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ABSTRACT

This paper describes procedures used by the author in analyzing data obtained from observation of a 9-day fourth-grade social studies unit developed by the Washington University Social Studies Curriculum Project. Analysis included the development of a chart showing the structure of each lesson from two teachers' lesson plans. The actual sequence of events was then compared with the chart, and the two teachers' classroom procedures were compared. Results of the study will be incorporated into the author's doctoral dissertation, tentatively titled," A Description and Analysis of a Sequence of Innovative Lessons Taught in an Elementary School Classroom." (RT)

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PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION AND LESSON PLAN ANALYSIS: IMPLICATIONS FOR CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTIONAL RESEARCH

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Two and a half years ago, as a student in Dr. Louis Smith's seminar "The Classroom as a Social System," I was asked to carry out a participant observation study of a school classroom. The opportunity to make such a study excited me, since in the process of carrying out that task I would be able to observe and analyze the teaching of a unit I had helped create the previous summer. As I saw it then, my job was simply to collect field notes, to write a narrative based on the field notes, and to develop concepts and hypotheses that would help explain the events observed and described in the narrative. What I didn't know at that time was that the observations I was going to make would provide me with data that I would spend more than two years analyzing.

My procedures were simple: I went into the 4th grade classroom of the city school where the unit was piloted carrying tape-recorder and note pad. I turned on the tape recorder to collect the dialogue, and in my notes kept track of who was doing the speaking and what events were occurring. In the evenings I listened to the tape-recordings and added details in my notebook that my hand was not fast enough to collect during class. That, in addition to my picking up lesson plans mimeographed by the curriculum project, constituted the data collection phase. The next step was to analyze the data. This I did by writing a narrative of each lesson, and while doing so, I considered what things of significance were

going on. Those things were described at a more abstract, theoretical level, creating statements that Zetterberg (1965) has called propositions, statements that "relate variates (or concepts) to each other" (p. 64). For example, in my narrative of the first lesson observed I noted that the pilot teacher, Mr. Phillips, made a decision to share the job of reading the text with the students. I also noted in the narrative that Mr. Phillips frequently intervened in their reading to correct the student's pronounciation of words and to discuss with them the meaning of the words. This seemed significant because it happened so often that day, many times shifting the topic of the discussion away from the story itself. In analyzing those phenomena I proceeded to compare his reading of the text in Lesson 14 with the second pilot teacher, Mr. Miller's, use of interventions when he alone read the text in Lesson 18. I noted that in each lesson not all of the interventions were the same, that some seemed to interrupt the continuity of the story, whereas others did not. Those that interrupted, I called <u>interruptive interventions</u>; those that did not, I called <u>move-along interventions</u>. Then, using an approach suggested by Smith & Goeffrey, (1968, pp. 14-15), I attempted to determine what variables could be considered antecedent variables to each kind of intervention, and which variables could be considered consequences of them. The determinants -- the difficulty of

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the materials for the students, the teacher's diagnosis of the difficulty of the materials, and the teacher's standards for acceptable student performance -- and the consequences -- pace, attentiveness, and achievement of objectives -- were all suggested by the fieldnotes and tape-recorded data (Solomon, 1968, 1970).

The seminar paper, (Solomon, 1968) which included such ideas as those above, seemed to Louis Smith and other faculty members at Washington University to be a paper that could be expanded upon to be my dissertation. Since then, I have been reanalyzing the same data, and now, finally, I feel convinced I see light at the end of what has been a very long tunnel. Part of the reason the job has taken so long is that there are very few how-to-do-it rules on participant studies in the classroom.[1]

Out of my two and a half years of challenging, sometimes exhilerating, often frustrating experiences of working with my data, I feel I have developed an approach to the data that has much promise. This approach I would like to share so that, if others decide to do a study like the one I have been doing, they could avoid at least a few of those dead-end streets where I now see I spent too much time.

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[1]Since I completed the seminar paper in 1968, a book by Glaser and Strauss (1968) and papers by Smith & Pohland (1969) and Smith & Brock (1970) were written. Those readings are useful for the classroom participant observer.

