

4TH AND 6TH GRADE 4TH AND 6TH GRADERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS NATIONS AND NATIONAL GROUPS – A HUNGARIAN PILOT STUDY

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The Hungarian core curriculum in line with the intentions of the European Union (Chiarello, 2012) aims to foster children's tolerance towards nations and national groups. It is necessary to explore factors affecting children's attitudes before creating effective educational programs.

Cognitive developmental theory (Aboud, 1998, 2008) supposes a connection between children's attitudes and their cognitive abilities. According to social identity development theory (Nesdale, 2008) children's group membership motivates them to devalue out-groups. A synthetic approach (Barrett, 2007, 2011) tries to integrate the different theories and emphasizes the joint influence of cognitive, motivational and contextual factors. The aim of this study is (1) to adapt international scales and (2) to investigate Hungarian elementary school students' attitudes towards nations and national groups. Furthermore, (3) the connection between children's attitudes and their national identity was investigated.

Participants are Hungarian elementary school students, a total of 244 children from 4th and 6th grade. The questionnaire includes a standardized international scale and a task (see Barrett, 2007). These assess children's strength of identification with their national group, and their in-group and out-group evaluations. Targeted out-groups are Americans, Romani people (Gypsies), Romanians and Polish people.

Results show that the adapted scale and task (Strength of Identification Scale: .94; trait attribution task: .77) are reliable. Only the evaluations of Hungarians and Romanians vary significantly across age groups. Younger students attribute more positive characteristics to Hungarians ($t=3.20$, $p=.002$) and Romanian people ($t=3.39$, $p=.001$), while older ones view Hungarians more negatively ($t=-2.37$, $p=.019$). This result suggests that children's perception of the in-group gets more detailed. In accordance with our expectation, older students identify significantly stronger ($t=-15.60$, $p<.001$) with their national group. The children's strength of identification is only related to the number of negative traits that they attribute to Hungarians ($r=-.17$, $p<.001$), and the general liking of Hungarians ($r=.27$, $p=0.01$). Children attribute significantly more positive traits to Polish people, than to Americans, Romanians and the Romani people. This result indicates that children do not reject all out-groups; there are groups which are more favorable depending mainly on the socio-historical context of the students' country.

These outcomes are the first steps to explore the set of variables which affects students' out-group evaluation. The adapted instruments provide new possibilities in the assessment of children's national identity and intergroup attitudes. Hopefully, further findings will help curriculum and textbook developers to create unbiased educational tools or new developmental programs.

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