Using Newspapers in the Junior High Classroom to Enhance the Development of Citizenship

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Using Newspapers in the Junior High Classroom
to Enhance the Development of Citizenship

by

James J. Langen

A project submitted to the Division of Curriculum and Instruction in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education

University of North Florida
College of Education and Human Services
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Abstract

The purpose of this project was to design a curriculum utilizing newspapers as a primary learning resource to establish newspaper reading habits among junior high students. Research suggested a strong correlation between consistent reading of the daily newspaper and political knowledge, voting, and other acts reflecting good citizenship. Use of the newspaper in the classroom helped to establish newspaper reading habits among adolescents. This resulted in students being more aware of the adult world they would enter and more confident. They understood how their society functioned. With increased mastery of newspapers, came increased self-esteem, since newspapers were seen as an adult medium of communication. To capitalize on these findings, this project incorporated the newspaper into the classroom, to be used daily. The adopted textbook is not utilized as extensively as in previous courses. Instruction on newspapers, using the major local daily and two prominent publications (New York Times, Wall Street Journal), has been included. Methodology to be utilized will take into consideration the various learning styles of the students; development of critical thinking skills is emphasized to strengthen the development of citizenship.
Dedication

To Marianne, whose love and support never flagged over the long haul.
Chapter One

Introduction

Many secondary school students are not well-informed with regard to current political events. They have vague ideas about some of the major issues confronting the United States and seldom possess enough background information to form a clear position. Reasons for this include a lack of geographic information, a lack of historical perspective, and a lack of specific and timely facts regarding national and international events.

At the beginning of the high school years, that is, in ninth grade, students have already completed a course in world geography and American history. The information they presumably have acquired then appears to be lost, perhaps due to a lack of reinforcement. The majority of the students do not use what they have learned to broaden their conceptions of the forces which shape the world today.

Secondary school students are highly social and interact with their peers quite spontaneously. A problem that is properly set up, with clear areas of conflict, will develop into lively discussion. However, their data base for such discussion is often limited. Thus, suggested solutions may be sources of more conflicts.
Further, highly unrealistic or simplistic actions are often suggested, given the complexity of the political, social, and economic problems our nation faces today.

It is not that students are not being exposed to enough information to create logical solutions for given problems. By age fourteen, these youngsters have spent considerable time in classroom settings. They not only have covered the factual material they could utilize now, but also have listened to opposing opinions and suggestions on problem solving. They have been offered opportunities to be adequately prepared to discuss issues of the adult world.

This information is piecemeal, however. As a result, a major concern is that so many of the students have a narrow view of society and their role in it. Events which do not appear to be immediately related to their established pattern of social intercourse are given scant attention.

Students from all segments of a community maintain that they see no reason to use the base of information they have received. There is little desire to become involved in or evaluate the success of government sponsored programs to create change or meet the problems mentioned daily in the newspaper. The students maintain
a narrow perspective regarding what is important to
them. They establish a hierarchy of priorities which
place the immediate and the short range at the top.
Preparing themselves for active participation in external
events is continually downplayed.

There is little argument that the success of a
republic depends on the intellectual quality of its
citizens and the extent of their participation in public
life. It is in the best interest of our community and
country that voter registration and participation
increase. Issues addressed through the mechanism of the
ballot range from quality of life and economic well-being
to matters of physical safety. All of us benefit when
well-constructed opinions are acted on by voting.

High school students now taking American government
or economics courses will be eligible to vote in two to
four years; therefore, adequate preparation for this
responsibility is essential. Unfortunately, the
extinction process may reduce their awareness of the
basic structure of the American political system, just
as it may have previously affected earlier social studies
content. A pattern of fact-gathering, information
analysis, and opinion formation must be developed to
sustain the learning experience labeled formal education;
otherwise, the students will often feel inadequate to
the task of making intelligent decisions at the polls.

The daily briefings on local, national, and
international events can be most adequately obtained
through the newspaper. Background and follow-up
communiqués provide a basis for well-developed opinions.
Still subject to challenges, perhaps, these opinions
will sustain one in an adult environment, when considering
the state of the union, the state, the arts, or the
economy.

