

THE EFFECT ON
THE POLITICAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM AND
POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE/LITERACY ON THE POLITICAL
SOCIALIZATION OF STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY OF
BAHAMIAN STUDENTS IN MONTREAL¹

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Introduction

The Socialization Process:

Recently researchers have begun to explain the acquisition of political orientations as a consequence of socialization. The three major approaches often referred to in studying socialization processes are: learning, personality and role (Miller and Dollard, 1941; Elkin, 1960; Hilgard, 1960; Sewell, 1963; Hess and Torney, 1967). Those using the learning approach emphasize the concepts of "imitation and identification". Another group of researchers have attempted to explain political behaviour in relation to the political socialization process by concentrating on the role played by personality in this process (Wolfenstein, 1965; Greenstein, 1967; Froman, 1961). Certain of these scholars have tried to examine the relationship between social institutions and attitudes (Riesman, 1950; Hess and Easton, 1960, Levine, 1961; Greenstein, 1969) while others have attempted to understand the relationship between attitudes and behaviour (Lasswell, 1954; Campbell, Gurin and Miller, 1959; Milbraith, 1969). In actual studies, however, the correlation between personality dispositions and behaviour have been reported to be very weak (Katz and Benjamin, 1960; Browning and Jacob, 1964). The concept of role is used by several role theorists as the bridge between individual and society. Langton (1969) proposes a linkage model to describe the relations between the behaviour of an individual and the expectations of a group where he indicates direct causal links between school, family and peer group taken independently to political attitudes or behaviour of an individual.

have variously agreed that most of society's institutions can and do act as agencies of socialization (Almond and Verba, 1966, Langton, 1966, 1968; Massialas, 1969; Cleary, 1971; Jaros, 1973). Previously, students of socialization had focused almost exclusively on the family (especially in terms of its structure), in their quest to explain political attitudes and behaviour. Thus, the German's willingness to accept an authoritarian relationship between himself and his political leaders had been explained by reference to the authority patterns in the family (Shaffner, 1948). A similar emphasis on the effect of family authority patterns was expressed by Levine in his study of a West African country (Levine, 1963). However, it is a major contention of the new generation of researchers as Langton (1969) and Jaros (1973) that, the approach which located the family at the center of the socialization process is unsatisfactory in providing a comprehensive and realistic account of how the individual does learn political attitudes and behaviours. The political system is more, they aver, than the family writ large as an individual's behaviour in it and attitudes towards it are no doubt mediated in part through the family. Hence it becomes important in the study of political socialization, to consider such secondary agencies as the school and peer group, which may affect the political socialization of children and youth. It may also be that each agency assumes the place of prominence at a particular stage in the socialization process.

Agencies of Socialization:

Contemporary students of political socialization

Patterns of Political Learning:

Until recently the literature on political socialization described this process along a developmental model which posited rapid and deep-rooted socialization in the elementary school years and then leveled off with relatively little change over the rest of the life-cycle (Greenstein, 1965; Easton and Dennis, 1965; 1967; Hess and Torney, 1967). In the area of theoretical writing on socialization a new trend is gradually gaining popularity stressing the need for socialization after childhood (Brim, 1966).

Several researchers in the field of political socialization have started asking whether this trend fits the case of political socialization. The most outspoken are Jennings and Niemi (1968). They start with the acceptance of the developmental model as a basis for their studies, however, they stress a fact that a host of studies have documented: education is strongly related both directly and indirectly to a variety of political orientations (emphasis added). They, therefore, try to support the hypothesis that a variety of developmental patterns exist which apply to different political attitudes and behaviour patterns. The main argument, therefore, is that the political learning curve assumes a variety of shapes depending upon the particular dimension being considered at a given point in the life cycle of an individual.

Proposed Frameworks for the Study of Political Socialization:

While most researchers concerned with political learning acknowledge the utility of the concept "political socialization" in understanding political behaviour, it has to be recognized that a generally accepted theory of political socialization is yet to be formulated. However, some of the more prolific students of political socialization have proposed frameworks within which they examine this process. These frameworks may be classified as "macro-level" and "micro-level" approaches.

