

Canadian Students and World Affairs

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While a great deal is known about children's political socialization in general, little information is available to describe childhood learning about international affairs in particular. In an attempt to fill this lacuna, over 1 100 students, drawn from Grades 5, 8 and 11, were surveyed to determine their knowledge of and attitudes toward world affairs. The findings indicate that socialization to foreign politics follows much the same pattern found by studies of childhood socialization to domestic politics in that age, sex, and class are the most important correlates. It was also discovered that children are only marginally more knowledgeable about domestic politics than international affairs.

Dans ses aspects généraux le processus de socialisation politique qui se déroule durant l'enfance est relativement bien connu, par ailleurs il existe très peu d'études décrivant plus spécifiquement comment les enfants acquièrent des connaissances touchant la politique internationale. En vue de remédier à cette lacune, nous avons mené une enquête sur les connaissances et les attitudes de 1 100 écoliers de cinquième, huitième et onzième années relativement aux affaires internationales. Les résultats obtenus indiquent que le processus de socialisation politique relatif aux affaires étrangères correspond à peu de chose près au modèle de socialisation mis en lumière dans les études portant sur l'évolution de la connaissance de la politique nationale, au cours de l'enfance: c'est donc dire que l'âge, le sexe et la classe sociale sont des facteurs explicatifs importants. Enfin, les enfants sont à peine un peu plus informés de la politique nationale que des relations internationales.

INTRODUCTION

While a great deal is known about children's acquisition of information about domestic politics (Hyman, 1959; Greenstein, 1961, 1965; Easton and Hess, 1962; Hess and Torney, 1967; Easton and Dennis, 1969; Langton, 1969; Dawson, Prewitt, and Dawson, 1977; Pammett and Whittington, 1976; Stacey, 1978; Mishler, 1979) we have very little systematic data on how, when, and what children learn about international relations. In an age marked by the increasing interdependence of states and fraught with global tensions the question of children's socialization to world affairs is of more than academic interest. If today's students develop a predisposition to view global politics in overly simplistic, bipolar terms, then the possibility of their influence and control of foreign policy making is greatly diminished. In other words, a critical, informed citizenry must have a realistic view of world affairs to allow the fullest measure of democratic debate. It follows that some instruction about foreign affairs should be part of the citizenship training provided by schools in their programs of civic education.

Another practical aspect of this question relates to the structure of social studies curricula. If it is found that children learn about international events at the same age and rate as they do domestic issues, it is then worth considering whether formal instruction in social studies adequately takes this into account. If current programs do not, it may be necessary to think in terms of a program that would place special emphasis on linking Canada with the rest of the world. Consequently, the "applied" component of the research reported here is every bit as important as its "theoretical" side.

Despite the relevance of socialization to international politics it remains poorly explored. This is surprising when one considers the well-known studies of Piaget and Weil (1951) on the development of a conception of "the homeland" among children, and Jahoda's (1963, 1963a) attempts to replicate the 1951 work. In addition to these classic investigations, there are several other studies which treat elements of this side of political socialization. Some (Cooper, 1965; Alvik, 1968; Rosell, 1968; Haavelsrud, 1970; Ehly, 1975) give particular attention to the evolution of children's ideas about war and peace. Others are more explicitly interested in interstate relations, still focusing on attitudinal development (Morrison, 1967; Targ, 1970; Burrton, 1971). A third group of studies (Tolley, 1973; Torney, Oppenheim, and Farnen, 1975) looks at the child's knowledge of international affairs – specifically at foreign governments and interstate relations – but does not integrate this with information about domestic politics.

Though less extensive than the domestic, political socialization literature, that treating foreign affairs has paralleled this research in emphasizing the variables of age, sex, and class in an understanding of what and how children learn about politics. As a result, the absence of investigations of links between the foreign and domestic parts of the child's political world is even more striking. One would like to know if children know more about domestic politics than foreign affairs, and whether their knowledge of these two areas develops at similar rates as the children mature. The socialization studies summarized in, for example, Dawson, Prewitt, and Dawson (1977) or Mishler (1979) indicate that boys are more knowledgeable about civic affairs than are girls. Does this pattern hold when the topic is international relations, or are the differences between the sexes moderated, perhaps indicating that neither care very much for the subject? Or are they the same, or more pronounced – implying that the cultural depoliticization of females is especially marked in the realm of world affairs? These same studies show students from higher social-status as more politically informed than their lower status counterparts: Does this relationship hold when the subject is international politics?

