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ABSTRACT

Four interrelated questions in this paper provide a framework for examining the rationale of a model for developing a political laboratory which would fulfill meaningful objectives for civics and government instruction. The first question, why make the school the focus of the laboratory, offers reasons for preferring the school over the classroom or community as a setting for political activity. Discussion of the second question--why stress political participation--gives theories of learning and instruction and of political participation and its effects on the political system. The third question deals with how politics can be taught via the laboratory and focuses on providing a framework for viewing school politics. The last question explains ways in which knowledge building, skill building, and participation activities can be designed. The lab can transform the image of the school into a dynamic social and political unit, and can help students transfer knowledge directly into a practical political situation. Related documents are SO 005 409 and SO 005 410. (Author/SJM)

USING THE SCHOOL AS A POLITICAL LABORATORY

FOR CIVICS AND GOVERNMENT INSTRUCTION*

by

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USING THE SCHOOL AS A POLITICAL LABORATORY

FOR CIVICS AND GOVERNMENT INSTRUCTION

There are many different models which could serve as the basis for developing a political laboratory for civics and government instruction. If it is assumed that the central purpose of any set of laboratory activities is to provide systematic applications of knowledge, then probably the most widely used model is the science laboratory. In a science lab, students perform experiments which demonstrate concrete applications of principles of biology, chemistry and physics. The analog for science experiments in civics instruction has traditionally been the case study. Students have applied their knowledge of legal processes to exemplary cases of their knowledge of presidential decision-making to historic situations. One type of political laboratory could be built out of a series of such case studies which would be systematically integrated to illustrate general social science principles and findings. Under this "experimental" model students could, for example, use data and original resource packages in a laboratory to apply their general knowledge of processes of American Government across specific national or local political units.

Other models for a laboratory compete with the experimental type. One such model rises out of a growth of classroom simulations and games. Most classroom simulations attempt to create an environment in which students can participate as political actors in a wide range of roles. Students learn political principles

through their role behavior much in the same way that a driver trainer simulates road conditions and teaches students to respond to curves and stop signs. Under the "simulator" model for a laboratory, students could apply their knowledge of such political processes as decision-making or leadership in a series of carefully designed simulated situations. In this way, students could analyze alternative patterns of political behavior without placing the costs of mistakes in judgment on any actual political community

A third model provides still another alternative. Since the late 1950's when the Citizenship Education Project set out a series of activities to promote student participation in community political life, the number and types of projects which have stressed student political action as a means of applying political learning have consistently grown.[1] From visits to the local mayor to explorations as extensive as the Parkway Program in Philadelphia, taking part in political life "as it is" has become a real prototype for a laboratory.[2] This "political action" alternative could be created by setting up a series of participation experiences which would lead students to apply political knowledge in a purposive way in their local community.

The type of political laboratory proposed here combines features of each of these models in a unique way. The setting for the laboratory is the school as a

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[1]These activities outlined how projects could be designed for students such as encouraging local community members to register and vote or promoting legal aid societies. See Citizenship Education Project, Laboratory Practices in Citizenship: Learning Experiences in the Community. Teacher's College, Columbia University, 1958.

[2]The Parkway Program is explained in Charles E. Silberman, Crisis in the Classroom: The Remaking of American Education. New York: Random House, 1970, pp. 349-56.

whole. The school is viewed as a micro-political system operating under fundamental political principles such as decision-making or leadership that are common to any political system. The lab activities are designed to guide student political learning by systematically integrating knowledge-building, skill-building and student participation experiences which apply and extend the general principles. Accordingly, students not only explore and analyze school political life through the lab, but also have many opportunities to put their political knowledge to use and contribute to the ongoing political life of the school through their purposive participation. In these ways the lab retains much of the control typical of experimental settings, extends the guided training of a simulated experience to a real setting, and promotes the purposive participation found in political action models. Perhaps the proper analog is not the driver trainer situation, but rather that of a driving permit where students actually apply political knowledge in the school from the driver's seat with the guidance of a teacher. Viewed from this perspective, this particular alternative appears to offer some potential payoffs for student learning and experience not accessible through other models.

The purpose here is to spell out a more specific rationale for this particular type of political laboratory by asking four interrelated questions: 1) Why make the school the focus of the laboratory? 2) Why stress political participation? 3) How can politics be taught via the laboratory? and 4) What ways can activities be designed? Attempts to come to grips with these four questions will give us some idea of whether or not this particular alternative model can achieve meaningful objectives in civics and government instruction.

Why make the school the focus of the laboratory?

There are at least five different reasons for preferring the school over the classroom or the community as a setting for a political laboratory. The first stems from one of the central goals of civics instruction: the development of effective and responsible citizens. Within the civics classroom stress has always been put on the political knowledge requisite for these goals with the assumption that knowledge would be transferred into other political experience. The lab is designed to make the integration of knowledge and political experience explicit rather than implicit. The integration is made effective through the control that the focus on the school promotes over the conditions of learning and transfer. A meaningful match between political principles and a series of inquiry and participation experiences necessitates the identification of a carefully selected range of different organizations and individuals. Otherwise, significantly different types of political activities such as leadership or decision-making cannot be explored or experienced. This match is much easier to provide in the school than in the community because of the accessibility of a defined environmental context and the opportunity to directly work in setting conditions and identifying or controlling instructional situations. Though such control is possible in the classroom, the opportunity for integrating political knowledge and actual participation experience is considerably restricted.

