political Socialization Research and Canadian Studies

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Cette étude fait le point de la recherche récemment effectuée au Canada sur la façon dont les enfants s'initient à la politique. Une grande partie des recherches sont fondées sur un modèle de clivage social qui contraste les modèles consensuels américains. Les études mentionnées s'échelonnent géographiquement de la Colombie-britannique à la Nouvelle-Ecosse et touchent les deux communautés linguistiques. Deux études du rôle des manuels dans cette socialisation sont incluses. Les attitudes des jeunes Canadiens envers la société canadienne varient considérablement selon les régions, les différences étant particulièrement sensibles entre les jeunes anglophones et les jeunes francophones. Ces variations doivent être prises en considération dans l'enseignement des Sciences sociales de façon à éviter une approche consensuelle trop étroite. Les écoles peuvent contribuer à une plus grande compréhension mutuelle mais leur influence ne peut être que modeste car la nature de la société canadienne donne nécessairement à l'éducation civique un caractère expérimental.

The recent and rapid growth of the behavioral sciences in Canada has given a new focus to political studies. This focus provides a dynamic view of the political process which stresses studies of voting and other forms of political behavior together with studies of the values, attitudes, and social variables (family, class, religion, and ethnicity, among others) related to such behavior. More recently, interest has focussed on political socialization, i.e. on political learning or on how knowledge, beliefs, values, and attitudes are acquired in any given "civic culture." This interest has led many social scientists to engage in their first studies of children and youth. The result for Canadian studies is an increasing harvest of knowledge about the perceptions, values, and attitudes of youth in relation to Canadian society.

Much contemporary political socialization research in Canada stresses a social-cleavage as opposed to a consensus or equilibrium view of society. Such research is based on social realities that if not uniquely Canadian at least do not constitute the "normal" state of federal societies that are based on a strong consensus. The Canadian destiny, to paraphrase Morton (1), could be called obscure rather than manifest, as reflected in what Zureik and Pike (2, p. viii) term a weak sense of national identity and strong regional identifications. These scholars also note a hierarchical social class structure embodying class-based inequalities, a system of ethnic stratification based on family, religious, and linguistic allegiances (intertwined

with the class structure) and an official ideology of cultural pluralism. All these characteristics are seen to promote cleavage rather than consensus.

A social-cleavage orientation among Canadian youth was clearly evident in the most extensive study of political socialization carried out to date in Canada. Conducted by Johnstone (3) in 1965 on behalf of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, this study reported how a national sample of 1365 young Canadians 13–20 years old perceived their homeland. It indicated that Francophone and Anglophone youth develop divergent orientations to the social system at an early age “and that on some important dimensions, the two groups are further apart in young adulthood than in adolescence.” The most significant differences were on national goals for Canada, on evaluation of the federal government, and on bilingualism. Francophone students were impressed by the provincial divisions of Canada, thus tending to define the nation in political terms, while young Anglophones saw Canadian society in terms of its economic structure and resources, that is in economic terms. However, with increasing age both groups showed more positive perceptions of provincial governments, a tendency, speculated Johnstone, that may indicate a greater awareness of Canadian regionalism as they grow older. The adolescent years in Canada “could be characterized as the period of emergent sectionalism.”

Johnstone’s study focussed more on cognitive than on affective reactions, i.e. more on beliefs and impressions than on attitudes and sentiments. In 1968, Lamy (4) administered questionnaires to 1251 Quebec Francophone and Ontario Anglophone elementary and high school students aged 11–20 to test the hypothesis that “cleavages on broad affective dimensions of attitude between English and French would manifest themselves at an earlier age than the cleavages found on cognitive dimensions by Johnstone.” This hypothesis was rejected but other hypotheses on a range of concepts encompassing national symbols and institutions, foreign affairs, and “the very existence of the political system itself” were confirmed. These results, termed “foreboding” by Lamy, caused him to conclude that “there are significant cleavages between French and English on concepts which seem fundamental to the existence and stability of the present Canadian political system and these divergences emerge particularly in late adolescence and young adulthood.” Political socialization of young Canadians appears to be “a process of socialization into discord.”

Recent research by Richert (5) throws further light on the findings of Johnstone and Lamy. Richert surveyed 960 children (575 Francophone, 385 Anglophone) enrolled in grades 4 through 7 in Quebec schools in 1970/71. Following Doob’s (6) assertion that the community name is one of the most potent community symbols, Richert compared his subject’s knowledge of the name of the national community with that of the name of the province and city or township. Although the majority of both groups correctly identified Canada as their nation, more were able to identify the provincial

and local names. Moreover, Francophone children were significantly less inclined to identify Canada as their country than Anglophone children. The increasing tendency with age of the former to identify Quebec rather than Canada as their country is contrary to trends noted by Piaget and Weill (7) and others in investigating the concept of homeland. In their studies, cognitive confusion among children in naming community levels decreases with age.

