Adolescents' Political Socialization in Changing Contexts: An International Study in the Spirit of Nevitt Sanford

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The recently completed IEA Civic Education Study collected data from 140,000 adolescent students in a total of 29 countries. A recent examination of the work of Nevitt Sanford shows that many aspects of the IEA Civic Education Study are parallel to methods and conclusions of his research from the 1950's through the 1970's and partake in the spirit of his work as well as extending it. These parallels include the use of a contextualized approach in the study of adolescents' socialization and the value of studying groups with extreme response patterns.

KEY WORDS: political socialization, cross-cultural studies, civic education, adolescent attitudes, surveys

The founders of the International Society of Political Psychology named the Sanford Award for one of their colleagues, Nevitt Sanford, rather than calling it the Application of Political Psychology Award. Because I believe that organizations should affirm their history and foundations, I decided to learn more about the life and work of this distinguished political psychologist and to build this presentation around what I learned. The first section deals with who Nevitt Sanford was and some unexpected parallels in our lives and work. I then describe the methodology and findings of the recently completed IEA Civic Education Study and indicate, by quoting from some of Sanford's writings discovered in preparing for this presentation, how Sanford's work with adults and university students parallels the IEA Study in its methods and approaches (Amadeo, Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Husfeldt, & Nikolova, 2002; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001; Torney-Purta, Schwille, & Amadeo, 1999). These parallels include the use of qualitative and quantitative methods, a multimode and contextualized

approach to the study of adolescents' political socialization, and the value of studying groups with extreme response patterns. Finally, there are some reflections about what I would like to discuss with Nevitt Sanford about this study and political psychology were he still alive, and about ways in which the IEA Study has contributed to future studies of political socialization.

Nevitt Sanford and the Spirit and Tradition of His Work

Nevitt Sanford was born in 1909. After receiving degrees from the University of Virginia and Columbia, Sanford went as a doctoral student to Harvard in the 1930s to work on the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) with Henry Murray. Here the parallels begin. I went as a graduate student to Harvard nearly 30 years later also fascinated with personality testing and asked to be assigned to Henry Murray. Instead I was assigned to a study of delay of gratification, offering school-children a choice between a small 5-cent candy bar today and a big 10-cent candy bar next week. This was a long way from psychodynamics and projective tests, and after a year I transferred to the University of Chicago, where I earned my Ph.D. in human development. There my interests in psychological measurement changed from adult personality to children's attitudes. Research on political socialization was beginning, with collaboration between a psychologist (Robert Hess) and a political scientist (David Easton). From offering candy bars I went to asking children, "Does the president care what people like you and your family think," and co-authoring a book, *The Development of Political Attitudes in Children* (Hess & Torney, 1967). Within 2 years after my Ph.D. I had embarked on the first study of civic education in nine Western European countries conducted by IEA (the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement) (Torney, Oppenheim, & Farnen, 1975). Now in the closing years of my career, I have had the opportunity and challenge to lead a study of the same area and topic with the accumulated experience of my career as a guide.

What does it mean to say that the IEA Civic Education Study partakes of the spirit of Sanford's work? In the early years of his career, he was part of a large study, *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950), where he had two German collaborators, Theodor Adorno and Else Frenkel-Brunswik, who had fled from the Nazis to the University of California at Berkeley. Some of Sanford's memories of Adorno provide a perspective. In 1986 Sanford wrote,

> We did not see how our quantitative and clinical methods (in the book) could provide any crucial tests of the big theories (of the Frankfurt School) . . . [however], Adorno was a most stimulating intellectual companion . . . He was very helpful when it came to thinking up items for the F scale. (p. 211)

The IEA Civic Education Study just completed was a collaboration between Humboldt University of Berlin in the new Germany and the University of

Maryland. And we also found IEA Steering Committee members from Poland to Greece to Italy who were good at "thinking up items" for scales. Another parallel is financial. Sanford noted that a grant of $500 was the start of *The Authoritarian Personality.* He also commented on how rare it was for senior social scientists to successfully collaborate for 5 years. Here the parallels continue, in our relatively meager funding for the IEA Study (pieced together from several foundations) and our strong collegial relationship (supported for 9 years by electronic communication across at least 12 time zones). Finally, there is Sanford's mentoring of Dan Levinson (a co-author of *The Authoritarian Personality*), who later pioneered the study of adult lives. Here too there is a parallel, because the entire IEA group has a commitment to bringing younger international scholars into the field.