The question of children's attitudes toward international affairs also needs study. Children's attitudes toward public affairs have been found to become both more liberal and less parochial as they mature (*inter alia*,

Easton and Dennis, 1969). They become less inclined to favour military solutions to world problems and come to hold a more realistic perspective on interstate behaviour that accepts that "We" in the capitalist states are as capable of wrong-doing as "They" in the socialist states. Does this really happen? Studies of Canadian curricular materials show that these present a cheerily one-sided view of world politics which could easily reinforce predispositions to adopt Cold War postures (Pratt, 1975; Bartels and Close, 1977; Zureik, 1978; Close and Bartels, 1979; cf. Charmant, 1979; Szabo, 1979). If this were combined with relatively low levels of information about the international sphere, it is certainly plausible that attitudes toward, say, East-West conflict might remain rigidly confrontational.

The research reported here attempts to partially fill the lacunae just described. It begins by addressing the question of the relationship between a child's knowledge of national and foreign public affairs: Do these increase at similar rates? Are the expected differences between sexes and among age groups and classes found when looking at socialization to world affairs? It then looks at the development of attitudes toward the Cold War, foreign aid, and the students' own political community to see what patterns emerge. Lastly, it asks if attitudes toward international issues are correlated with knowledge of these topics.

SAMPLE AND METHOD

A sample of 1 126 (582 girls and 544 boys) students drawn from Grades 5 (335), 8 (446), and 11 (345) from two school boards (Roman Catholic and non-denominational Protestant) in a rural part of Newfoundland was given a 71-item questionnaire concerning questions of war, peace, and international affairs in May 1979. The instrument, constructed from a list of items judged by elementary school teachers as comprehensible to the youngest students, was administered in nine schools to all students in the chosen grades who were in class that day. The students were assured that this was not a test in the usual sense but was more like an opinion poll, and that no one in their school would find out how they had answered. Administration of the survey was left in the hands of the regular classroom teacher, a decision taken mainly for reasons of economy. As the instrument had been discussed with administrators and teachers in each of the participating schools, and since all teachers had been sent a letter describing the aims of the survey and suggesting guidelines for its administration, there is every reason to think that no bias resulted from this part of the project.

A few notes on some specific methodological concerns are in order. First, the fact that this was a pencil-and-paper questionnaire meant that even questions asking for basic demographic information had to be couched in language that the youngest students could understand. Thus,

to get an indicator of social class, the children were asked to report their father's job. This was the sort of information that students could report most accurately, constituting an acceptable proxy indicator of class position since it is possible to estimate the level of control over the work situation and income associated with a particular job. In this study, fishermen, loggers, blue-collar workers, and clerical workers are placed in the lower class while professionals, small businessmen, and middle managers are put in the upper.

Although the region where this study was done is predominantly rural, it presents an interesting mix of socioeconomic characteristics. As a result, it was possible to include schools from (1) a relatively prosperous paper mill community (population about 20 000) that is the main commercial and service centre for the area, (2) an impoverished mining town, and (3) three chronically depressed fishing communities.

Grades 5, 8, and 11 were selected for this study because Grade 5 represents the threshold of national-cum-international awareness for the child (Piaget and Weil, 1951), Grade 8 is the upper end of the most important years for childhood political socialization (Easton and Hess, 1962), and Grade 11 the last year of secondary school. Although the question of possible curricular impact will be discussed later, it should be noted that the social studies courses offered in two of these three grades are international – at least non-Canadian – in focus. Finally, the survey was administered during a federal election, thus Canadian politics were especially prominent.

One further cautionary note. It should be obvious that a cross-sectional study of the type reported here cannot claim to show the development of children's ideas and information about foreign affairs; that would require longitudinal study covering five to seven years. Dividing the population into age cohorts can, however, indicate whether there is any need for a longitudinal study by clarifying the extent to which a ten-year-old child's thinking about international issues differs from that of a sixteen-year-old.