Not only do schools provide an opportunity for controlled integration of political knowledge and experience, they also offer a continuity of experience that is unavailable in classroom or community settings. Effective and responsible citizenship takes time to develop. Experiences in the community are often tied

to "events": school board meetings focusing on controversial issues or specific interview situations for city council members. Classroom participation through either small group activities or simulated settings avoids the type of transfer experience which allows students to see the consequences of their political actions take effect in an ongoing systemic political setting. The school is a place where a student can, on a continuous basis, study political life and build political experience which will maximize his ability to understand political experiences and increase his sense of political efficacy.

As Barker and Gump have demonstrated, schools both large and small also offer a large number and wide variety of behavior settings through which students can observe and participate in politics.[3] Schools support a rich variety of political activities. For example, political decisions about how resources will be distributed are made in school systems everyday. School boards decide on expenditures for personnel which determine who will participate in the system. Teachers decide which materials to use in the classroom which in turn determine what students will learn to do. Students decide whether to join one activity or another, or how to devote their time and energy resources within the school setting. "What shall I do Monday?" is thus a very real political choice on all levels of the school system.

Furthermore, the accessibility of data in the school setting offers many advantages for political learning. Because data is readily available in the school setting for testing generalizations about politics, students can act as participant

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[3]R.G. Barker and P.V. Gump, Big School, Small School. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964.

observers to decision-making situations, interview relevant leaders, or make changes in student organizations in order to determine how alternative forms of political organization work. Students can, for example, devise alternative ways of organizing student councils and determine which form is most effective in their school setting. The school laboratory also provides unique opportunities for students to study the history and development of school situations. Students could, for example, undertake content analyses of school newspapers or local newspaper files on school-community issues in order to study the political history of an ongoing political system, to determine how changes have come about over time, and to make predictions and evaluations of possible future developments.

Finally, there is no reason why the school itself should not be the beneficiary of students' increased political knowledge and experience. Knowledge of school organization can contribute to more effective communication among groups participating in the school community. The mobilization of student efforts can channel leadership and interest among students into making positive contributions to the political system which most immediately affects their lives. In some cases, the laboratory package may be used to develop permanent constructive roles for students as part of the political community of the school. Most important, the benefits of political knowledge and participation can be fed back into the school itself.

Thus, using the school as a whole as the locus for a political laboratory affords some unique advantages over other settings. Controlled integration between political knowledge and experience, continuity and variety in applications, accessibility of data, and potential contributions to the school itself are maximized under

this particular alternative. In addition, when the school becomes the focus for study, it is possible to link the school political system and other political units on the national and transnational levels enabling students to compare their knowledge and experience to a wide variety of political contexts.

Why stress political participation?

The above discussion has indicated some of the benefits of using the school as a laboratory over alternate settings; yet the advantages of the laboratory participation experience over other instructional procedures are not self-evident. Why construct a laboratory for learning about politics and gaining political experience? Why do students need political experience anyway? The answers to these questions stem mainly from two sources: theories of learning and instruction and theories of political participation and its effects on the political system.

If learning is defined as "a relatively permanent change in a behavioral tendency which results from reinforced practice,"[4] then part of the justification for participation rests on the reinforcement it provides and its contribution to changes in patterns of student behavior. In one sense, learning through participation is not essentially different from other types of learning. To be meaningful, participation must be related to other learning activities and must be based on previous knowledge and experience.[5] Yet the laboratory provides a unique advantage of offering applications for knowledge which are both based on knowledge learned

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[4]John P. DeCecco, The Psychology of Learning and Instruction: Educational Psychology. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968, p. 431.

[5]David P. Ausubel, Educational Psychology: A Cognitive View. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968.

in coursework and directly related to experiences that for students are familiar everyday activities. In this way, the laboratory capitalizes on the students long-term previous knowledge and experience in schools to provide meaningful applications and reinforcement for new knowledge.

The instructional advantages of participation are also unique in some ways. If instruction is defined as the creation of conditions that facilitate learning, then another part of the justification for participation rests on the way in which participation activities set conditions for the learning process. Participation through the laboratory provides a mechanism through which both students and teachers can see the consequences of changed behavior. If, as Skinner indicates, behavior change depends on the demonstration of consequences, participation in the school provides a unique feedback to the learning process.[6] Unlike classroom learning where change is rewarded largely through teacher approval, the school setting allows students to see the effects of their own and others' behavior because change is reinforced through experiences in school environment.

The school, then, provides a direct mechanism for guiding and rewarding participation activity. It also facilitates the observation and reinforcement of change in behavior itself. Teachers can observe directly whether students can utilize political knowledge in directing their behavior. Students, on the other hand, can establish habits of participation in ongoing school political life that are not normally included in classroom routines. For perhaps the first time in many schools, students will use political knowledge on an everyday basis in the school political community and be able to directly determine effective and ineffective consequences of political behavior.

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[6]B.F. Skinner, Technology of Teaching. New York: Appleton Century Crofts, 1968.