Before I describe my procedure, a few words are in order about the context of the study. The unit observed was one developed by the Washington University Social Studies Curriculum Project, a project directed by Harold Berlak and Timothy Tomlinson. That unit, like others of their project, centers about a set of characters who in a story become involved in a public policy issue that students studying the unit also come to grapple with. The particular unit I observed was concerned mainly with a ficticious, fourteen year old Russian boy called Semyon Goncharov, whose drama writing hobby absorbed so much of his time that his school grades suffered, leading him into serious problems with the Pioneer organization of which he was a member. According to the plans found in the teacher's guides, the students in the classes studying the unit would role play Semyon and the Pioneer group members and in the process would come to deal with the issue of how much conformity is it legitimate for a group to demand of its members.

I was present for all but one of the nine days that the unit lasted. As a result of the data collection activities I had a set of lesson plans, tape-recordings, transcripts based on the tape-recordings, and field notes for an entire unit, from beginning to end. I also had a set of notes taken by others who observed the same set of lessons, including notes written by those who taught the lessons. My own interests led me toward

describing how the lessons developed, one after another, and as I worked with the data, I became particularly interested in relating lessons as taught to lessons as the lesson plans suggested they be taught, and in relating lesson to lesson.

Typically, each of my chapters that analyzes a lesson begins with a "how the lesson was supposed to be taught" section, which was then followed by a section on how the lesson actually was taught.

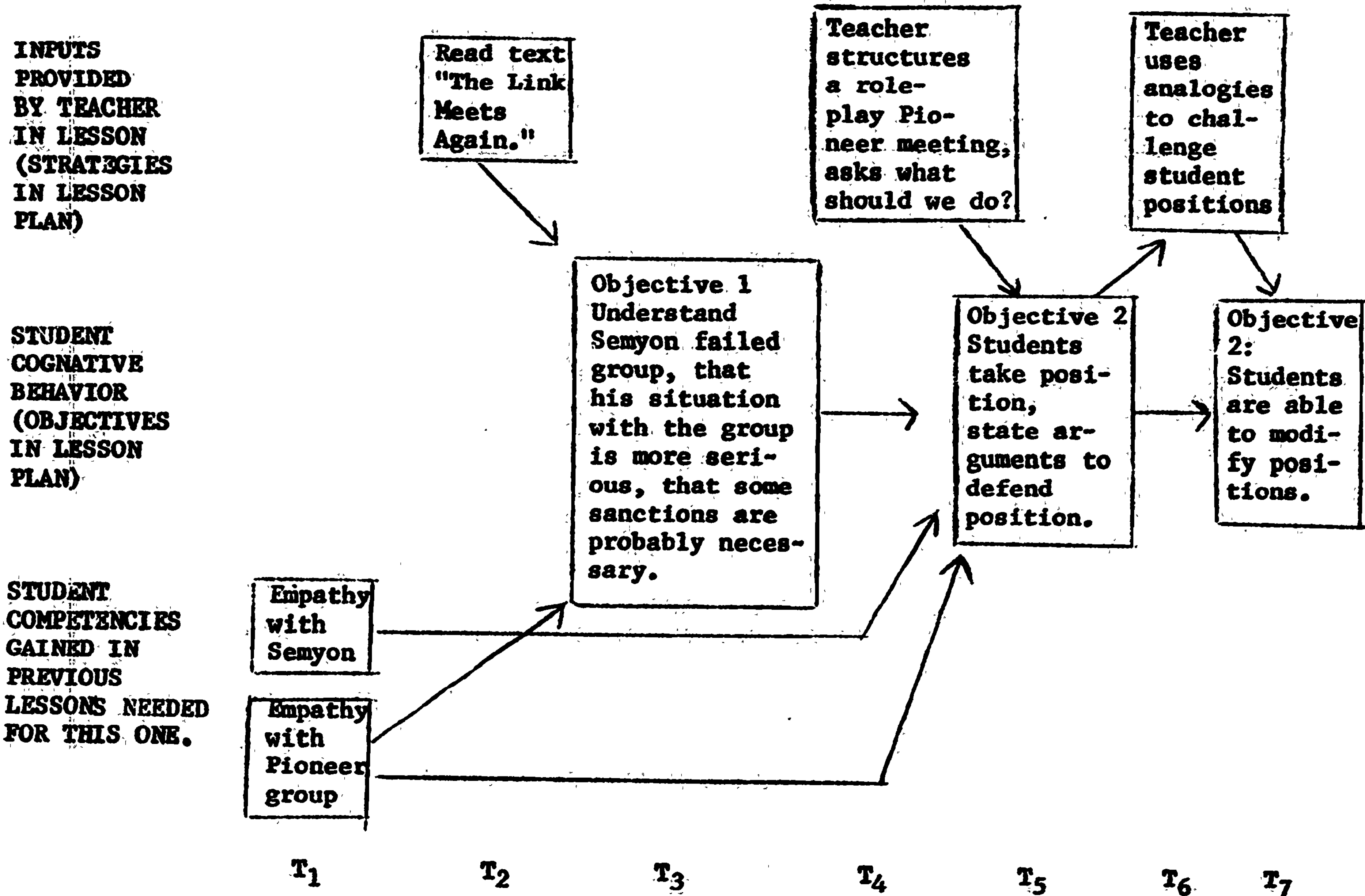
The "how the lesson was supposed to be taught" section is basically an analysis of the lesson plan, beginning with an interpretation of the objectives. The interpretation had two aspects, much as Grobman (1968) has suggested: a paraphrasing the objectives in operational terms, an approach advocated by Robert Mager, (1962) and also a paraphrasing of the objectives using concepts suggested by the cognitive and affective handbooks of the _Taxonomy of Educational Objectives_ (Bloom, et.al., 1956 and Kratwohl, et.al., 1964). Making the objectives more precise by operationalizing them assists one in assessing whether those objectives were realized. Moreover, by stating them in terms Bloom and Kratwohl suggest in their taxonomies, one is led to determine relationships among objectives, i.e., which objectives can be considered prerequisite to which other ones. Analysis of lesson plans involves not only interpretation of objectives; it also involves describing what strategies the curriculum writers