Richert's study also revealed that as compared with a sample of American children of similar age, his Canadian subjects had a weaker sense of national identity in terms of the ability of either language group to name their national community. Additionally, he attempted to measure affective attachment to the national community in terms of pride of membership in it in comparison with his American sample. The two language groups expressed very similar levels of highly positive response, 78.9% of Francophones and 77.2% of Anglophones declaring themselves "very proud" to be Canadians. However, these proportions decreased with age. By contrast, 96.4% of the American sample declared themselves "very proud" to be Americans, with the proportion *increasing* with age.

In a related investigation using the same sample, Richert (8) studied the impact of Anglophone and Francophone ethnicity on the perception of heroes and historical symbols. This was to test the hypothesis suggested by the Trudel-Jain study of textbooks (9) that there are two Canadian historical traditions representative of the two linguistic communities and that they are mutually exclusive. The findings confirmed the hypothesis. Children overwhelmingly identified with historical symbols of their own culture and with different eras of Canadian history: the Francophones with the pre-1760 era and the Anglophones with the post-1760 era. Moreover, these tendencies increased with age. Richert concluded that "there are few reconciliation symbols in Canadian history, which was, therefore, viewed as divisive rather than as a binding force." Citing the views of such scholars as Erik Erikson (10), Seymour Lipset (11), and Leonard Doob (6) to the effect that history serves an integrative role in social and political development and helps to shape national identity, Richert concluded that this is not the case in Canada.

There is interesting evidence that regionalism in political perception (and thus in political socialization) is by no means confined to Francophone or Québécois youth. In 1970, Ullman (12) investigated nationalism and regionalism among a sample of 1199 Cape Breton students between the ages of 9 and 19. He concluded that political socialization in Cape Breton "creates in many young people rather weak nationalism as well as an intense pride about the island, its people and institutions." Ullman found that as they mature "an increasing number of Cape Bretoners choose Cape Breton as that entity of which they are most proud" whereas by contrast "both Nova Scotia and Canada slip in their esteem."

In 1970, Skogstad (13) conducted a study of adolescent political alienation in Alberta, utilizing a sample of 1354 students in grades 7–12 drawn from rural, Protestant parental-Conservative backgrounds and urban Catholic parental-Liberal backgrounds. Negative sentiments were directed more towards the federal government than towards the provincial government. She concluded that Alberta students feel less politically effective and less conscious of the duties of citizenship than American students as revealed by similar studies in the United States.

A 1974 study by Belovari and associates (14) investigated general attitudes to government and politicians, knowledge of politicians and political figures and sources of political knowledge of a sample of 810 Ontario students aged 10 to 23. The relationship of each dimension to variables of age, sex, socio-economic status, parental status, and Canadian birth was also studied. In general, this study revealed less political alienation among Ontario youth than among the provincial populations sampled in the other studies noted. There was a fairly trusting attitude towards government and a belief in the duty of political participation at least in terms of voting. A test of political identification which required the sample to identify the incumbents of American, Canadian, local, and Ontario provincial political offices revealed an "order of familiarity" in that (descending) sequence. President Nixon, for example, was significantly better known than even John Diefenbaker. However, Prime Minister Trudeau and Premier Davis were not included among incumbents because a pilot survey had shown them to be almost universally known. In political knowledge sex, Canadian birth, and parental occupation were not, with some minor exceptions, significant variables but age and grade were, with grade 11 emerging as a significant dividing line above which political knowledge was markedly higher.

Television was the major source of political information by a wide margin among eight sources measured. Only in grade 10 did it take second place, where it ranked after newspapers. Teachers were a significant source of information only in the early grades (5–9). Even there, they generally ranked behind the home, newspapers, and magazines. For the sample as a whole, only 5.6% of the respondents rated teachers as their best information source. Beyond grade 9, teachers as a source, in the words of the investigators, "can be ignored."