That participation can produce desired effects has only recently become a focus for study, yet one major survey undertaken recently by the Johns Hopkins Center for Social Organization of Schools found that:

> "Participation can come in different forms, and each extra element adds a potentially different effect on students. Participation to increase social integration affects students' general satisfaction. If participation also adds new peer group mixes, new student norms will be developed, often emphasizing academic interest. If decision-making experiences are added, responsibility and decision-making skill will be increased, with more successful academic pursuits resulting as a by-product."[7]

An appropriate mix of different forms of participation, then, can have multiple effects on student behavior at least in terms of satisfaction, norms, and decision-making skills.

Furthermore, the school laboratory also offers some unique benefits for transfer of knowledge. According to Gagné, transfer of learning can be either lateral, where learning is applied to different situations of the same complexity, or vertical, where learning is applied to different situations of greater complexity.[8] The lab facilitates lateral transfer of knowledge to practical political situations, which is in itself unique to civics instruction. Most courses assume the knowledge of political parties on the national level will produce more informed or participating citizens, but few courses include specific instruction that ensures such

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[7]James McPartland, et.al., Student Participation in High School Decisions: A Study of Students and Teachers in Fourteen Urban High Schools. Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University, 1971, p. 14.

[8]Robert M. Gagné, The Conditions of Learning. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965.

transfer. Thus, it is not surprising that studies have shown that civics courses have little effect on political attitudes and participation.[9]

The transfer of learning promoted by the lab is not only lateral, but vertical in that students are not only asked to apply knowledge in the lab in a one-to-one transfer, but also to modify that knowledge given the constraints of concrete political situations. For example, a student may study the concept of political influence in the classroom and gather data about it in the school which reinforces and extends his knowledge. Yet when he is faced with actually exercising influence on a concrete school political situation, he must learn how to build his own influence base in a particular context. Though based on previous knowledge, this experience will also push him to modify and add to his knowledge given the concrete school political context. Problem-solving activities such as this one certainly lead to higher levels of complexity in learning, but they also lead to new learning because theoretical and empirical knowledge is translated into practical experiences.

The above arguments have been given to justify participation as an advantageous learning tool, but what of its political effects? Certainly, most studies support the positive relationship between increases in participation and greater support for the political system.[10] Yet, studies in public opinion also warn that participation on the part of citizens may lead to conflictual or even non-rational political

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[9]Kenneth P. Langton and M. Kent Jennings, "Political Socialization and the High School Civics Curriculum," American Political Science Review, 62, No. 3 (September, 1968.

[10]Robert E. Agger and Marshall N. Goldstein, Who Will Rule the Schools: A Cultural Class Crisis. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1971. Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963. Lester W. Milbrath, Political Participation. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1965.

decision-making.[11] What, then, will be the effects of sustained student participation roles on the school community? What will be the effects of the development of a "participant" culture on the polity in general?

It should be noted first that participation in the school political laboratory will be supported by instruction in politics; thus political action is by definition informed. Second, the lab will not attempt to produce a political activist. Rather it will promote individual fulfillment at the heart of which is an active mind and active behavior regardless of the particular context in which the individual finds himself. With this goal in mind, students will engage in school political activity as one kind of exciting facet of everyday life they might wish to continue further than the school itself. Thus, the goal is to have students become aware that politics as decision-making, leadership or bargaining is part of everyday living and that political activity can be as exciting in the school club as on the national party level. The encouragement of a multitude of political roles, then, facilitates the accommodation of differences in a participant culture.

In these ways, participation in the school political laboratory offers many unique advantages for student learning. The laboratory experiences not only promote meaningful political learning, but can provide direct reinforcement and transfer of learning in a unique way. Participation experience can also provide a prototype for a meaningful life style regardless of the particular social or political context in which a student finds himself at another time. Yet, the question remains

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[11]Philip E. Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," in David E. Apter, Ideology and Discontent, New York: Free Press, 1964, pp. 206-61.

as to how politics can be studied through the laboratory. The next section is designed to probe the question of whether the school is a meaningful political system for study.

How can politics be taught via the laboratory?

If politics is defined as those activities through which values are allocated for a society, many of the decisions made daily by principals, teachers, and students, which involve value allocations for the society of their school would seem to be political in nature. For example, principals often devise schedules or disciplinary rules which regulate the behavior of both teachers and students; teachers make decisions about what students will learn; and students make decisions about what activities they will support in the school. These types of political involvement are documented by a great many sources. Nunnery and Kimbrough, for example, demonstrate just how political the role of the principal can be in regard to school elections.[12] Harmon Zeigler's study demonstrates how teachers' political attitudes and participation in educational politics can be explained by key background and school environment variables.[13] Neal Gross' study of superintendents and boards of education demonstrates how group pressures affect policy decisions and the role of principals, teachers, and parents in school politics.[14] Thus there seems little reason to doubt that schools can provide ample experiences for studying politics.

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[12]Michael Y. Nunnery and Ralph B. Kimbrough, Politics, Power, Polls and School Elections. Berkeley: McCutchan Publishing Corporation, 1971.

[13]Harmon Zeigler, The Political Life of American Teachers. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967.

[14]Neal Gross, Who Runs Our Schools? New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1958.

