

Children's Development of Concepts Related to Country and Nationality: A Canadian Perspective

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The acquisition by children of information related to their native country or nationality has been the object of previous studies by Piaget in Switzerland and Jahoda in Scotland. The present study was motivated by the fact that there are very few investigations of this type in other countries, and especially in Canada. Our sample consisted of 40 boys and 40 girls, all between ages 6 and 12, attending two schools in a middle-class neighborhood in London, Ontario. Our research, like that of Piaget, was conducted using interviews, general questionnaires, and group work sessions involving an entire class. Our goal was successive measurement of the children's verbal comprehension of geographical relations, their ability to indicate these relations spatially, and their overall comprehension of their nationality.

L'acquisition, chez les jeunes, des connaissances relatives à la patrie ou à la nationalité avait déjà été l'objet de deux études, l'une de Piaget en Suisse et l'autre de Jahoda en Ecosse. Notre propre recherche a été motivée par le fait que les études de ce genre sont très rares dans les autres pays, et en particulier au Canada. Notre échantillon se composait de quarante garçons et de quarante filles, tous âgés de 6 à 12 ans et inscrits à deux écoles d'un quartier de niveau socio-économique moyen à London, Ontario. A l'instar de Piaget, nous avons effectué notre recherche à l'aide d'entrevues, de questions générales et de travaux réalisés en groupe par toute une classe. Notre but était de mesurer successivement chez ces jeunes, leur compréhension verbale des relations géographiques, leur capacité de situer ces relations dans l'espace et leur compréhension globale de leur nationalité.

The development of a national awareness and identity among the young is usually considered to be an important objective by most nations. The school, as one of the major socializing forces in society, is often seen as the agent which can best promote this development (Dennis, 1973; Torney & Hess, 1969). It is essential, therefore, for educators to understand the patterns and influencing factors in the development of the concepts relating to country and nationality.

Piaget and Weil (1951), in tracing the comprehension of the idea of homeland and nationality among Swiss children, found discernible stages in development. These stages, they concluded, are differentiated mainly by the understanding of spatial-geographical relations prior to nationality ones, and are determined by the ability or inability to make certain logical class inclusions. Jahoda (1964) found similar general stage patterns with

Scottish children, but did not support the conclusion that comprehension of space relations necessarily precedes an understanding of nationality relations. Both Jahoda with Scottish children, and Stoltman (1971) with children from United States, concluded that the rate of development of spatial-geographical concepts related to their countries was slower than with Swiss children. Price and Hart (1975) found, among Canadian children, developmental trends in geographical relationships involving entities in which the children lived. Towers (1974), who also studied Scottish children, suggests that differential school and travel experiences within one's country are related to differences in the development of an understanding of geographical relationships and concepts of nationality.

The main purpose of this investigation was to determine the patterns of development of the concepts of country and nationality among Canadian children. By cross-national analysis, it was expected that the findings would indicate how the level of development of these concepts among Canadian children compares with that of Swiss and Scottish children. It was hoped that the findings might provide a basis upon which to assess the area of disagreement which Jahoda raises with Piaget and Weil's study. It was expected, since Canada is a relatively young but very large country, having a population comprising many diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, that the development of ideas of country and nationality would be slower in Canadian children than in the children used in the above-mentioned studies. Since geographical place names, rather than terms more commonly associated with community and national identification, were used by Price and Hart to test the development of an understanding of nationality, it was believed that a study should be conducted using terms of the latter type.

METHODS AND INSTRUMENTATION

Subjects

One hundred and fifty-five children from Grades 1, 3, 5, and 7 in two schools serving middle level socio-economic areas of London, Ontario were selected. In most cases all children in a classroom were included to reduce any feelings of anxiety on the part of individuals which might have been generated by being singled out. A pool of possible subjects was then created by selecting only those who (a) were born in Canada, (b) had lived in London for the previous five years, and (c) based on classroom teacher's evaluation, were of average performance ability. An assessment of the middle socio-economic level criteria for each subject was made at this time using the teacher's knowledge of family background. Twenty subjects at each grade level, equally distributed according to sex, were then randomly selected. Of the 80 subjects constituting the final sample, 34 were from one school and 46 from the other. Table 1 indicates the mean ages for each grade level.