Sanford was appointed a professor of psychology at the University of California at Berkeley in 1940, but the university dismissed him and 11 other faculty members in 1950 during the McCarthy era for refusing to sign a loyalty oath. He commented, looking back in 1986, as follows:

> The "time of the oath" taught me that what university employees actually did about the oath was far from being just a matter of their personality dispositions; economic, social and cultural factors in the contemporary situation were often crucial determinants. (p. 212)

This shaped his views of political psychology. He was reinstated by the California Supreme Court in 1959 and in 1968 founded the Wright Institute, whose goal was the interdisciplinary study of social problems.

Findings and Methods of the IEA Study Contextualized by Sanford's Work and Current Thinking About Political Psychology

The Authoritarian Personality, although criticized by many, was nonetheless central in what Sullivan, Rahn, and Randolph (2002) charted as the earliest era of political psychology dealing with personality and politics. The approach of studying political attitudes and beliefs that Sullivan and his colleagues associate with the 1970s (Hess & Torney, 1967) and studying schemas of political problem solving by adolescents associated with the 1980s (Torney-Purta, 1994) both helped to frame the IEA Study, which dealt with a wide range of knowledge and cognitions, attitudes, belief or concepts, and actions or practices, rather than concentrating on one of them.

Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in the Study of Adolescents' Civic Engagement

Although an explicit distinction between qualitative and quantitative research was not a matter of much debate for Sanford and his colleagues 50 years ago, his research modeled the combination of the two with special emphasis on clinical

interviews and individual case studies. The first phase of the recent IEA Study consisted of a qualitative series of structured national case studies conducted by social scientists and educators within each of the countries. This was supplemented by some focus groups and Internet-based conferences to get the voice of students internationally into the instrument. This phase was also a consensus-building process of a scope that is unusual in such studies. It resulted in a book, *Civic Education Across Countries: Twenty-Four National Case Studies From the IEA Civic Education Project* (Torney-Purta et al., 1999).

There is no such thing as political thinking free of context. Hence, the 29 national research coordinators reported about the expectations for civic knowledge, attitudes, and behavior in their respective countries, and these reports became the basis for our framework for building tests and interpreting the results. Just as Sanford framed a great deal of his work around issues of social change, a continuing stimulus to the thinking of the IEA group—especially when the study began in the early 1990s—was the collapse of communism and the creation of new democracies whose leaders and educators were required to explore changes in civic education. Late in the 20th century there was also increasing concern in the established democracies about declining interest in public affairs and participation, especially among the young. This is not a problem new to this era, however. Sanford (1967) presented a picture of the 1960s quite different from the one often associated with the activism of the student movement in California:

> In a list of 14 items administered to Stanford University students in the mid-1960s which included "participation in activities directed toward national or international betterment," "participation as a citizen in the affairs of your community," and "helping other people," none of these three items was ranked in third place or higher by more than 11 percent of the students. Even the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley (during this period) attracted only a minority of the student population. (p. 24)

In the IEA Study, many of the same individuals participated as research coordinators in both the more qualitative and more quantitative phases. Moreover, we received original items and suggestions for revisions over a period of several years from educators in many countries. This commitment to decentering the item development for the survey/test strengthened the extent to which the study was cross-national at its core and addressed issues seen to be important in many areas of the world.

Valuing the Perspectives of Respondents to the Surveys

The IEA Study's framing concepts and theories focused on the embedding of the individual and of psychological processes in a social context or situation. The study used an "octagon" model that exemplified this and also relied on socio-cultural theory and notions of situated cognition, such as those espoused by Lave and Wenger (1991) about everyday communities of practice.