But in order to support meaningful learning through the laboratory, isolated sets of activities must be given an overall framework. The purpose that such a framework serves is well illustrated by Barker and Gump in their study of the effects of size on school activities:

> "If a novice, an Englishman, for example, wished to understand the environment of a first baseman in a ball game, he might set about to observe the interactions of the player with his surroundings. To do this with utmost precision he might view the first baseman through field glasses, so focused that the player would be centered in the field of the glasses, with just enough of the environment included to encompass all his contacts with the environment, all inputs and outputs: all balls caught, balls thrown, players tagged, etc. Despite the commendable observational care, however, this method would never provide meaning to a first basemen's transactions with his surroundings, and which in fact, constitutes the environment of his baseball playing behavior. By observing a player in this way, the novice would, in fact, fragment the game and destroy what he was seeking. . .he could never arrive at the phenomenon known as a baseball game by this means. . . . It would seem clear that a novice would learn more about the ecological environment of a first baseman by blotting out the player and observing the game around him."[15]

What is needed, according to the baseball analogy, is a way of looking at the politics of schools that will blot out the individual players so that the rules and patterns of player interaction can be understood. This is important because we are less interested in what a specific principal in a specific leadership position does than we are in making sense out of the "game" of school politics. We want to know what the patterns of leadership or decision-making are in order that we can determine the rules of the game. We also want to know how different patterns weave together to make the fabric of school politics, to see why schools change or are in conflict or stay the same. We want to know how the game turns out under different rules--

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[15]Barker, op. cit., pp. 15-17.

whether schools "win," "lose," or "draw." To do this, some type of overview or framework needs to be created which will provide an understanding of school political systems as wholes.

One way to begin to create such a framework is to explore these experiences that are common to every political system, whether that system is the school, the community, or the nation-state. In all of these political systems, individuals feel the impact of political change because, for example, different school policies effect whether schools will spend money on needed facilities or new curricula just as different national policies determine whether the draft will be extended or urban pollution research will be undertaken. Changes such as these demonstrably effect the lives of citizens in the school or national political system. Yet, at the same time, people are consistenty influenced by the rules or decisions maintained in the political system because they act in accordance with rules or laws. A rule about dress codes or graduation credits can influence participants in the school political system in a similar way that laws about school integration or voting affect every citizen. People are also involved in the experience of political development in schools as in other political systems. For example, increases in budgets allow for increased educational opportunities or new math better prepares students for jobs. Finally, political conflict is also present in schools as in state, local, and international levels of government. At any level, people become frustrated daily when their work is threatened by demonstrations or strikes or arguments over priorities.

These four common political experiences -- political change, political maintenance, political development and political conflict -- constitute much of what we

want to know about politics. To effectively study these experiences, however, some key explanatory concepts need to be provided through which the behavior patterns underlying these experiences can be understood. These concepts are provided through the definition of politics stated previously: those activities through which values are allocated for a society.[16] From this definition stem two focal components of any political process: activities through which values are allocated, and the political values themselves. What are important dimensions of each of these components? Surely decision-making, leadership, participation and communication are important activities through which political values are distributed. Just as surely power, wealth, and ideology are important values which are part of the political process. What is proposed here is a set of concepts which give key handles for understanding political life -- the game of politics. The concepts are not tied to a single individual or role in the political system and are useful in explaining the four political experiences introduced earlier.[17]

The four political experiences and the seven concepts that are designed to aid in understanding them can be diagrammed as in Figure 1. The diagram demonstrates how the fundamental political experiences can be potentially explained by focusing on the patterns of political decision-making.

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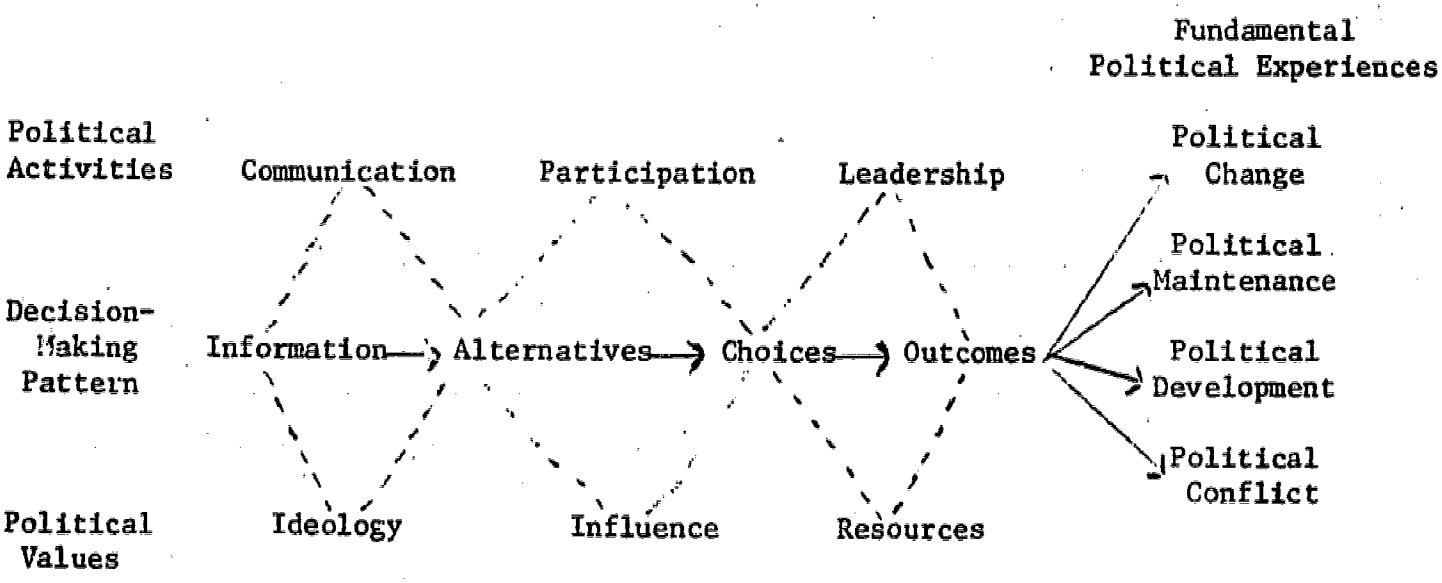
[16]The definition is based on the formulation presented by David Easton in A Systems Analysis of Political Life. New York: John Wiley, 1965.