TABLE 1
Ages of Children in Study

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Mean Age (yrs.)</i>	<i>Range (yrs.)</i>
7	39	12.7	1.0
5	49	10.9	2.1
3	37	8.7	0.8
1	30	6.8	1.0

For the remainder of the discussion the sub-samples will be referred to according to age groups (6, 8, 10, and 12) to facilitate possible comparisons with other students.

Collection of Data

In order to make, where possible, cross-national comparisons, the method followed closely that reported by Piaget and Weil, and Jahoda. Each child was interviewed individually by either the investigator or his research assistant. A standardized series of questions, mainly open-ended, and a task involving the selection and placement of two cardboard discs were administered to measure the development of geographical, spatial, and nationality variables. All communication was tape recorded and later transcribed, while the results of the disc task were recorded by the interviewer.

Geographical Relationship Task (G level)

To determine the children's awareness of London and Canada as unitary wholes, and an indication of their understanding of the relationship between these units, they were asked whether or not they had heard of each place, and what and where each was. If they were unable to state where each was they were asked whether or not it was "here," "near here," or "a long way from here."

The verbal responses to the series of "what" and "where" questions were categorized as follows:

- G - 1 Conception that London exists as a place but not as a part of Canada.
- G - 2 Conception that London exists as a place and is part of the larger unit Canada.

Spatial Representation Task (S level)

Following the geographical task the subjects were then asked to select from eight cardboard discs, four 2.5 in. in diameter and four 1 in. in diameter, one to represent Canada and another to represent London. They were

instructed to arrange the two discs to indicate how London and Canada are related spatially. For this task Piaget and Weil had the children draw circles representing Geneva and Switzerland, while Jahoda's subjects arranged plastic discs representing Scotland and Britain. In a pilot study using both drawings and discs the investigator found almost no difference in the children's representations when both methods were used. The discs were chosen for this study as younger children seemed to find this method more suited to their less developed psychomotor skills.

Responses were categorized according to two levels representing failure (S-1) or success (S-2).

- S - 1 Discs chosen of equal size, London represented as being larger than Canada, or discs placed side by side or separate from each other.
(No inclusion)
- S - 2 Smaller disc represented London, and enclosed by larger one.
(Inclusion)

Nationality Task (N level)

Two series of progressively more specific questions were employed to ascertain whether or not the children thought of themselves as Canadians and as Londoners. They were asked to give justifications for their answers. Those who stated they were Canadians and Londoners were asked to explain how they could be both things at one time.

The responses were categorized as follows:

- N - 1 Londoner only, Canadian only, or neither.
- N - 2 Both a Londoner and a Canadian, but were unable to give any or a suitable explanation.
- N - 3 Both a Londoner and a Canadian, and gave a suitable explanation.

Analysis

All responses on each of the geographical relationship, spatial representation, and nationality tasks were categorized independently by two judges and resulted in a 5% or higher agreement for each task. All cases of disagreement were submitted to a third judge and the placements of the two judges in agreement were accepted. Most disagreements occurred with the nationality task when either very brief or rambling responses were given.

Geographical Relationships and Spatial Representations

In the geographical relationship task, all subjects indicated that they had heard of the two units. Although responses such as "London is down the street" were not accepted as indicative of a subject's understanding that

London is within the Canadian unit, they were categorized as indicating that London exists as a place. An analysis of the verbal statements indicates that many subjects appeared to understand the relationship of the two geographical units. The age distributions for this task are represented in Table 2. It would seem that by age 8 most Canadian children have acquired at least this verbal understanding of the relationship of their town or city to the country as a whole. Those at age 6 are aware of the existence of the two geographical units but think of them as existing completely outside or adjacent to each other.

TABLE 2
Geographical Relationship Levels by Ages

Level	Ages				Totals
	6	8	10	12	
G - 1 (London exists but not as part of Canada)	17	3	0	0	20
G - 2 (London exists and is a part of Canada)	3	17	20	20	60
	20	20	20	20	80

The purpose of the spatial task was to operationalize the relationship and thereby differentiate between those who had only the correct verbal response and those who could support their verbal response with the correct graphic representation. The assumption was made that a verbal statement alone is not necessarily as valid an indicator of development as is operationalized behavior. The results of the spatial task, shown in Table 3, indicate that it is not until approximately age 10 that Canadian children are able to represent consistently the relationship between London and Canada using the cardboard discs. The 8-year-olds appear to be in a crucial stage when this development is beginning to appear. The 6-year-old group is almost completely without understanding while the 12-year-old group is almost completely with understanding.