A recent perusal of Sanford's work found the following quotation from 30 years ago that could have been written about the design of the IEA Study: "People's views and perceptions of themselves in environments make a difference" (Sanford, 1970, p. 10). In the early 1980s he castigated experimental social psychologists for fragmenting the very individuals they investigated and advised them to try to understand how the people they were studying saw their environments (Sanford, 1982). The IEA Study relied on measures asking individual young people how they perceived their classrooms and schools as well as their discussions with family and friends, seeking (where possible) confirmatory information from teachers and other students, but not assuming that the teacher or aggregate groups of students had the only legitimate views.

In phase 2 of the IEA Study (the quantitative statistical part of the research using a test and survey), the students' responses and perceptions were central. Two multiple-choice tests each consisting of about 40 items were developed from a pool of about 180 items. One test was for 14-year-olds; the other, with some of the same items, was for 17- to 19-year-olds. Following the suggestions of about 30 national research coordinators, these 40-minute instruments concentrated on students' understanding of democratic concepts and principles as well as skills in interpreting political information such as cartoons and newspaper articles. No items specific to any one nation's government structure were included. The second class-hour of the instrument consisted of measures of concepts of democracy and citizenship, of attitudes (many of them derived from sources such as the General Social Survey), and of current and expected political participation or practice. The 11 IRT (item response theory–based) scales for knowledge and attitudes have strong psychometric properties across countries. The data and interpretations from those instruments reported in this section come from two volumes. The first, *Citizenship and Education in Twenty-eight Countries: Civic Knowledge and Engagement at Age Fourteen*, was released in March 2001 (Torney-Purta et al., 2001). It reports findings from 90,000 students tested in 1999 in 28 countries: Australia, Belgium (French), Bulgaria, Chile, Colombia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong (SAR), Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States.

The second volume, released in July 2002, was *Civic Knowledge and Engagement: An IEA Study of Upper Secondary Students* (Amadeo et al., 2002). It reported findings from 50,000 16- to 19-year-olds tested in 2000 in 16 countries: Chile, Colombia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Hong Kong (SAR), Israel, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russian Federation, Slovenia, Sweden, and Switzerland (German).

Both volumes report on nationally representative samples of schools and randomly chosen classes of students in those schools. There is a massive amount of data for analysis between and within countries. The basic data from both the 14-year-olds and the 16- to 19-year-olds has been released for secondary analysis (Lehmann, 2004).

Multiple Modes of Civic Engagement

Many of the dynamics of IEA's recent work find echoes in Sanford's reflections. He, of course, was interested in the "democratic personality." He believed that to overcome authoritarianism and achieve independence of thinking,

> students will have to have knowledge to resist dogma; practice in criticism; [and finally] the self esteem and confidence that will permit them to stand in opposition to pressures of authority and of the immediate social group. (Sanford, 1968, p. 865)

In a parallel way the IEA Study was formulated in the early 1990s using a broadened conception of civic engagement appropriate for democracy. Independent of any direct influence from Sanford's work, the IEA researchers arrived at a list of elements quite similar to this recently discovered quotation. The study's instrument included multiple modes and measures of civic engagement. This is in contrast to many programs that aim to revive the civic sense in young people and look at the institutions (schools or youth organizations) that might accomplish that goal but focus on a single outcome. Some program developers are disturbed by young people's ignorance and therefore seek to enhance students' knowledge of government structures. Others are motivated by declining numbers of young citizens who turn out for elections, and they seek to increase voting (sometimes without very much concern about the information that the voter might seek about candidates or issues). There are still others concerned by the decline in membership in civil-society organizations who seek to increase willingness to volunteer. Sometimes each group seems to be promoting a single definition of the problem to the exclusion of others (or of linkages between them). One of the main messages of the IEA Study is that there are multiple modes of engaged citizenship. These certainly include knowledge, voting, and volunteering, but also encompass other types of psychological engagement with society (sense of confidence in one's ability to make a difference in the groups to which one belongs) or willingness to protest non-violently against injustice. This makes the task of enhancing civic engagement more complex but at the same time more realistic.

If we look at the items on which there was considerable consensus among the respondents to the IEA Study instrument, it is clear that the profile of young people's beliefs about civic engagement is changing. Although young people believe that good citizens should obey the law and should vote, other conventional political activities such as joining a political party or participating in discussing political issues as an adult are not very well regarded. Instead, young people say that activities to promote human rights, protect the environment, and benefit the community are important.