RESULTS

Acquisition of information

Knowledge of world affairs was measured by a set of 23 questions touching international relations, foreign political systems, and war-peace issues. The students' information about Canada was gauged by an eight-item index. A number of items found within these two sets were separated into smaller groups for further analysis: There were six questions touching peace-related matters (e.g., knowing how many countries have nuclear weapons), eight asked students to identify national and international leaders, while an additional seven presented political symbols (e.g., a Star of David) to be matched with their countries.¹

TABLE 1
Informational Index Scores in Percent Correct by Grade

<i>Index</i>	<i>Grade</i>			<i>Gamma</i>
	<i>5</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>11</i>	
Canada	41.0	55.6	70.4	.68
International	38.3	52.4	65.6	.66
War-Peace*	47.8	54.3	67.3	.44
Leaders*	30.8	48.1	65.5	.67
Symbols*	46.2	69.0	76.7	.57

*Sub-index; n = 1121.

TABLE 2
Preferred source of information about foreign affairs by grade

<i>Source</i>	<i>Grade</i>		
	<i>5</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>11</i>
Parent	32.7	18.0	15.9
Teacher	12.1	17.5	26.3
Social Studies Text	35.5	34.8	26.3
Other book	19.4	29.7	32.4

n = 1067.

The results presented in Table 1 reveal an unambiguous pattern of information about both types of politics increasing at the same rate as the children grow older. Although students at each grade level know more about Canadian than non-Canadian affairs, the difference is not great and could have been influenced by extraneous factors. For example, one of the questions included in the Canadian index asked them to identify Prime Minister Trudeau from a photo. As the instrument was presented during a federal election campaign, the PM's picture would have been particularly familiar and the question especially easy to answer correctly. Consequently it is possible that the scores recorded on the Canadian items are artificially high and the "real" difference between the two indexes is smaller than depicted here. This is particularly interesting insofar as other studies (Torney 1977; Jones 1980) have consistently found American students to be much less well informed about international issues than domestic politics. Whether the results obtained here reflect the process of de-nationalization or some more positive degree of cosmopolitanism is a question that remains to be explored.

Consideration of the three sub-components of the main indexes reveals the difficulty encountered by students in the two lower grades in naming political leaders. Asked to identify the Ayatollah Khomeini, Leonid Brezhnev, Deng Xiaoping, Jimmy Carter, Pierre Trudeau, Ed Schreyer, and Brian Peckford the children were most easily able to name Prime Minister Trudeau, President Carter, and Premier Peckford. They encountered particular problems with the Chinese, Soviet, and West German leaders, as well as with the Governor-General. From this we can conclude that knowing about national and international political figures with relatively low public profiles is a mark of the politically more mature. Most foreign leaders may simply appear too infrequently or seem too personally distant to attract the notice of any but the most attentive of the younger children.

By way of contrast, such political symbols as flags constitute a substantial part of the political information available to the lower age groups. The best known symbols at all grade levels were the Canadian and American flags. Some 34.6% of the grade sample could identify the Soviet flag, but only 9.1% of them correctly named Mr. Brezhnev as leader of the USSR. Equally well known to even the youngest children were some of the issues related to international conflict and its resolution. It was somewhat surprising to discover that even the Grade 5 sample knew that countries were talking about stopping the spread of nuclear weapons (72% correct) or that the USA and USSR have been discussing how to avoid war (62% correct). Some of the questions on international conflict were phrased in terms that perhaps allowed children with even a general idea of what was going on in the world to come up with the right answer, but the question of how and from what sources the children develop this general sense of world affairs is unanswered. In part it will be nurtured in the schools through such media as geography courses (e.g., learning the flags of different countries), in part at home through exposure to television, the press, and, where present, political discussion.

One question in the study does bear on this question of the source of children's information about international affairs, albeit in a less direct way than might be wished. The respondents were asked to indicate to which of four sources – parent, teacher, social studies textbook, or other book – they would turn to find out something about a foreign country or foreign affairs. The question did not ask for their usual source of information about these matters, but rather where they would look for information. Table 2 indicates that parents are considered the least likely source of information about world affairs among the eighth and eleventh graders. The growing dependence upon teachers, texts, and other books or magazines suggests that international affairs is a topic that requires specialized knowledge. Whether this is the student's perception of the matter is unclear.

To conclude this section on children's information about foreign

TABLE 3
*Informational Index Scores in Percent Correct
 by Sex and Class*

<i>Index</i>	<i>Variable</i>			
	<i>Sex</i>		<i>Class</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>U</i>
Canada	57.2	54.3†	54.6	60.4
International	56.8	47.9	51.0	57.6
War-Peace*	61.0	54.2	55.5	61.8
Leaders*	51.5	45.2	46.5	54.6
Symbols*	70.1	59.5	62.9	72.7

* Sub-index; n = 1121.