offer for accomplishing their objectives. I found that a particular lesson plan could be translated without difficulty into chart form, indicating a structure to the lesson, a structure of implicit assumptions of hypothesized relationships among objectives and strategies. The following chart illustrates the structure of assumptions resting behind the lesson plan for the final lesson of the unit:

INSERT FIGURE 1

Charting out the lesson as is suggested here is not just an intellectual exercise. It is a practical way of raising penetrating questions of the observation data. For example, data from the previous lessons indicating much student failure in gaining the competencies to have been achieved in those lessons suggests that the positions that the students take at T5 would probably be unrealistic, revealing little empathy with either Semyon or the other Pioneer group members. Also, given the fact of a perceptive teacher, knowledge of student weaknesses in those areas suggests the question of what will Mr. Miller do in this lesson to compensate for problems that occured in the earlier lessons. If we look at the chart carefully, it becomes apparent that there are many other questions that could be suggested: for example, will the analogies cause students to modify their positions? Which

Figure 1. Chart revealing the implicit structure of assumed inputs and outputs for the final lesson of the Russia Unit.



analogies will be most potent in doing so? How do we account for the greater potency of some than of others? Obviously, many other questions are suggested by the chart.

Once the analysis of the lesson plan is completed, raising a set of questions about which the investigator will concern himself, it is then time to perform the much more complex job of analyzing the data. A first step in performing that task is that of describing the phenomena observed. I have felt a responsibility to make the description as accurate and vivid as possible. In so doing, many lengthy quotations from the transcripts were provided so that the reader would be able to examine my interpretations of the data and raise questions about the adequacy of the concepts and propositions proposed. Following the description of a particular activity or tactic that the teacher took, I then attempted to conceptualize what was happening, using concept labels of my own or those of other investigators if they had a good fit to my data.[1] An important aspect of the conceptualizations I made is that they were influenced by the lesson plan. For one thing, the lesson plan provided criteria for what phenomena should be attended to in the interpretations of the data. For example, the lesson plans indicated to me that analysis of the social structure of the classroom was of less interest to me in this study

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1 An excellent source of concepts is Hyman (1968).