[17]For a brief description of the explanatory potential of this type of framework see Anatol Rapoport, "Some Systems Approaches to Political Theory," in David Easton, Varieties of Political Theory, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966, 129-141.

FIGURE 1: A FRAMEWORK FOR VIEWING SCHOOL POLITICS



Decision-making is a key process in any analysis of politics because it is through this process that guidelines for the use of the system's resources are developed. Choices between alternatives can cause systems to change, to remain stable, or to develop in one direction or another. Complete explanations of common political experiences must, however, include the influence of other political behaviors and attitudes. The figure demonstrates one way in which patterns of behavior such as leadership or values such as ideology influence the decision process, and, therefore, the political experience we desire to understand.

Potentially, this framework can help to aid understanding of school politics. For example, within the focus of the framework we will be interested in determining how changes in leadership can bring about political conflict or how changes in political participation help to maintain behavior patterns in the school political

system. This framework provides a way of looking at school politics which is based on common political experiences and from which we can gain a coherent idea of how the game of politics in schools is played. Furthermore, we have a basis for making comparisons to different levels of the American system as well as to other national systems themselves. By viewing school politics in this way, the school political laboratory can provide a basis for stuying politics and for gaining valuable participation experience in schools.

What ways can activities be designed?

A surprising variety of school-based political activities can be devised within the dimensions of the framework described above. Only a sample of these activities will be discussed in this paper. These illustrations will indicate how the lab can provide applications for course knowledge, create new knowledge about the politics of schools, and transfer that knowledge into useful participation experiences.[18]

Three different categories of activities form the general outline for the laboratory: knowledge-building activities, skill-building activities, and participation activities. These three types are general indicators of the different objectives which the lab is designed to implement: 1) The learning and reinforcement of new political ideas and data; 2) The learning of analytical, methodological and participatory skills useful to organizing and analyzing data as well as promoting effective political participation; and 3) The provision of participation experiences

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[18]A full explanation of the laboratory and specific activities will be available in an occasional paper to be published by the Social Studies Development Center at Indiana University, 1129 Atwater, Bloomington, Indiana in the fall of 1972. The paper will be distributed upon request.

on a regularized basis in order that students habitually participate in political activity. None of these objectives can be achieved through any one of the three general categories alone. They are designed to be part of an integrated program and sequenced to facilitate steps in the learning process.

The knowledge-building activities are designed mainly to provide applications for political concepts learned in the classroom and to test generalizations derived from course materials. In this way, they are designed to reinforce learning and transfer to practical school situations. The school situations explored are designed to be analogous to political behavior studies at other levels of the political system, yet as with all transfer learning the focus on a particular set of school activities at a particular time as well as the students' involvement in a concrete situation will add many dimensions to concepts already learned.

Within this category, then, students gather data and observe political life in order to check their observations against what they have learned and to pull out relevant generalizations. This type of activity can be carried out in a host of ways: primary source analysis, direct observation, content analysis, participant observation, content analysis, interviewing, survey research, or experimentation. In each of these ways, students can explore school politics and gain knowledge about decision-making or participation, influence or ideology and its effects on political change, maintenance, development, and conflict.

The variety and power of these types of activities can be illustrated in the two activities outlined below. The first is an activity designed to reinforce students' learning about different types of political influence through the use of primary source materials and interviews:

Types of Political Influence

Purpose: To determine differences between formal and informal influence and to recognize various types of influence relations such as force, authority, wealth, or personality in school politics.

Outline of Activity: Obtain from the principal's office an organization chart or document which describes the roles that various people play within the school -- superintendent, principal, teachers, etc. Study this document so that you know the basic lines of formal influence which it indicates. Then construct an interview with the principal and ask him the following types of questions: 1) What have been the three most important decisions that you have recently made which effect the school as a whole? 2) Who have you consulted most frequently in making these decisions? Administrators? Department chairmen? Teachers? Students? Parents? Other community members? 3) Over whom do you feel you have the most influence in making decisions about the school system? On what basis do you exercise your influence over them -- force, authority, wealth, personality? and 4) Do you use different types of influence with different groups in the school setting? What type of influence do you use with parents? Students? Teachers? Administrators? Other community members?