Of the "macro-level" frameworks perhaps the most clearly articulated would be that of David Easton (1957). His political theory of political socialization is conceived as an "attempt to demonstrate the relevance of socializing phenomena for the operations of political systems". (Easton, 1957, p. 384). This framework, unlike many others, is not

a plea for the promotion of socialization for system-maintenance. It rather makes it possible for the political system to persist. On the other hand, in his attempt to compare socialization in developing countries with the process in developed countries, Almond produced a model which in his account of it could be used cross-culturally. So far as he is concerned, political socialization is but one of the input functions which any political system must perform, if it is to survive, because without socialization the cultures and structures of the political system would not be perpetuated through time. Since this is the aim of all political systems - perpetuation through time - socialization becomes a necessary function. Thus he defined political socialization as "the induction into political culture which results in a set of attitudes cognitions, values, standards and feelings - about the political system, its various roles and role incumbents: (Almond and Coleman, 1960, p. 27-28). Other researchers have the "micro-level" or individual approach to the study of political socialization. They focus explicitly on the political socialization process of individuals. Fred Greenstein, for example, attempts to synthesize the basic elements of the several other formulations and asks pedagogical questions. This model is essentially a restatement of Lasswell's statement of the general process of communication, namely (1) who (2) learns what (3) from whom (4) under what (4) under what circumstances (5) with what effects (Greenstein, 1965).

More and more it is felt that a proper study of socialization must draw on both conceptual approaches. This was basically the approach utilized by Langton (1969) and characterizes this study.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Political Socialization:

Researchers who have studied the political socialization of children and youth argue that there are many variables involved in describing this concept. Langton (1969) and Massialas (1971) have provided and used the most comprehensive listing of these variables: Political Interest (active

interest in political affairs); Spectator Politicization (How much political content is consumed by the student in the mass media); Political Discourse (Conversations about public affairs or politics); Political Efficacy (The belief that one can affect political outcomes); Political Cynicism (Feelings of mistrust and doubt toward participation in public life); Civic Tolerance (Support for the Bill of Rights, due process of law, freedom of speech, recognition of legitimate diversity etc.); Participative Orientation (Propensity toward participation in public life); Politicization (A combined measure of political discourse and spectator politicization); Political Knowledge/Literacy (The ability to understand political concepts and language in particular as used in a democracy).

Since we were using the Langton questionnaire, we have also chosen to take the operational definitions of these concepts as developed and tested by Langton. It should be remembered that all the questions were asked in the present tense and were also repeated for the last three years of high school.

It should be noted that we are using Political Knowledge/Literacy as an independent variable in hypotheses sets two and three. In the general political socialization literature performance on factual tests is the main way used to assess this knowledge level. For the purposes of this study we chose two such tests (1. A five item test used by Langton and the Michigan Study. 2. A Political sophistication test used by Langton and the Michigan Study. Political sophistication is defined here as the student's perception of ideological differences between political parties). In addition we chose a third test (the York Social Studies Project Test-Part I, developed in England) which is based on the political literacy literature.

Political Education Curriculum:

The level of exposure to political education curriculum (PEC) is measured by the number of relevant courses taken in high school and university by the students in our sample. There were no Civics courses being offered in Bahamian

high schools while the respondents went to school in the Bahamas. However, we also know from the literature on political socialization that the differential effect of civics and citizenship study courses from other courses with relevant political content is not significant (Langton, 1969; Massialas, 1972). Therefore we decided to consider a number of relevant courses instead, such as History, Social Studies, Political Science, and courses which were thought by the students to contain political elements. These were designated as "Other Relevant Courses".

Other Variables:

The following variables which occur in the literature of political socialization as control variables were also used in our analysis of data as necessary: age, sex, SES, high school SES, high school peer-class environment based on respondent's perception of the peer-class environment as homogeneous (same SES) or heterogeneous (different SES), quality of high school, pupil grade point average, PEC teachers' sex, quality, quality of PEC courses, personality of respondents, major in high school and university, parents' education, family politicization and quality of family life.