When the distributions of the geographical (Table 2) and spatial (Table 3) variables are compared in Table 4, the relationship of the underlying cognitive processes involved in the two areas of thought is highlighted.

It is quite evident from the S-1/G-2 intersecting cell that geographical relationships, as measured by verbal responses, become part of children's knowledge before the understanding can be operationally demonstrated. The frequency of this occurrence was age 6-1, age 8-8, age 10-3, and age 12-2. This amounts to 40% of the 8-year-old subjects. This might be explained by their rapidly developing verbal skills and their ability to

TABLE 3
Spatial Representation Levels by Ages

<i>Level</i>	<i>Ages</i>				<i>Totals</i>
	6	8	10	12	
S - 1 (No inclusion)	18	11	3	2	34
S - 2 (Inclusion)	2	9	17	18	46
	20	20	20	20	80

TABLE 4
Comparison of Spatial and Geographical Levels

<i>Geographical Level</i>	<i>Spatial Level</i>		<i>Totals</i>
	<i>S - 1 (No inclusion)</i>	<i>S - 2 (Inclusion)</i>	
G - 1 (London exists but not as part of Canada)	20	0	20
G - 2 (London exists and is a part of Canada)	14	46	60
	34	46	80

retain factual knowledge which precede the development of relevant cognitive processes. According to Piaget these processes are necessary before true understanding of being part of one's country is achieved.

Nationality

The understanding of the nationality relationship is necessary, according to Piaget, for the individual to have the idea that the country is his homeland. This would occur when an understanding of the logical part-whole relationship between the concepts "Londoner" and "Canadian" is achieved. The number of subjects who had reached this point is indicated by level N-3 in Table 5. The results of this study, using Piaget's framework, would suggest that the attainment of a national identity is achieved by most Canadian children by age 10. At age 6 only a few subjects indicated that they could be both a Londoner and a Canadian at the same time but none could give a satisfactory explanation. This could be, but is not necessarily, a result of their limited ability to provide verbal explanations. It would appear that much conceptual activity in the development

toward an understanding of a Canadian nationality is beginning to occur around age 8. The number of subjects who had progressed to high levels of understanding is substantial. However, it is not until age 10 when the majority reach complete understanding.

TABLE 5
Nationality Levels by Ages

<i>Level</i>	<i>Ages</i>				<i>Totals</i>
	6	8	10	12	
N - 1 (Londoner or Canadian or neither)	14	5	0	0	19
N - 2 (Both Londoner and Canadian without explanation)	6	9	2	3	20
N - 3 (Both Londoner and Canadian with valid explanation)	0	6	18	17	41
	20	20	20	20	80

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Comparison with Piaget's Stages

Piaget and Weil formulated overall stages of development combining the spatial and nationality variables. Jahoda reconstructed their stages as follows:

- Stage 1 (P-1): S-1 and N-1 (No inclusion and Londoner or Canadian or neither)
- Stage 2 (P-2): S-2 and N-1 (Inclusion and Londoner or Canadian or N-2 or neither or Londoner and Canadian without explanation)
- Stage 3 (P-3): S-2 and N-3 (Inclusion and Londoner and Canadian with valid explanation)

Following the same procedures, the results of this study in terms of Piaget and Weil's stages would be as shown in Table 6. Five subjects could not be classified because they did not fit the Piagetian stages as recreated by Jahoda. They were categorized S-1 / N-3. This meant that they had achieved full understanding of their nationality without being able to place the discs properly and show the relationship between London and

Canada, which according to Piaget is not possible. It is on the basis of a greater number of similar examples in Jahoda's study that he disagrees with Piaget and Weil's claim that logical in-class relations as indicated by the spatial task must precede nationality relations. Jahoda suggests the possibility of both measurement and sampling error as possible explanations but proceeds to reject their conclusions by using statistical analysis. It is the researcher's opinion that, because of the nature of the research — that is, the interview method and its heavy reliance on verbal communication with young children who may not always completely comprehend or communicate fully — and the use of one-shot procedures, measurement error is quite possible. This could account for the examples which did not correspond to the Piagetian position. Future research studies might provide explanations for similar unexpected results by exploring further, using additional interview questions and materials, the thoughts of the children involved.