From the formal organization chart or document and the responses that the principal has made during the interview, attempt to answer the following questions about political influence: 1) Are there any differences between the formal influence relationships indicated in the organization chart and those used by the principal in making his decisions? Do different groups have more influence than others on the decisions that the principal makes? 2) Does the principal use more than one type of influence? How does he try to influence parents? Students? Teachers? Department heads? Other administrators? 3) How do you think students would be most successful in influencing the principal? 4) Compare your findings to those available for local and national officials. How are your findings similar or different? 5) Construct one or more generalizations about differences between formal and informal influence and the use of various types of influence.

This particular activity is an example of how knowledge about political influence can be extended to schools in either an individual or group student activity.

The second activity illustrates how a long-term group activity can be constructed in order to study an important facet of political decision-making -- information effects. The activity combines participant observation and experimentation using problem settings in different student organizations as follows:

The Importance of Information in Political Decision-Making

Purpose: To determine the effects on different amounts and types of information on political decision-making.

Outline of Activity: Determine three different student organizations such as the F.T.A., language club, newspaper staff, math club, or student government organizations, which meet the following criteria: (1) at least one student in the class is a member of each group; (2) the organization's decision-makers meet on a weekly basis or more frequently; (3) the decision-rules by which issues are decided are the same (i.e., majority vote); and 4) the composition of the decision-making group is relatively the same (i.e., if one group has a major split on most policy issues, so should the others).

Decide on one issue which each of the groups find important to make a policy decision about. The issue must have at least three possible alternative solutions. The issue itself may vary from group to group.

A student or group of students should then attend each group's meetings. One group serves as a control group. The student(s) introduce a policy issue and the group discusses alternatives in its normal way, uninterrupted by inputs from the student observers. Student observers keep notes on how alternatives are decided and the resolution of the decision on forms prepared for this purpose. They attend meetings until the issue is resolved (should be no more than three meetings).

The second and third groups serve as experimental groups. One group serves to test the difference that information produced in support of a single alternative can make in a decision process. Students research one alternative presented in the group and bring as much information in support of that position to the meetings as possible. Students take notes on the effects of the amount and type of information on decision-making. A second group of students do the same in another group only in this case

> different students take two alternatives and do research, some on one alternative, some on another. They then determine the effects of information on decision-making between the two alternatives and between these and less well-researched alternatives.
>
> Students then compare results of their observations in order to make generalizations about the influence of information on the decision process.

While this activity is different from the first in both duration and type, students are gathering information which reinforces and extends knowledge.

As can readily be seen, each of the above activities require certain types of inquiry skills. Thus, the second general category is skill-building activities. This category is designed to be integrated with the first by providing analytical and methodological skills necessary for systematic inquiry into political behavior. Like the knowledge-building activities, the skill activities are designed to stress both applications and initial learning. For most effective use the skills would be learned through the classroom and then applied through subsequent knowledge-building and participation activities.

The skill-building activities can be divided into three types. First, analytical skills such as problem selection, conceptualization, generalization, comparison, inference, and evaluation can be developed by using school political situations as case studies through which skills are learned and student mastery determined. Second, methodological skills such as data collection, interviewing, table reading, survey research and comparative analysis can be taught using resources supplied in the school setting. Third, participation skills such as bargaining, role-play, decision-making and leadership can be taught through a series of in-service programs in the school which include working with school political leaders and acting in various roles in actual group problem-solving situations.

The variety that these activities can exhibit is illustrated through two examples, one an activity developing the analytical capacity for making comparisons and the other developing a skill of role play in group decision-making situations. The first activity is illustrated as follows:

Making Comparisons About Political Behavior

Purpose: To determine various ways that comparisons can be useful in the study of political behavior and to gain experience in making comparisons.

Outline of Activity: Think about three students that you know in your school who act very differently in the school setting. Determine what is similar about their behavior -- they all go to class everyday -- and what is different about them -- some participate in sports while others do not. Making comparisons is essentially a matter of determining such similarities and differences. In this case, comparison serves to aid in the clarification of what people share in common and what they do not. Shared behavior patterns become the basis for generalizations about social and political life. State some of the generalizations you think you can make about student behavior from the similar and different characteristics you have found in the patterns of behavior of the three students.

This is only one way that comparison can be useful. Another way is to determine what difference it makes in politics as a whole if people exhibit different patterns of political behavior. Analyze the results of the last student council election. Each of the candidates proposed something relatively different for students and the school. What difference could the election of one candidate rather than another make for how students would behave or how the school in general would function? List the possible effects on students and the school in the case of the election of each candidate. Now, determine a hypothetical candidate who could make a radical change in the behavior of students and the school. List the possible changes that this candidate could make. Each candidate represents some alternative which can make a difference in school politics. One function of comparison, then, is to determine what differences in the behavior patterns of individuals really make an impact, or have different consequences, for the functioning of the school system as a whole.