Harvey and associates (15) attempted in 1971 to measure nationalist sentiment among adolescents and what they described as "the prevalence and social correlates of nationalistic feelings". Using a sample of 1955 high school students in three regions of Southern Ontario they measured five "key dimensions" of nationalist sentiment: national loyalty, national idealization, anti-Americanism, desire for national independence and desire for national power. In general, the findings revealed a highly nationalistic outlook of almost xenophobic proportions among the sample, with

nationalistic sentiments apparently forming a psychological syndrome “strongly related to indicators of social circumstances and socio-economic status.”

Although some American political socialization research indicates that young children are restricted to a very personalized view of government and political authority with institutional perceptions developing later, two Canadian investigators suggest otherwise. Thus Pammett (16) in a study carried out in Ontario found that his subjects’ knowledge of some of the institutions of government was as high as that of the more personalized roles of government. A British Columbia investigation by Zureik (17) showed that while young children indeed think of government in personal terms, with older ones more easily adopting an institutional perspective, nevertheless for some in the sample there was national identification and awareness and a felt sense of political community at ages as young as eight years.

In considering the implications for civic education and the curriculum of the political socialization studies noted above, reference should be made to the psychological and socio-cultural factors that are involved in the formation and transmission of political values and attitudes. The great controversy among social scientists as to the relative importance of school vis-à-vis non-school factors in all learning is well known. We do not know much about the relative contributions of personality characteristics and of the various agencies of socialization (family, peer group, school, media) to the formation of specific attitudes, including political attitudes. Zureik and Pike (2, p. 29) note that it has yet to be shown empirically that from knowing early political attitudes we can predict later behavior. Some studies have indicated that adult experience in the workplace may be important in forming political orientations. If true, such experience may be more important than early political learning, including that acquired in school.

None of the studies thus far referred to take much explicit note of the role of the school in political socialization. This role was the focus of Hodgetts’ famous landmark study (18) which became the primary impetus for the Canadian studies curriculum movement. Judging from the frequent references and respect accorded it in the political socialization literature we can infer that it has done much to stimulate scholarly investigations as well. *What Culture? What Heritage?* was itself a political socialization study at the same time that it was the largest investigation ever carried out in Canadian classrooms on a nationwide scale.

Hodgetts’ consideration of a wide range of classroom and school factors led him to conclude that formal civic education in Canada is an ineffective socializing process because it fails to convey an adequate conception of the Canadian political culture and heritage. He clearly has great faith in the potential of the school to serve as a positive socializing force — a role that

he believes is essential to the continuing stability of the Canadian political system.

Among the socializing factors considered by Hodgetts were textbooks and teaching materials. He found most of these inadequate on most counts. More recently, other scholars have given further attention to the socializing influence of these teaching media. Trudel and Jain in the comparative study of history textbooks (9) that was carried out for the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism concluded that Canadian history is taught "not from the national standpoint but from the provincial" (p. 15). They found that Francophone and Anglophone textbook authors inhabited "two different worlds." Much more could and should be done to present a common history. Their belief in the powerful socializing forces of history teaching is summed up in the concluding sentence of their study, where they declare that "if Canada is more than ever threatened with schism, we believe we must look for the cause very largely in the manner in which today's citizens have learned the history of their country." (9, p. 133)

Pratt (19) has made a careful study of the textbook as an agent of socialization. He believes that it reinforces and transmits the dominant culture. He found that Canadian textbooks portrayed a homogeneous image of society, biased towards middle-class and Anglo-Saxon cultural values, conveying a negative image of other groups. Class and other social cleavages were absent and consensus interpretations were the norm.

Pratt recognized contemporary skepticism about the school as a significant determinant of attitudes and behavior. Yet the fact remains that the school is the agency through which society makes its most deliberate effort to direct socialization. He took note of the "hidden curriculum" discussed by Haller and Thorson (20), i.e. how group teaching may promote universalism and equality among peers, the hierarchy of power and authority in providing political models, the effects of grade and streaming patterns, desk arrangements, grading systems, and extra-curricular activities. But it is the ostensible curriculum that reflects the most conscious effort to develop student attitudes and beliefs. The teacher is undoubtedly the most important modifier of the curriculum even though usually subject to external authority constraints and limited choice of teaching materials. The influence of the teacher was carefully documented by Hodgetts in noting the often slavish adherence to textbooks that he observed in many classrooms he visited.

Quite apart from this slavish adherence, Pratt observes that textbooks constitute the bulk of the reading material available to many children, especially in the elementary grades. It is significant that textbooks are *official* publications carrying the authority of governmental, i.e. political, sanction and often promoted by the teacher as an "authorized version" of the topics discussed. Textbooks often provide the first student introduc-

tion to social issues and Pratt believes their potential influence may be immense.