When Piaget's integrated system is applied to the London study there is not a significant difference between it and the results as shown in Table 5, the nationality levels. The major thrust in development occurs by age 10. The total number who had not reached the higher level or stage of development is the same: $N-1$ plus $N-2$ equals $P-1$ plus $P-2$. The number achieving full development ($P-3$) is the same except for the five fewer mentioned previously who could not be classified. If Piaget and Weil's stage structure is accepted as the best indication of the development of a national identity, then this development among Canadian children can be said to occur mainly after age 8 but is quite firmly established by age 10.

Comparison between Scottish and Canadian Children

Jahoda's sample of Scottish children of 144 subjects was distributed evenly among 6-7, 8-9, and 10-11 year old groups. The 6, 8, and 10 year groups from the London study were of a similar age range and therefore could be used for comparison purposes.

The Piagetian classification, being the most comprehensive indication of development, provides a common basis for comparison. Percentages of total subjects from both samples assigned to each stage are indicated in Table 7. A general trend is evident. The Canadian sample has a lower percentage in Stages 1 and 2, and 13.4% more subjects in Stage 3. This would seem to indicate that Canadian children develop an earlier understanding that Canada is their homeland and that they are Canadians than the Scottish children do for their country and nationality. This is a hypothesis for further research. Since Jahoda's sample contained middle and working class children and the London study was restricted to subjects from middle class backgrounds only, socio-economic factors, according to studies (Bernstein, 1975) on verbal development, may be an

influencing variable. Another factor could be a possible heightened awareness among Canadians of their country and identity resulting from the unity question at the present time. The relatively recent increase in Scottish nationalism might well produce different findings among Scottish children if Jahoda's study were replicated now. However, Towers' (1974) findings among North Isles children provide reason to believe that this increase would not be sufficient to produce significantly different results.

TABLE 6
*Classification of the London, Canada Study
According to Piaget's Stages*

<i>Stages</i>	<i>Ages</i>				<i>Totals</i>
	6	8	10	12	
P - 1 (S-1 and N-1)	18	9	2	0	29
P - 2 (S-2 and N-1 or N-2)	2	5	0	3	10
P - 3 (S-2 and N-3)	0	4	17	15	36
	20	18	19	18	75

TABLE 7
*Comparison of Scottish and Canadian Children
Percentage in each Piagetian Stage*

<i>Stages</i>	<i>National Group</i>	
	<i>Scottish</i>	<i>Canadian</i>
P - 1 (S-1 and N-1)	46.7	38.7
P - 2 (S-2 and N-1 or N-2)	18.7	13.3
P - 3 (S-2 and N-3)	34.6	48.0

SUMMARY

This study attempted to determine the trends in the development of an understanding among Canadian children of a concept of Canada as their country and of a Canadian nationality. There would appear to be a sequence in development from a verbal level of understanding of geographical relationships to an ability to demonstrate spatial relationships,

and then to an understanding of one's nationality. This last level of understanding is achieved when the logical part-whole relationships are integrated. Although development begins by age 6, the majority of children do not achieve complete understanding of the different dimensions until they reach age 10. Canadian children seem to develop the understandings as early as if not earlier than Scottish children.

Several important educational implications can be drawn from this study. First, educators involved in promoting the development of a national identity in children should be cautious about accepting verbal responses as proof of the attainment of the relevant concepts. Incorrect interpretations can be made of initial statements which appear to be valid responses but which, if followed by further questioning, reveal the lack of true understanding of the concepts. Next, true understanding of nationality concepts would seem to require the presence of a sufficiently developed mental structure which allows the individual to perform the process of class inclusion. This suggests that instructional methods which emphasize the transmission of knowledge as the means to the development of a national identity will not succeed until the appropriate mental abilities evolve. Such methods, however, may result in an irrational sense of national identity. In addition, teachers should be aware of the sequential patterns which occur in the development of a national identity. Awareness of geographical entities in which the child lives and the relationships between them precedes the ability to comprehend and relate concepts dealing with nationality. An understanding of these stages would help the teacher in the selection of content and in expectations held for the learner. The development of a national identity is a complex process. Some factors discussed in this paper may help educators to better understand the nature of this development.

NOTE

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