A third way in which comparison is useful is in the analysis of political change. Obtain a copy of the school's history, or talk with an administrator or teacher who has been in the school for at least ten years. Identify one major change in the politics of the school which has occurred over a period of the last decade such as teachers unionizing or the school board being elected in different ways. First, determine what was similar in the behavior of people in the school before and after the change. Second, determine what behavior was different at the time of the change. This second behavior is what produced the change. Then, identify what behavior was different after the change. This behavior is the consequence that the change itself produced. An understanding of change, then, is essentially derived from an analysis of similarities and differences.

Each of these ways of making comparisons is useful in understanding politics. Determining similarities and differences aid in clarifying alternative ways people behave politically. Assessing the consequences or differences in alternatives promotes the assessment of which differences have a real impact on the school system. Analyzing change through comparison aids in understanding how differences develop in the first place.

The second skill activity is designed to teach students about role play in group situations:

Role Behavior in Group Participation

Purpose: To identify various roles that members of groups play in any group activity and to gain experience in participating in groups in various role positions.

Outline of Activity: Generally, any functioning group divides tasks among members either directly or by accident. In all but the smallest and most temporary groups, five types of roles are played: group leader, information-gatherer, specialist on a particular topic, evaluator, and implementer. The group leader generally coordinates activity and stimulates motivation. The information gatherer generally supplies data on alternative policies and brings in opinions on group activities from various sources. The specialist is someone who has in-depth knowledge about some aspect of the problem that the group is working on at a particular time. The evaluator checks group activity against short-run and long-run goals. The implementers generally do the actual work of the group toward accomplishing the task. Determine several school groups which students in the class are members. At the next meeting of these groups, students should observe how various roles are played.

> Third, determine one political problem in which 5-10 students as a group are interested in resolving in the school. The problem should be one which can be worked on for a week. Students should select out roles for working together. Each day, students should rotate to take on different roles. At the end of the week they should discuss the function of the various roles in group activity and how they contribute to group effectiveness.

Many of the skill development activities such as leadership training can take considerably more time than the one above. Therefore, it is important that these activities be flexible enough to integrate with regular classroom or other knowledge-building activities. Regardless of the particular integration which is made, each of these types of skill-building activities are designed to offer a controlled environment through which students can learn from their mistakes.

The participation category follows logically from those of knowledge and skill-building. The focus of this category is the utilization of knowledge and skills in political situations within the school setting. Having learned how various variables affect political change, maintenance, development and conflict and having gained skills in both analysis and participation, students will be able to use the school laboratory as a vehicle for gaining concrete experience in advocating changes and trying out solutions to problems in the actual operating school context.

Not all activities which fall under this prototype involve student leadership or membership in school political organizations. The purpose of the laboratory is to involve students in activity which will extend their knowledge and put it to use, not to facilitate student takeover of the school. Thus, a wide range of types of activities can be designed which involve real political situations in which students can experiment with political alternatives without placing the student in

the role of principal or superintendent. The types of leadership and decision-making activities which pervade school political life exist on every level and in every organized subgroup within the system.

Participation activities include active membership in decision-making groups such as student courts as well as cooperative activities in which students take over part of the roles of school leaders such as the principal. In between these two extremes, students can establish agencies for existing groups in order to directly or indirectly influence existing political organization such as the P.T.A. or the student newspaper. Students can also create independent groups which parallel the extant school organizations and experiment with different organizational forms in the parallel organization which can be recommended to the existing organization.

The range and potential of these types of activities can be illustrated in the following examples of membership activities and activities through parallel organizations. The first is a membership activity which promotes experimentation with various types of political influence.

Types of Influence in Student Participation

Purpose: To give students experience in exercising different types of political influence in the school setting.

Outline of Activity: Identify a decision-making group in the school which has the following characteristics: 1) It is a permanent decision-making body within the school which meets at least on a bi-weekly basis; 2) It considers decisions which are relevant to most students, faculty, and administrators; and 3) There are at least four decision-makers involved in making decisions. Then determine at least four students who want to work as a group to explore different ways in which influence can be used to effect decisions of the group. Interview at least one member of the group to determine what decisions it will be making in the near future. Also do an analysis of the records of the group's past decisions in order to determine how the group works together to

make decisions and who traditionally votes in given ways on issues. When your background work is done, determine one decision and relevant alternatives on which to work. Research the issue, develop a clear problem statement, develop alternative solutions, and make a choice on a position. Develop a sound set of arguments and evidence for your position. Now organize the group into four different tasks. The task of one part of the group is to convince members of the original decision-making group of the student position by using as much knowledge (arguments and evidence) as possible, but without resorting to alternative types of influence. The task of the second set of students is to use as much wealth, in this case student time and energy, as possible as a bargaining tool for influencing the decision. For example, students could offer their time in helping to carry out the program if it were accepted (students must keep this part of their bargain if they win). The task of the third group is to use as much power (the power of numbers) as possible to influence votes by arguing that most students support them. Finally, a fourth set of students argues from authority (their position in the school as the basis for which the school exists in the first place). No groups should use more than one form of influence. Each group keeps a record of its influence attempts.

When the issue has been resolved, students meet as an entire group to discuss the success of their efforts. Questions such as the following should be answered: 1) When are different types of influence more effective than others?; 2) How does the exercise of influence effect decision-making? and 3) How can the type of influence used produce change or conflict in the school system as a whole?