It is intriguing to note some of the country differences in the IEA scales that contrast the conventional views of adult citizenship (voting or joining parties) with the social movement–related views (activities to promote human rights, protect

the environment, or benefit the community). On these scales, the post-communist countries showed a mixed picture; some of them (e.g., Poland and Lithuania) were above the international mean, and others (e.g., the Czech Republic and Estonia) were below it. Generally speaking, the countries where students were highly supportive of both conventional and social movement–related activities among citizens were in southern Europe (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, and Portugal) and the Americas (Chile, Colombia, and the United States). The countries where students showed relatively low levels of support for these kinds of activities were in the northern part of western Europe (all the Nordic countries, as well as England, Germany, and Belgium), and also Australia. Sweden stands out as a country in which students are highly participative within the school environment, but this interest appears not to transfer to arenas of potential action in the political community outside the school.

Results in the United States also indicate a differentiated pattern of participation: Students are more likely than those in any other country to say they have already volunteered in some community effort, but less likely than those in any other country to say that they regularly read international news in the newspaper.

The Appropriateness of Studying Early Adolescents

Whether the study of adolescent political socialization is of value to political scientists or psychologists has been debated for at least 35 years. Sanford also expressed a view on this issue:

> Adults do not change as readily as children precisely because they have a greater repertoire of behavior. Unless they are presented with sufficient challenge, they will react as they have in the past. (Sanford, 1968, p. 860)

He continued to note that adolescence is a time particularly rich in possibilities for change.

One of the sources of interdisciplinary misunderstanding is that most psychologists have to be convinced that anything happening *after age 12* makes a difference, whereas political scientists have to be convinced that anything happening *before age 18* makes a difference. Perhaps this is changing. Conover and Searing (2002) saw concerns about citizenship preparation bringing together comparativists, political philosophers, and behaviorally oriented political scientists studying a variety of ages. Sullivan, Rahn, and Rudolph (2002), in the same volume, encouraged the study of adolescents:

> Political scientists have often adopted the position that unless childhood or adolescent patterns of political thinking and behavior can be directly linked to adult behavior in a sort of one-to-one correspondence, the study of political socialization cannot be justified. We think this is an overly narrow viewpoint. Developmental approaches . . . link the structure and

content of thought at one point with the entire web of thought and action that preceded the present. . . . Understanding the present cannot be divorced from a comprehension of the past, both for individuals and for social and political aggregations. (p. 33)

One can hope that the release of the IEA Study's data for analysis by social scientists around the world may open new interest in the study of adolescents' political socialization and may delineate the role of schools more clearly. (For a first step in this direction, see Torney-Purta, 2002.)

Practical constraints led to the IEA Study's testing of 14-year-olds rather than slightly older adolescents. Compulsory education concludes at 15 in some of the potential participating countries, making sampling of older students in schools problematic. Looking back from a vantage point after major analysis has been completed, study of this age group seems to have been appropriate. An important conclusion of the IEA Study was that by the age of 14 many young people are already members of the political culture they share with adults (Torney-Purta, 2002). This is best illustrated by two scales that are similar to those frequently used with adults: trust in civic-related institutions, and belief that government should take responsibility for or intervene in economic matters. The country differences observed among 14-year-olds are nearly identical to those observed among adults by scholars using the World Values Survey (Inglehart, 1997). For example, the IEA respondents in the new democracies, including the post-communist countries, scored low on political trust; in contrast, Denmark, Norway, and Switzerland appeared at the top of the distribution. On another scale, 14-year-olds in the United States were less likely than those in any of the other 27 countries to believe that the government had a responsibility to intervene in the economy or ensure a decent standard of living for the unemployed. Countries scoring high on that scale were Bulgaria and the Russian Federation. Already these 8th and 9th graders have absorbed political views about the trustworthiness of government and about the extent to which the government should be involved in the economy that largely correspond to those of the parent generation.