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than was analysis of how students respond to teacher statements and how the teacher reacts to student responses. A second influence of the lesson plan was that in the propositions developed objectives of the lessons were included among the variables, usually among the dependent variables. Third, special attention was also focused on whether what the teacher did corresponded to what one would expect from the lesson plan and what consequences resulted from deviations. Finally, attention was also given to student statements to see whether they indicated accomplishment of lesson objectives.

In the final lesson of the unit, for example, it was noted that Mr. Miller used relatively few analogies. Instead, he used hypothetical cases that showed Semyon behaving in a manner parallel to his failure to perform well in school, in each case of which his behavior resulted in harm to others of his Pioneer group. Such cases, it was found, seemed to have the same effect as analogies were supposed to have: Students did modify their positions; yet analysis of student statements indicated that the hypothetical cases caused changed positions because the students recognized the horrible consequences of Semyon's behavior in those cases, -- loss of an important basketball game and a broken leg for Semyon's friend -- not because they grasped how the link felt toward Semyon's poor schoolwork, as lesson one indicated was one intent of the lesson.

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Analysis of the transcripts and field notes indicated that Mr. Miller did many things not specified by the lesson plan. For example, he made much use of humor, he presented his hypothetical cases in such a way as to create a story having a plot, he reacted to student statements assuming a stance characterized in my paper as the role of the strong opponent. Such behaviors had much influence on the way the lesson developed, and by describing those behaviors and their hypothesized antecendents and consequences, the reader becomes aware of a complex inter-play of events in the classrc in a way that examination of the lesson plan does not even suggest.

At this point, the question might be raised, is such analysis worth all the effort? Of what value are such studies as the kind I am describing? There are three audiences that might well find such a study of great interest: First, there are the teachers who have been or will eventually teach the Washington University Elementary School Social Studies Project curriculum. They will find in such a study a vivid description of how a unit was taught by those people who have developed the unit. They will also be presented with concepts and hypotheses that they might use in interpreting their own teaching. They would also become aware of the greater complexity involved in teaching the materials than the lesson plans suggest. Reading such a study as this one may help teachers develop a functional, technical vocabulary and

be able to construe classroom events in their complexities, in ways that Philip Jackson (1968, pp. 146-7) has suggested teachers typically do not do at present.

A second audience is the curriculum writing staff of the project itself. Such an audience might not only be able to utilize the hypotheses developed and specific recommendations for modifications of the unit, but in reading the description, the story of the unit as taught, they will have food for thought that would enable them to think of modifications that this investigator himself did not think of. My study has played such a role as a formative evaluation document, helping make possible a superior unit.

Finally, the study may be of interest to those in the research community. Several concepts and hypotheses developed in this study could be made more precise in follow-up studies that would zero in on similar phenomena in different settings, using comparative analysis in the manner suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1968). For example, different ways of presenting analogies and different teacher styles of reaction to student responses to analogies could be explored in different classrooms. The goal would be conceptualization and clarification of theory, a step to precede verificational studies.

The approach just described requires much investment of time and energy in the study of a single classroom. It is obvious

that this approach alone does not constitute an adequate methodology for an evaluation of a curriculum, especially a summative evaluation. Even in the study of a single classroom the approach I have used could be strengthened by a larger data base, expanded to include student papers, interviews, and other self-reports. By confining itself to one classroom, a study of the kind described here is clearly inappropriate as an evaluation of how a unit functions in a total school district, let alone the nation. Yet not all studies need have such grand goals. Studies like this one have great power in suggesting ideas about the complexities and dynamic processes in classrooms, and as I have found enable one to gain an insight into the artistic aspects of teaching that Eisner (1963) has noted has so often been neglected. If one shares with Stake (1967) the notion that "the purpose of educational evaluation is expository: to acquaint the audience with the workings of certain educators and their learners...., (p. 5)" to tell what happened, offering as a bonus ideas useful in modifying educational programs, the approach suggested here would seem to have much power.

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