In this case, students advocate positions using their knowledge of political influence activities in various organizations in which they are members.

The second activity occurs in decision groups which parallel the structural characteristics in existing groups. Through parallel groups, students explore various ways in which decision rules affect political decisions and offer suggestions for more effective ways for school political decisions to be carried out:

The Effect of Decision Rules in School Political Decision-Making

Purpose: To give students experience in making decisions under different decision rules and to assess the effect of decision rules on the school system as a whole.

Outline of Activity: Determine one decision-making group in your school which at least 5-10 students would like to study. The group should have the following characteristics: 1) it has existed in your school for two years prior to this time; 2) the decisions made by the group either directly or indirectly effect most students, faculty and administrators; 3) it meets on a regular basis to make decisions at least bi-weekly; and 4) students can develop some access to the group for participating in its decisions. When the initial decision-making group is identified, the students should review the past decisions of the group in order to determine the rules under which decisions are made and the inclusiveness of participation in decisions on the part of members of the school.

Having determined the traditional ways in which decision rules have operated in this decision-making group, students should then select an issue which the group is now in the process of deciding and set up two alternative student decision groups which parallel the composition and attitudes of the members of the original decision group. Each of the alternate groups should be run on a different decision rule -- one-man rule, majority rule, or unanimity rule -- depending on the rule discovered to be operating in the original decision group. Students should both study the decision-making process in the original group and make their own decisions under the various decision rules.

After all decisions have been made, students should compare the effects of making the same decision under different decision rules by answering the following types of questions: 1) Were the decisions different in any of the groups? Why or why not? 2) If the original decision-making group had used a different rule for making decisions would its decisions have been different? Why or why not? 3) What are the effects of using different decision rules on the school system as a whole? Is the school more likely to undergo fundamental changes under one decision rule rather than under another? Why or why not? Students should attempt to relay their findings to the decision-making group and establish one person or group to participate in and study future decisions of the group.

This activity demonstrates how effective alternatives can be generated without turning over operating decision-making groups to experimentation.

Each of the three categories forms an integrated program for promoting political learning and encouraging effective political participation within schools. Ideally, the lab as a whole is an integral part of an instructional program and the lab itself is integrated across prototypes. In this way, students can develop applications which extend their knowledge from coursework and, hopefully, develop habits of participation which will demonstrate the practical relevance of knowledge obtained as well as transfer knowledge to situations beyond the school setting.

Conclusion

The rationale presented above has demonstrated some ways in which a political laboratory could be developed which would fulfill meaningful objectives for civics and government instruction. The activities included in the lab have been designed to form an integrated program for reinforcing classroom learning and using political knowledge in effective political participation. Viewed in this way, the lab represents one potential facet of an alternative way to study politics and government in high schools.

As an alternative, the lab breaks with some familiar assumptions about schools. The school is normally viewed as a series of classrooms, open or closed, in which subjects such as civics are taught. The lab transforms the image of the school as a building composed of classrooms into one of a dynamic social and political unit which escapes internal physical boundaries. In this way the gate is pushed open for study and experience in a dynamic political system. Actually, the lab is built on the assumption that this "new" way to look at schools is closer than other alternatives to the way students have normally seen the school setting. As Coleman

has indicated, peer group activities have always been of key import to student attitudes and behavior in schools.[19] Because the lab focuses on the students' own individual and group experience within schools, it should then provide a more readily understandable framework for meaningful learning of new ideas than other alternatives.

The lab also breaks with some standard assumptions about civics instruction. In most civics classrooms, student learning is normally reinforced and lateral transfer is achieved through case studies and verbal examples. Rarely is the student required to transfer knowledge directly into a practical everyday political situation. At the other extreme, most community participation activities conducted in civics courses are not systematically related to formal classroom instruction. In both cases the control is lost which promotes effective integration between political knowledge and experience. The lab, on the other hand, explicitly operationalizes the assumption that for "learning by doing" to be effective, the integration between political knowledge and participation experience must be systematic and carefully guided.

Because the lab is based on such assumptions, many questions should be raised which have not been treated here. The use of the school as a setting brings with it many questions about established roles of students, teachers, and administrators. Probably the most important change will occur in the teachers' role vis à vis both students and school faculty and administrators. Teachers will have much more

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[19]James S. Coleman, Adolescents and the Schools. New York: Basic Books, 1965.

of a coordinator's role in regard to students' activities in the lab than a knowledge dissemination one. They will also be required to "politic" themselves in order to arrange various types of activities. Furthermore, many members of the school community will need to be receptive to questions and suggestions from others.

Probably the most significant long-term question about the lab can be raised, but surely cannot be answered here. The lab will produce changes in the social and political fabric of schools as it is carried out. The implications of such changes cannot be determined at this time, but the effects of increased information alone would imply increases in awareness of political activity on the part of all participants in the school system and new norms for behavior. The introduction of a lab will, at minimum, give school data about itself and increase the stakes and opportunities of participants for making effective changes. In addition, it may well be that, for the first time in many schools, some of the people on which changes will depend will not only be student government leaders but a variety of interested students who are well-trained in analyzing and participating in school political life.

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