Problem Statement

This study was conceived as an inquiry into the effect of political education curriculum (PEC) and of political knowledge/literacy on the political socialization of students. Some researchers have argued that the school is by far the most influential agency involved in the political socialization of individuals (Almond and Verba, 1963; Hess and Torney, 1967; Entwistle, 1971). Entwistle, for instance, has argued that only by deliberately teaching individuals political ideas and events do they develop the disposition towards citizenship in an active political sense. Political education is taken to refer to any course studied in school which may have political content. It could therefore include History, Current Events, Economics, Social Studies, Geography, Citizenship Education, Civics, Environmental Studies and similar subject matter. The function of such courses is to initiate individuals into "the skills and concepts required for active participation in political affairs of citizenship" (Entwistle, 1971 p.1).

In Entwistle's definition political knowledge/literacy is the sign of a politically socialized person. However, we have made a further distinction in our study - we have taken the political knowledge/literacy both as a dependent variable - dependent on level of PEC - and as an independent variable.

Therefore, to gain insight into the role of political education in socializing individuals to politics, this study examined the effects of PEC upon the political socialization of a group of Bahamian youth studying in Montreal.

The Sample:

The sample for this research project consisted of 41 Bahamian students, at Universities and Colleges in the Montreal area. With the exception of three students doing post-graduates studies, the respondents constituted the entire population of Bahamian students in the city at the time of the study.

The Instrument:

The main body of data was collected through an interview schedule. This interview schedule is an adaption from the questionnaire used by Langton and obtained from the Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan. The questionnaire is classified under Project 477, March 1965, entitled "High School Senior Study".

The pre-coded interview-schedule consisted of four major parts:

- Part One: Items related to the schooling and educational history of the respondent.
- Part Two: Items related to measures of political socialization.
- Part Three: Items related to measures of political knowledge/literacy.
- Part Four: Items related to general background information about respondent and family.

Important Findings and Suggestions for Further Research

Apart from the considerations of practically, accessibility and the fact that we knew about the self-selection and "elite" attributes of the sample, the added advantage of this sample

over others possible in Montreal is the homogeneous historical and political background and experience of the sample, Methodologically, however, we has to rely on an ex post facto design and on the memories and subjective assessment of the respondents. The major assumption here was that since the respondents were all undergraduates, their high school experience was quite fresh in their memories. This was complicated, however, by the fact that most of our respondents were in their mid-twenties. This meant that they may have had formal educational experiences between high school and university. This fact however was controlled. Almost half of the sample had not attended higher educational institutions between high school and university but we could not establish any independent or additive effect of this experience on the political socialization of the individual involved. This was mainly because the same individuals happened to be those who had a high PEC exposure at the high school level.

PEC was measured therefore at the high school and univeristy levels. At the high school level PEC was based on the number of History, courses taken and on the number of Social Studies courses taken. At the University level PEC was based on the number of History, Political Science and "Other Relevant" courses taken. The effect of each different subject matter was assumed to be independent. The most obvious confounding factor here is the neglect of the interactive effect of the courses. However, one can think easily of other predictor variables which we did not control - like age, sex, SES, and many others. However, we can state that directly course related factors such as sex of teacher, quality of course and satisfaction with the course seem to be quite similar for most courses examined in this study.

Another methodological consideration is the determination of cut off points for high, medium and low PEC exposure. Since the theoretical base is not yet very strong in the literature, very few researchers have given particular attention to this item. We decided on five courses as the high PEC exposure level since most of the literature uses the same number of courses (Ehman, 1973) and since the number

looked reasonable for our sample as well.

A new methodological dimension that this research project added to the existing literature is the group of "Other Relevant" courses. Once we completed the list of preselected courses known to contain political components such as History, Political Science and others, we asked the respondents to mention "other relevant courses" which contributed to their interest in political affairs. As we shall see in our research this method yielded interesting effects. Therefore, it should be used and refined in further studies on this subject.

Political interest was based on one single question used by Langton. He had chosen this question as the most reliable among many other measures available in the literature. Out of a total score of two, the mean for our sample at high school was 1.3902 and at university it went up to 1.5610. At high school only 14 (34.1%) scored two while at university their number was 23 (56.1%). Political interest increased with the number of PEC courses taken at high school as well as at the university level, although not significantly at the .05 level. However, political interest did not change much with the level of political knowledge/literacy. Again, although there was no statistical significance obtained at .05 level, political interest was higher for Whites than Blacks, for those who were planning careers as teachers for those who had greater influence in family decisions concerning themselves, for those whose fathers were dead or absent, and for respondents whose parents had less than seven years of education.