† n.s.

affairs, it can be reported that the relationships obtaining between both sex and class and what is known about the topic follow the expected pattern (see Table 3). Significant differences were found between boys and girls in their knowledge of world affairs, but not with respect to Canadian issues. Since boys and girls reported similar levels of interest in foreign relations (Close, 1980), the explanation may lie in the greater news coverage of domestic events. That is, Canadian public affairs may be sufficiently widely reported that it is easy even for those not drawn to politics to absorb relevant material. With regard to the social class variable, the consistently higher scores of upper stratum children suggests that this class's greater verbal abilities may permit them to assimilate the arcane world of foreign affairs more easily than do their lower class age peers.

Development of attitudes

Because there were no suitable attitudinal scales relating to international affairs, it was necessary to devise questions and indexes that would canvass perspectives on the international system. The indexes presented below were derived from a factor analysis of the opinion-seeking questions in the survey; only items with a factor loading of .25 or greater were entered into an index. The first of the three indexes used here composed of five questions which centre on East-West relations. The second contains four items which indicate something of how students feel toward foreign countries, i.e., their internationalism. The third measure is made up of five questions reflecting students' views on the Canadian politico-economic system, the regime under which they live.² These

TABLE 4
Mean Scores on Attitudinal Indexes by Grade

<i>Index</i>	<i>Grade</i>			<i>Gamma</i>
	<i>5</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>11</i>	
Cold War	6.6	7.2	7.5	.35
Internationalism	10.8	11.0	10.9	.03
Regime	9.1	10.0	10.6	.36

n = 1116.

indexes are additive, not scalar, and the variables of age, sex, and class are once again examined.

Table 4 presents the mean scores on the three indexes broken down by grade. In all cases a higher numerical mean value represents a more liberal, that is, less authoritarian or parochial, attitude. Overall, there is a clear trend toward more critical perspectives on both the domestic regime and the international system in which it exists as the child matures. This is congruent with findings reported by other socialization studies, especially Targ (1970), and it indicates accession to adult values and outlooks. This may also explain the slight drop in the level of internationalism among the Grade 11 component of the survey, a question worthy of further study.

Grade 11 boys held particularly negative views on the topic of foreign aid, being one and one-half times more likely to disagree that aid was a good thing than were boys in other grades. A similar, but slightly less dramatic, shift toward a more critical position on this issue is also shown by girls in their last year of school. Perhaps being on the threshold of earning a living heightened these youngsters' perception of the relative scarcity of wealth in their communities and the consequent desirability of retaining as much of it as they can for their own needs. It may also be that these sixteen-year olds are more completely socialized into their society and, thus, better reflect community perspectives on the question of aid. This raises the possibility that children in different circumstances would respond differently.

The classification by sex and class for these children's attitudes toward world political issues are presented in Table 5. The only significant attitudinal difference between boys and girls is recorded on the dimension of internationalism, and derives from the markedly negative perspective on foreign aid found among the sixteen-year-old boys in the sample. It should be noted, though, that on many of these attitudinal items girls were much more likely than boys to answer "maybe" than to agree or disagree with a statement. It is impossible, based on the evidence here available, to determine if this response indicates real ambivalence or simple disinterest.

TABLE 5
Mean Scores on Attitudinal Indexes by Sex and Class

<i>Index</i>	<i>Variable</i>			
	<i>Sex</i>		<i>Class</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>
Cold War	7.1	6.8	7.0	7.6*
Internationalism	10.8	11.1*	11.0	11.0
Regime	9.9	10.0	9.9	10.0

*P < .05; n = 1116.

Turning to the social class variable, we find that lower class students differ from their higher status cohorts only in their being more conservative regarding Cold War issues. This is not linked to regime orientation, as both classes tend toward the critical end of the continuum, but may be associated with the greater knowledge of world affairs found among the study's upper stratum. Having more information about international politics might well dispose a student to adopt a "realist's" outlook, holding that international relations occur in an amoral setting where might is the sole determinant of right.