To begin the process of developing informed
thoughtful citizens, the school can focus on its
secondary social studies courses; for example,
ninth-grade students in Duval County, Florida, could
gain more from a one-semester course on American
government if the material covered appeared more relevant
to the student. Classroom activities must help them
bridge the gap between their adolescent world and the
adult world which they will soon enter. Such a
course might be designed to teach the ways in which the
federal, state, and local governments operate, as well
as to foster citizenship. However, a democratic society
demands that good citizens make an effort to stay
informed on issues the society faces. Since neither
teachers nor textbooks can supply the timely information the newspapers provide each day regarding public issues, the latter can become the most valuable teaching aid available. Newspapers also give the reader the opportunity to compare opinions readily. Some papers provide opposing points of view, but more often the reader must subscribe to another paper. Teachers can take advantage of this opportunity to provide opposing opinions.

If regular reading of the newspaper will help develop an awareness of social and political problems and issues, students must be encouraged to begin a reading program. They presently do not make a sustained effort to do this. Most programs that teachers conduct using newspapers have as their objective the learning of a specific skill. Mastery of the skill does not often generate new interest in reading newspapers consistently.

The purpose of this project was to develop a curriculum unit for ninth-grade students which focused on the content of newspapers, the value and shortcomings of newspapers, and how these can be used as a tool to acquire knowledge relevant at various life stages. The curriculum also includes a focus on students acquiring the knowledge valuable to exercise good citizenship.
To meet the desired educational goal, the program allows for consistent hands-on experience with the local daily newspaper. By using the newspaper as the major teaching resource, consistent exposure to it is guaranteed. The course text, while useful, provides background material to enhance the primary resource, the newspaper.

The objective of the program was to develop consistent newspaper reading which focused on local, national, and international subject matter. At the end of the semester, after having studied American government, the students will also have acquired a necessary body of knowledge to pass required assessment tests, as determined by county curriculum guides. Achievement of these objectives will be assessed through both students' scores on formal cognitive tests and the response of students on a questionnaire designed to determine their newspaper reading behaviors.
Chapter Two

Review of Literature

A program designed to foster the development of citizenship must include a commonly accepted definition of the term. It is apparently assumed that educators possess such a definition since none of Duval County's major curriculum guides define citizenship. Neither do statements of goals provided to visiting accreditation teams delimit the term. All of those documents do, however, include the development of citizenship in each student as a goal. Several social studies textbooks also use the term without fully defining it.

One nationally recognized publishing company provided a definition of citizenship.

Citizenship is the act of knowing, respecting, and obeying laws; being informed and knowing one's rights; respecting the rights of others and defending rights. Citizenship also includes participating in civic life during and between elections; and acting for the good of the community. (Patrick & Remey, 1980, p. 106)

Another definition, though of "citizenship education," is the following: "Citizenship education is the teaching and learning of bodies of knowledge, values, attitudes,
and behaviors which are considered necessary for support and sustenance of the civic culture of the teacher and learner" (Gibson, 1968, p. 2).

In behavioral terms such education would lead to citizens who demonstrate responsibility to society yet are self-reliant. Such citizens would display an understanding of the democratic process and would participate in establishing public policy. Once policy is established, these citizens would accept it and only work for change through the democratic process (Gibson, 1965). If these goals are achieved, the student may likely view himself positively and with a sense of responsibility for his own intellectual and social growth (Gibson, 1965).

A basic tenet of this project was that knowledge of the world in which students live will give them a stronger feeling of self-esteem. An objective of the introduction of newspapers into the classroom was to provide the students opportunities to develop an understanding of how classroom material relates to their everyday world, as represented in newspaper accounts. Mastery of adult media and responsibilities may enhance the self-esteem of young adolescents. Newton (1985) concluded that "students' self-images were
enhanced by their association with newspapers" (p. 7) because they were seen as an adult medium of communication.

Harris (1986) examined students' perceptions of newspapers. She found that understanding the material in the newspaper generated more self-confidence in students than did understanding the material in other mediums, including television.

The value of the newspaper as an additional classroom resource was supported when the limitations of textbooks were considered. Frazier and West (1961) pointed out that any textbook has limitations. Text material is often in general terms and is highly condensed. Since there are space requirements, the content tends to emphasize facts. Presentations of differing viewpoints or controversial subject matter are usually avoided. Some material presented is often quite dated, since considerable time is required for publication. Also, unfortunately, according to Frazier and West (1961), a recent copyright date does not guarantee quality. Not all social studies textbooks have been prepared with care.