Spectator, politicization was measured on students' behaviour regarding television, radio, newspapers and magazines. Most students did not read magazines regularly therefore its effect was held to be constant for all and we proceeded to examine spectator politicization as related to level of political consumption through radio and newspapers. On newspaper politicization out of a high score of two our sample mean for the high school level was 1.1220 and .8780 at the university level. In absolute frequencies the number of those who scored two at the high school level dropped from 15 (36.6%) to 11 (26.0%) at the university level. However, as we have stated television was the main source of information at this level. On the radio politicization there

was again a drop of sample means between high school and university from 1.5122 to 1.0244 and in terms of frequencies from 16 students (39.0%) to 10 students (24.4%). In the case of newspaper politicization there is a definite PEC effect especially at the university level where it becomes significant at the $p < .05$ level. Level of political knowledge/literacy does not seem to make any difference.

In the case of radio politicization there is an increase as related to the higher level of PEC. Levels of political knowledge/literacy does not seem to make much of a difference except in the case of the York Test where those who scored high have a higher level of radio consumption than those who scored low at $p .054$. Other factors do not seem to influence much the level of political consumption through newspapers and radio for our respondents.

Political discourse is supposed to act as a surrogate for forms of adult level political activity. Therefore, the frequency with which respondents engage in political conversations is taken as a probable indicator for the level of political socialization. The group mean increased very little between high school and university on this item. Out of a possible high score of three our sample had a mean of 1.3659 at high school and 1.4878 at university. There were no high scores at high school, and only two students scored three at university. The number of medium scorers went from 18 (43.9) to 23 (56.1). Political discourse scores increased with higher levels of PEC exposure but this effect was not significant at the $p < .05$ level. Political knowledge/literacy seemed to affect and increase the levels of political discourse but its most important effect was felt in the case of Langton's factual test at the university level. White respondents had a much higher group mean than Blacks and the older respondents were also the higher scorers. Those planning to become teachers engaged in political discourse more often as did those respondents who had greater influence in the family decisions concerning themselves. Those who did not have fathers scored higher on discourse as did those who were in racially mixed schools. Once again, none of the results were significant at the $p < .05$ level.

A specially developed three point efficacy scale with a CR of .94 such as the one used by Langton, was used to measure the belief that one can affect political outcomes. Political efficacy increased between high school and university from a group mean score of .7561 out of a

possible three to 1.2195. Only three students (7.3) scored high, at high school while this number increased to 11 (26.0) at university. The PEC effect is very obvious at all levels but especially at the university where it is statistically significant at the $p .05$ level. There does not seem to be much of a relationship between level of efficacy and level of political knowledge/literacy as measured on Langton's Factual Test, especially at the high school level. The relationship is stronger as measured on Langton's sophistication test, and it becomes even stronger when we measure it on the York Test.

Interestingly, Blacks scored higher on political efficacy as did Protestants, those planning to become professionals, those whose parents generally made family decisions together, and those whose mothers decided about punishment. Moreover, those who majored in social sciences and those whose fathers and mothers had a higher educational level were higher on political efficacy. No statistical significance at the $p < .05$ level was realized.

Cynicism seems in part to be antithetical to a feeling of civic competence. A six item scale with a CR .94 used by Langton was replicated for our sample. It should be remembered, however, that cynicism increases with the increased levels of education, irrespective of level of political efficacy. This seems true for our sample as well. Therefore, means of cynicism increased instead of decreasing from high school to university - from 1.9268 to 2.2683 of a high score of 3. Eleven students scored high on cynicism at high school and 13 scored high at university. And although there were 11 students in the low cynicism and no cynicism categories at high school, there were only two respondents who scored low on cynicism at the university. There does not seem to be much of a relationship between PEC and political cynicism. The same is true for political knowledge/literacy as measured on the sophistication test. However, political cynicism seems to increase with increasing factual knowledge as based on Langton's Factual Test and significantly so at the university level, as well as with increasing knowledge measured on the York Test at $p < .38$. However, since in these two last cases the difference is not apparent at the high school level, we may conclude that it is the general educational level, that is, number of years of scholarship which is the most important factor in this case. Whites are more cynical than Blacks on political matters, and those older in age follow suit. Lower middle class respondent are less cynical. Those who are planning to become teachers and professionals

are more cynical than others, as well as those who are majoring in social sciences and significantly so. Those whose fathers made the punishment and voting decisions were higher on cynicism as well as those who were in a majority white school.