All the studies cited above are suggestive of many generalizations at the same time that they are inconclusive at the general scale. They have an unmistakable interest for educators if only because their subjects were students and most were conducted in schools. It is quite clear that students are far from apathetic about Canadian issues even if they are not always knowledgeable about them. Indeed, if the results so briefly surveyed here are compared with the dismal findings of Hodgetts and others that reveal widespread factual and conceptual ignorance about Canada, we are, like many behavioral scientists, forced to question whether there is any necessary relationship between knowledge and attitudes. In the face of the growth of regional and other "parochial" cultural loyalties in Canada and elsewhere on the part of youth and adults alike, one is also forced to question the supposed homogenizing influence of our technological society, including the media. Quite possibly local loyalties reflect a healthy reaction against that very homogenizing influence. For Canadian educators, the dilemma is especially sharp, as on the one hand they may value and promote cultural diversity while on the other hand they may espouse a national civic education.

The political socialization studies referred to reveal marked regional variations among Canadian youth in their perceptions of Canada and Canadian society. This fact makes even less justifiable the continued teaching of what Hodgetts termed a "bland consensus view" or a "national" history which is too often a central Canadian or Ontario-focussed history. It is noteworthy that in referring to Québécois, Maritime, or western regional perspectives, there is often an implication that these are deviant from a "national" perspective. But the latter may be no more than an Ontario regional perspective. Does the strong nationalism exhibited by Ontario students in Harvey's study reflect the strong confidence of a provincial culture more self-confident than any other save only Quebec? How generalizable is the Harvey sample to Canadian Anglophone youth generally? Obviously, as the authors state, "The mood of nationalism detected here gains in significance if it is paralleled in other parts of Canada" (15, p. 255). Such nationalistic attitudes raise for teachers the question of whether in promoting national consciousness and understanding in the future they should not put more emphasis on the international dimensions of Canadian studies and consciously emphasize more reasoned, informed, and balanced youthful attitudes towards other nations, particularly the United States. However, as in all attitude research, we must be cautious in inferring how far attitudes may be translated into behavior. To what extent are students in the Harvey sample likely to act on their proclaimed nationalist sentiment — on their view, for example, that Canadians should be prepared to accept a reduction in their standard of living as the price

of repatriating their economy? To what extent is the school, particularly the teacher, probably contributing to the growth of such sentiment? It is possible that in the formation of political attitudes the teacher plays a greater role than, according to Belovari's findings, he plays as an information source.

If regional perspectives and perceptions are as strong as some of the studies suggest, there is a need for a teaching approach that will take account of them. The fact needs to be faced that students and teachers are often culture-bound by the assumptions inherent in their own regional, linguistic, social, and other milieux. An emphasis on values education in which students can acquire the skills necessary to examining their own value commitments could be one way to deal with these assumptions. At the same time, it must be recognized that those who inhabit and have inherited a given culture are often in the best position to convey the nature of that culture to others. Rarely in Canada have students in Ontario, for example, had an opportunity to study the Prairie regions from a Prairie point of view. Student and teacher interregional exchange programs and conferences are probably the best means of sharing divergent viewpoints but there are obvious limitations to carrying these out on a large scale. Such efforts must be supplemented or complemented by the development of materials that can be tested and used across the country. There has been a beginning of this type of curriculum development in recent years.

If civic education in Canada is indeed a process of "socialization into discord," the school clearly has a responsibility for alleviating the resulting social and cultural cleavages. However, experience elsewhere, particularly in the United States, suggests the enormous difficulty, if not the sheer impossibility, of the school playing a major role in this regard. It is becoming increasingly clear that the school cannot and should not attempt to solve the problems of the larger society. But it does have a responsibility to promote greater mutual understanding and civic awareness. Hodgetts' study makes clear that much of what Canadian students learn about their own country in school "perpetuates the misunderstanding and tensions in our communal life making it less productive and pleasant than it could be" (22, p. 1). Although the school is not the sole or even the major agent of civic education it is hard to disagree with Hodgetts that despite the limitations and unpredictability of formal education, it can do much more to promote national understanding and civic awareness than it now does.

In conclusion, it seems evident that in a culturally diverse nation like Canada that lacks an integrating ethic or strong consensus, civic education is likely to be a tentative curricular enterprise. History, for example, is unlikely to play the socializing role claimed for it in other societies. While Canadians have often envied the apparent sense of unity and

national purpose of their American neighbors, they may now, in an increasingly pluralistic world, be able to accept their heterogeneity as an asset rather than as a liability.

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