Is there a connection between knowledge and values in the realm of world affairs? A correlational analysis of the informational and attitudinal indexes for the entire population as well as for sub-populations grouped according to age, sex, and class revealed levels of association between the two sets of variables that were quite weak ($r < .30$ in all cases). This suggests that information which children possess about world affairs has no more than a minor influence in shaping their outlooks on such topics. Those interested in seeking the sources of these attitudes might be better advised to examine the effects of views toward domestic politics, and social relations in general, on perceptions of foreign countries and international politics. The development of more liberal attitudes toward international issues is probably more a function of a general broadening of views than the result of receiving specific information relating to foreign affairs.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has found that maturation tends to bring to young people both a greater awareness of foreign affairs and a more open outlook on the world. It has also suggested that boys know more about foreign affairs than do girls, but that both hold similar attitudes regarding these issues. Similarly, the variable of class was seen to have a more marked effect on students' knowledge of international politics than on their attitudes. At all

three grade levels, children of both sexes and each social stratum were better informed about Canadian politics than world affairs. Nevertheless, it was found that knowledge of both types of public affairs developed at similar rates. Finally, the attitudes prevailing among these children were not strongly correlated with the level of information they possessed.

The most striking finding was the fact that socialization to international politics so closely parallels the well-known path of socialization to domestic politics. To properly evaluate this we must refer briefly to the social studies curriculum used for each grade that was analyzed. This will indicate, even if imperfectly, the content of one of the students' sources of information about public affairs. The Grade 5 segment would have been doing provincial geography; the Grade 8 section, world geography and world history, and the Grade 11 element would have been studying either cultural geography, world history, essentially Canadian economics, or some combination of these (Division of Instruction, 1979). The overall curricular content was, at the time of the survey, strongly inclined toward history and geography. No systematic instruction in international relations, comparative politics, peace studies, or even traditional civics was offered across the province, although a handful of schools did present a world problems course in Grade 11.

In short, material about contemporary foreign governments and inter-state relations was not important to the curriculum. However, as Canadian studies do not figure particularly prominently either, perhaps the similar levels of information about each realm of affairs should have been the anticipated outcome. In any event, what is now required is research directed specifically at discovering how and from what sources children acquire information about world affairs, and whether these sources are the same as those for domestic politics.

A reasonable lesson to draw from the foregoing is that social studies courses which explicitly integrate information about Canada and foreign countries could be taught as early as Grade 5. Indeed, even courses which present relatively formal analyses of international relations would fall within the ken of the older two-thirds of the population studied here. These are especially salient considerations for courses in civics or political science. Such courses have traditionally been almost totally concerned with Canadian government and politics, a consequence of their intended citizen-training role. Perhaps the time has come to put Canada into comparative perspective by systematically introducing students to the way government is conducted in other countries. Perhaps it is also time to bring information bearing on the great and pressing world problems of East-West relations, the North-South dialogue, and the prospect of nuclear war into the social studies classroom in a more methodical manner. Obviously, material concerning foreign countries – especially those with social and political systems very different from ours – would have to be carefully prepared and presented to lessen the possibility that

any already existing negative views would be reinforced. Such care could, however, be rewarded with a generation of Canadians able to deal with questions of both national and international import in a more sophisticated manner.

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En sus aspectos generales, el proceso de socialización política que se desarrolla durante la niñez se conoce bastante bien. Por el contrario, hay muy pocos estudios que describan en forma más específica cómo los niños adquieren laguna, hemos llevado a cabo una encuesta sobre los conocimientos y actitudes de 1100 escolares de 50., 80. y llavo. cursos en lo que toca los asuntos internacionales. Los resultados indican que el proceso de socialización política correspondiente a los asuntos extranjeros sigue muy de cerca al modelo de socialización puesto de relieve en los estudios sobre la evolución de los conocimientos de política nacional durante la niñez, es decir que la edad, sexo, y clase social son los factores determinantes más importantes. Finalmente, se encontró que los niños están apenas mejor informados sobre la política nacional que sobre las relaciones internacionales.

Während man viel Allgemeines über die politische Sozialisierung von Kindern weiß, gibt es wenig Information, die das Lernen über insbesondere internationale Politik beschreibt. Um diese Lücke zu überbrücken, sind über 1100 Schüler aus dem fünften, achten und elften Schuljahr beobachtet worden, um ihre Kenntnisse über und ihre Stellungnahme zur Weltpolitik festzustellen. Der Befund zeigt, daß Sozialisierung zur Weltpolitik sehr dem Muster der Sozialisierung zur Innenpolitik folgt, idem Alter, Geschlecht und Gesellschaftsklasse das wichtigste Korrelat sind. Es wurde auch entdeckt, daß Kinder nur etwas mehr Kenntnis über Innenpolitik als über Weltpolitik haben.

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