Civic tolerance was measured on a three item scale devised by Langton. Civic tolerance means increased for our sample between high school and university from 2.0484 to 2.1951 out of a possible high score of three. In numbers, there were only three high scorers at high school while this number increased to 15 at university. However, civic tolerance does not seem to be related to PEC at high school nor at university. On the other hand there seems to be some relationship between level of political knowledge/literacy and civic tolerance especially at the high school level as measured on the Langton Factual Test $p = .078$ and on the York Test $p = .088$. We obtained higher scores on civic tolerance with higher levels of political knowledge/literacy, although we did not get any statistical significance.

Again, Whites are more tolerant than Blacks, as are middle class students vis-a-vis other SES groups. Those planning a professional or a teaching career are more tolerant and significantly so ($p = .0292$) as are those who were social science and science majors at high school.

PEC is therefore related to five out of seven aspects of political socialization studied in this research project: political interest, spectator politicization: newspaper and radio, political discourse, political efficacy. In the case of political efficacy and newspaper politicization the relationship is significant at the $p < .05$ level.

Political knowledge/literacy on the other hand is related to political efficacy as measured on all three tests. As measured on the Langton Factual Test, there exists a relationship between political knowledge/literacy and radio politicization as well as political efficacy, political cynicism and political tolerance. The only relationships between the sophistication test and the political socialization items occurs in the case of political efficacy. Race,

career plans and high school major subject, family relationship, parents' education, SES, age and racial composition of high school seem to be the other important intervening variables and in that order.

It seems clear from the preceding discussion that PEC and political knowledge/literacy are differentially related to the different aspects of political socialization. Where, however, is political knowledge/literacy obtained? To answer this question we tried to examine the relationship of PEC to political knowledge/literacy. The variation in the level of PEC measured as History does not seem to have much of an effect. The relationship becomes quite interesting in the case of PEC measured as social studies and political knowledge/literacy at the high school level. At the university level, increased PEC leads to increased political knowledge/literacy but we do not have any statistical significance. Also, it seems that the relationship is most obvious on the Langton Factual Test.

The three sets of hypotheses tested summarized the above relationships as follows:

- Set I. The Higher the exposure to PEC the Higher the Political Socialization of the students.
- Set II. The Higher the exposure to PEC the Higher the Political Knowledge/Literacy of the students.
- Set III. The Higher the Political Knowledge/Literacy of the students the Higher the Political Socialization of the students.

To summarize, we can say that the three sets of hypotheses were generally supported since the relationships obtained were in the predicted direction, although not significant statistically.

It seems, however, that the most interesting result obtained is related to the differentiation we made at the beginning of our study between PEC and political knowledge/literacy and political socialization.

It seems that PEC provides knowledge important in developing greater political knowledge, interest, spectator politicization, political

discourse, and efficacy, while political knowledge/literacy obtained independently of PEC seems to be most important in the case of political cynicism, and political tolerance. Furthermore, factual knowledge seems to be the most important type of knowledge in the latter case. It could be that for political cynicism and civic tolerance, personality factors such as authoritarianism may be the confounding factor. This is somewhat supported in the case of the York Test when those who scored low have a higher authoritarianism mean score as a group than those who scored higher on the same test. (Table I)

Of course the fact that some of the socialization concepts are better developed and therefore are measured by sharper tools, may have affected significantly the pattern discussed in the previous paragraphs. This is best illustrated in the case of the political efficacy component as opposed to the other variables on which political socialization is measured. From the substantive and methodological point of view this is an area where more research is needed.