In a study of urban voters (Vinyard & Sigel, 1971), newspapers were rated by the adults as the most important
source for keeping informed of events in the political world. One could conclude that newspapers are indeed a valuable information source, even in an age of electronic media.

Schramm, Lyle, and Parker (1960) noted that while television serves as a medium for entertainment and escape, as children grow older they increasingly use newspapers for learning about the real world. Media use begins with television, but, as students enter high school, newspaper readership increases. By the end of high school, most children are looking to the newspaper for news and general information.

Schramm, Lyle, and Parker (1960) also supported the findings mentioned previously regarding the relationship between newspapers and self-esteem. At the eighth-grade level newspapers had little prestige value with students, but they were rated highly during the high school years. Mauro (1979) similarly concluded that television viewing by teenagers decreases, interest in comics declines, and, after the ninth grade, news on the local, state, national, and international scenes becomes more interesting to students.

Banks (1985) also recorded that newspaper reading increased after the ninth grade. At the ninth-grade
level new interests develop—interests in adult literature or adolescent literature that appear to be of an adult nature to the student. To Banks there are successful approaches to integrating newspapers into the routine of ninth graders. He found that students consider news and current events important, and that newspaper reading for a class could provide a school activity for students which raises their interest in the world around them.

A study by Winhauser and Stone (1981) reported on students who used newspapers in the classroom versus students who did not. The findings support the hypothesis that classroom exposure to newspapers helps to establish newspaper reading habits among young adults.

Anderson (1982) supported Winhauser and Stone and thus reaffirms the rationale for this project. Her study concluded that students developed more positive attitudes towards newspapers and had increased interest and knowledge of current events as a result of using newspapers in school.

Both schools and mass media contribute to student attitudes about politics. They also contribute to the development of social behavior (Langton, 1969). Heightened self-esteem and understanding of the newspaper
enhance the probability that a citizen's attitude and behavior regarding society will be positive (Massialas & Torrey, 1978). Massialas and Torrey (1978) found that people who felt confident regarding participation in political decisions also believed strongly in the political process. The study by Massialas and Torrey (1978) also suggested that "the self-confident citizen appears to be the democratic citizen, with high expectations for participation; he is also a more satisfied and loyal citizen" (p. 29).

A review of research (Weaver & Buddenbaum, 1979) reported consistent findings. Newspaper readers tend to be the members of society who actively play a citizenship role. They contribute their time to community organizations and are more likely than nonreaders to debate about problems or issues facing their community.

Newspapers have a major impact on the political process. Weaver and Buddenbaum (1979) also reported that newspapers, not television, aroused more concern regarding political issues and provided more political knowledge. "Newspaper use is also strongly associated with voting turnout and other political activity" (p. 3).

For developing leadership, Weaver and Buddenbaum (1979) concluded that newspapers were favored over
television. Those individuals who desired to influence others, the opinion givers, were the heavier newspaper readers. Newspaper use among this group increased whenever they perceived the contents of the paper to be useful in discussions with others. Those individuals who were satisfied to listen and be persuaded by others were satisfied with television as their main source of information. Though information loss over time was recorded for both mediums, the loss seemed to be less for newspaper readers than for television viewers.

This review of the literature clearly supports the use of newspapers in secondary social studies programs to foster the development of citizenship. Understanding current events and the political process and being capable of participating in it help students to view themselves positively. Newspapers enhance this development of self-esteem while providing essential information since, by the ninth grade, students view newspapers as an adult medium.

The consistent use of newspapers at this time generates increased interest and knowledge of current events. A positive attitude towards newspapers helps in the development of a pattern of newspaper reading. This contributes to citizenship roles as newspaper reading
positively affects voter turnout and community involvement.
Chapter Three
Procedures

For this project, curriculum was defined as the planned learning experiences and learning outcomes designed for students, that is, what is to be learned.

Students' needs, in terms of being "newspaper literate," have in general been identified by research and through experience. As pointed out by Gage and Berliner (1984), however, failure to take into account individual differences in students created boredom, frustration, and resentment. Thus, needs must be clarified each semester for each new set of students.

Students in a pilot study using the curriculum will be asked to complete an attitudinal questionnaire regarding time spent reading newspapers, what is read, and why certain topics and sections are selected for reading. An opinion statement will be requested, asking for students' personal impressions regarding the newspaper. These materials will be designed in such a way that they could be used with future groups of students.