A second interesting facet of the IEA data is the differences observed between the average 14-year-old and the average 17- to 19-year-old student tested in the upper secondary study. In all 15 of the countries testing both age groups, the older students were more knowledgeable than the younger students (average increments of about one-third of a standard deviation on the test per year), as well as less trusting of government (Amadeo et al., 2002; Torney-Purta & Amadeo, 2003). We would have missed these differences and might have failed to realize the important role of the years of early to late adolescence in the political socialization process if we had tested only older students.

Another piece of evidence is that one of the earliest formed identities, gender, already influences political activity at age 14 (Torney-Purta et al., 2001). The most striking gender difference was observed in the Support for Women's Political

Rights Scale, a difference of nearly a full standard deviation in some countries, with females more supportive than males in every country. Females were also substantially more supportive of immigrants' rights, more likely to collect money for a social cause, and less likely to express general interest in politics and to say they would block traffic as a form of protest. These gender differences were largely the same among the younger and older adolescents (Amadeo et al., 2002).

Improving the Socialization Environment

A very important part of the IEA Study was going beyond country differences to study the influences important within each country. Sanford (1970) indicated a similar interest: "Most social science questions . . . should be of this general kind: how to arrange the environment, institution, or the social setting in such a way as to promote the development of all the individuals concerned" (p. 14). In fact, Sanford (1968) examined multiple features of the educational (college) environment—the curriculum, methods of teaching, organization of teacher-student relations, and extracurricular activities—asking what each contributes. The IEA Study researchers arrived independently at the same direction for analysis and conducted both basic predictors analysis (Amadeo et al., 2002; Torney-Purta et al., 2001) and multilevel analysis (Torney-Purta & Stapleton, 2002).

Findings from both types of analysis suggest the importance of emphases in the content of the curriculum, high educational expectations, a classroom climate in which students are encouraged to actively participate by expressing their opinions, a school climate in which students feel they have power, watching television news and reading newspapers, and discussing politics with parents as ways to enhance both the knowledge of civic matters and the inclination to vote. Demographic variables that make a positive difference in knowledge and likelihood of voting are educational background of the home and being native-born (rather than an immigrant).

A closer examination of different kinds of participation shows different patterns of correlates. For example, some recent exploratory analysis showed that the perceived likelihood of participating as an adult in community service has quite different correlates from those of other forms of participation (such as voting). In fact, it is the less knowledgeable students who believe they are going to participate in their communities, while it is the more knowledgeable students who plan to vote and inform themselves about candidates. In contrast, interest in political issues shows little relation to volunteering, but is correlated with joining a political party and to some extent with potential voting (Torney-Purta & Richardson, in press).

These conclusions about the school's and the family's influence echo Sanford's (1967) conclusions drawn from a study of college students nearly four decades earlier:

> Although courses in government can awaken the critical spirit . . . ,
> courses are regarded . . . more as the subject of examination than as a
> challenge to the way one lives. In order to strengthen social responsibil-
> ity . . . one must worry not only about the curriculum but about the values
> it lives by, the examples it sets. (p. 27)

Certainly this is true for the students recently studied by IEA, especially in the
findings about the role of classrooms and schools as models of democracy.

The concept of political efficacy threads its way through much of the politi-
cal psychology literature. Confidence in one's ability to make a difference in the
social environment, a sort of self and collective efficacy, is clearly important.
Sanford summarized his work in a similar vein:

> Once the student is aroused by social and political issues, he needs not
> only the support of a sympathetic group, but confidence in his own
> thought, judgment and decision-making—a confidence born only of
> practice. Instead of trying to avoid controversial issues, . . . [we should]
> promote analysis of them. (Sanford, 1967, p. 28)

And in another article he noted that it was the teacher's role to keep challenging
entrenched responses in the interest of growth (Sanford, 1968). These comments
are extremely germane to understanding the results of the IEA test and survey
research.

The Study of Groups with Extreme Attitudes

The final point of connection to Sanford, discovered in this recent review of
his work, was his interest in moving beyond an examination of central tendency
to look at extreme groups, even if they were rather small: "When we see 'trends'
there are [still] significant numbers of people who do not go along with the major-
ity" (1986, p. 213). Further, the study of the authoritarian personality was built
on the assumption that even if one expected to find only a small group of persons
with fascist attitudes in the United States in the later 1940s and early 1950s, it
would be valuable to develop the F-scale to identify them. One might not be as
concerned about the average as about how many had high F-scale scores.