Because of restricted entry into the university system in particular, the Bahamian students we have studied are an elite group and therefore we can say that for our sample the school influence is relatively important, combined with the experience of travel abroad for higher education and exposure to television. However, since the time period of the socialization of our sample coincide with important political changes - independence, first experience with a local government, etc. the political socialization effect of the family may have been undermined. We do agree with Langton that "attempts to map the political development of individuals must inevitably become involved with the relative contribution of different social institutions throughout the life cycle. This question, as much as any other, represents the substantive and methodological frontier of political socialization research". (Langton, 1966)

Given that the aim in schools is the development of democratically-minded citizens, perhaps the most obvious implication for education to be drawn from our study is that we need to provide more and better exposure to

TABLE I: Summary of Independent Variables and their effect on Outcomes of Political Socialization

	HS	U	KNOWLEDGE		
	PEC	PEC	L	S	Y
Political interest	+	+	-	-	-
Newspaper	+	+ ^S	-	-	-
Radio	+	+	-	-	+ ^S
Political discourse	+	+	+ ^S		
Political efficacy	+	+ ^S	+	+	+
Political cynicism	-	-	+ ^S	-	+ ^S
Political tolerance	-	-	+ ^S	-	+ ^S

subjects having the potential to educate in that particular mode of political thinking and behaviour. Our data is in the direction of support for the widespread assumption that the subjects of the social sciences are particularly potent as a source of political education. This, therefore, implies the provision of an integrated curricula in the social sciences, arts and humanities which will expose youth from the early ages to the major concepts and principles about political man in a variety of environments. The emphasis of this curriculum will be, not on the presentation and acquisition of facts, but on the understanding of concepts which will afford citizens the capacity to understand political behaviour.

We have, through our data, observed the susceptibility of youths to be cynical and intolerant of peoples other than themselves - in essence the 'out groups'. In a democracy, there seems to be a need to cultivate in prospective citizens attitudes which will dispose them to be willing to understand and respect others as persons. This amounts to saying that in accordance with our democratic aims there is need to re-structure courses especially in respect of content. We need to decide the extent to which we can continue to present biased history and geography lessons - ideologically

or otherwise. We need to determine whether and for how long we can persist in advancing idealistic conceptions of how the democratic citizen can and does function, when the surrounding environment produces evidence to the contrary.

The data examined further underlined the capacity of the social environment of the school especially with regard to composition in terms of race and SES to affect socialization outcomes. This seems to indicate that at the high school level at least, where there is less autonomy, a need for the integration of groups - not only in terms of race, but also in terms of sex and social class. For children and youth who are taught that the social theory which defines their particular social and political system is democracy, must experience conflict if they are surrounded by socially, racially or sexually exclusive schools. The point we are trying to make here is that, the creation of heterogenous class socializing environments will promote the stability of democratic political systems if the group in whose direction the others defer, is generally supportive of the democratic political system.

Whilst illustrating the importance of PEC as an instrument of political socialization this study has also focused on the non-educational sources of political beliefs and orientations. The family, especially as it relates to structure and organization does play a part in the formation of political attitudes. For example, the child who comes from a home

in which parents are comparatively speaking, educationally deprived, is affected more by exposure to PEC. Moreover, the individual whose parents in the process of his growing up, made some gesture towards the democratization of the family unit, possesses certain politically viable qualities which are either not present or not as pronounced and developed in those youths who were reared in homes in which authority derives from position and hence rests exclusively with the parents. Admittedly, the family is less tractable than the educational institution. Under these circumstances, successful education for democracy seems to require that families be made aware of the goals basic to the persistence of the political system. For it seems likely that the development of democratically minded citizens must be made an explicit objective of social policy and parents must be encouraged via the media, local organizations and government sponsored community programmes to re-organize families and child-rearing practises in accordance with the larger objectives of society.

Because of the relative absence of institutions of higher learning in the Bahamas, University students are an elite group. According to the statistics released by the Ministry of Education and Culture, in 1975-1976, there were 238 students abroad in universities and colleges. This means therefore that our sample represents a case study about the political education of a part of this elite, since we have examined the development of attitudes in approximately one-sixth of the entire university population of Bahamian students*.

It is therefore our hope that the next step in related research will be a comparative examination of the different groups of Bahamian university students studying in different parts of North America, Europe and the West Indies.

*The figures given here seem small. This is because the statistics speak only for students studying abroad on government sponsored scholarships and loans.

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