This parallels a direction of some IEA exploratory analysis. On average,
young people have positive attitudes toward immigrants (Torney-Purta et al.,
2001). There are less positive attitudes in Germany and Switzerland than in the
other countries, but even in those two countries the majority of students express
willingness to grant rights to education and even the vote to immigrants. However,
the small group of students with very negative attitudes also ought to be of inter-
est. Even a small group with such views can have a very negative influence if its
members carry these attitudes into action.

To study this, in the United States and Germany we created contrast groups consisting of students with attitude scores $1\frac{1}{2}$ standard deviations below the mean on support for immigrants' rights and compared them to students who were at or above the mean on this scale. The students in the group with negative attitudes strongly disagreed with the various items about immigrant rights, whereas those in the other group agreed or strongly agreed. These groups with negative and with average-to-positive attitudes (respectively) were compared on a series of other items in the instrument. It was sobering to see some of the items on which they differed. Obeying the law is a hallmark of good citizenship according to the large majority of students in most of the countries in the study, but among the group with highly negative immigrant attitudes, about 25% of the students said that it was "not important for citizens to obey the law." Only about 2% of the students with positive attitudes toward immigrants endorsed this view. Further, in both Germany and the United States, relative to students with positive immigrant attitudes, two to three times as many students with negative immigrant attitudes believed that it would be good for democracy if people critical of government were prohibited from speaking out or if peaceful protest was banned.

To place this in perspective, there are proportionally more students with highly negative attitudes toward immigrants in Germany, but the constellation of associated attitudes appears at least as problematic in the United States. More comprehensive study of extreme groups among the IEA respondents is part of planned future analysis.

Conclusions and an Imagined Conversation with Nevitt Sanford

The unexpected echoes of Sanford's work in the IEA Study prompt an examination of three recurring issues, leading to this question: If Nevitt Sanford were alive, what would I like to discuss with him?

First I would seek elaboration of his comment that psychologists "turn substantive issues into methodological ones" (Sanford, 1986, p. 213). In the current context, political scientists often seem relatively oblivious to the methodological or measurement issues and want to "get to the substance." In fact, measures of political knowledge used in most adult surveys are short, psychometrically of poor quality, or focused on tidbits of knowledge about political persons and issues. Concern about substance and about method need not be in conflict, however. The substantive nature of a discussion of research issues can be enhanced by trying to write an instrument or agree upon an analytic model. This is especially true when dealing with social scientists from different cultures where assumptions and meanings may differ.

Second, I would ask Sanford for insight about how to deal with a set of problems in interdisciplinary collaboration that seem to have changed very little in the past several decades. He commented when describing the founding of the Wright

Institute that "no tradition bound university is likely to offer a home to an institution based on research applied to problems" (Sanford, quoted in Canon, 1988). What comments would he have in the current setting, where only a few social science fields have successfully moved to interdisciplinarity?

Third, one of the most striking things to a reader new to his work is likely to be the vehemence with which Sanford spoke in favor of action research, which he came to call "research action" (1969). Why, after several decades, has there been so little action (*or* research action *or* action research) to implement activities supported by strong empirical research evidence? These include discussion of controversial issues that challenge students, recognizing multiple approaches and outcomes rather than taking a narrow focus, making information about society meaningful to students, and helping them connect citizenship to their identity and practice.

Some aspects of the IEA Civic Education Study also extend perspectives common in the era when Sanford conducted his research and writing. New modes of communication and an awareness that research on socialization about democracy must take place in a democratic framework has stimulated more extensive collaboration in the design of studies and in the interpretation of findings. Cross-cultural psychologists have contributed new directions for methodology in areas such as decentered or distributed test development. Developmental psychologists have become more frequent partners in political psychology. They have contributed theoretical frames that focus on the everyday experience of young people and on the ways in which they are embedded in different contexts. A new wave of political socialization research may be in the making.

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