Duval County's performance objectives for ninth-grade American government include the requirement that students demonstrate knowledge of the newspaper by
describing the role of mass media in shaping opinions, interpreting political cartoons, determining what is fact and what is opinion, examining the parts of the editorial page, and outlining the parts of the newspaper. A pretest will be designed to assess the degree of achievement of these objectives. The curriculum will include options for teachers to use in providing learning experiences for the students. A posttest will be designed to use at the end of this instructional period to evaluate the effectiveness of the instruction in terms of student achievement.

The curriculum was designed to aid in the development of citizenship and increase the scope and frequency of newspaper reading by students. Gage and Berliner (1984) labeled this final objective as the terminal behavior. Their findings on terminal behavior included the requirement for structure—the organizing of prerequisites into the proper order. These prerequisites would be subordinate to the terminal behavior.

The county performance objectives listed above serve as prerequisites to the terminal behavior. Other subordinate objectives, tailored to the needs of the class, include understanding constitutional rights, the checks and balance system, the political system,
political ideologies, and the scope of the national government.

The content of the curriculum would thus include material related to state and local issues, as well as material relating to the national government. National and international events of sudden and dramatic importance would also have a significant place within the content offered. Material which highlights different approaches or political philosophies will be included to provide assistance in meeting the performance objective requiring knowledge of the basic political ideologies in the United States.

The methods selected to help achieve the terminal behavior will vary, as no one method is effective in meeting all subordinate objectives (McKeachie & Kulik, 1975). Nor are all teaching methods effective to the same degree with all students, according to Bligh (cited in Gage and Berliner, 1984). Thus, based on the needs and abilities of the students, methods to be used will include lecture and explanation, small group activities, individual projects, and others to be identified. All methods selected will allow for development of critical thinking skills, skills in democratic participation, and student independence (Gage & Berliner, 1984).
As the curriculum was developed, specific procedures for evaluation of the newspaper in the classroom program were included. The criterion-referenced approach will be used because this allows for individualized measurement of students' understanding of material and provides freedom for expression of opinion. The process includes written analysis of newspaper articles, oral reports on topics of interest, questionnaires on newspaper readership, essays on topics covered in class of a specific nature or on broader topics, such as essays discussing citizenship and the need for information and participation.

The description of the curriculum also includes how the classroom experience might lead to other opportunities for students, based on individual interests. These include elective courses or clubs/activities in which they could participate.
This program was designed to incorporate newspapers into the mainstream of the ninth-grade course, American government. The students will have the opportunity to analyze the interactions between the majority and minority parties in the U.S. Congress, the compromises that are created between the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate and those reached between the legislative and executive branches. The power and limitations of the Chief Executive will be considered, in both domestic and foreign affairs.

A major reason for using newspapers to accomplish these goals is that textbooks are soon dated. The most current issues being considered by the federal government are often not discussed in the textbook. The lawmaking process and political process are reduced to flowcharts. Students cannot grasp the dynamics of government from textbooks alone. By using the newspaper on a daily basis to study the issues, students will be provided an up-to-date view of government in action.

Relying more on newspapers than textbooks will not reduce the validity of the ninth-grade American government course. The curriculum covers all the required performance
objectives that are listed in Duval County's course outline for American government. Students are required to master the concepts and skills that are mandated as Minimum Level Skills. In addition, this program does not substitute one program of study for another. It is designed to add vitality to the study of government. Through the study of government via the newspapers, students will be offered a broader view of the federal government's exercise of power. It is anticipated that an issue-oriented approach to analyzing the federal government will generate a more emotional reaction than that normally created by texts. Observations by the developer indicate that the opportunity for daily follow up will create new suspense and excitement for each class, thus serving as a motivating device.

Although the course emphasizes the role of national government, good citizenship demands an understanding of and participation in state and local governments and the relationships between all three levels of government in this country.

Objectives were written to help accomplish these goals. The following pages provide an outline of objectives for the course. These objectives are representative but not all inclusive since they mainly
reflect the lower level of the cognitive domain, mainly knowledge and comprehension. Through the use of a variety of classroom activities and writing assignments the students will be challenged to develop skills in application, analysis, and evaluation.

Analytical skills, for example, will be developed as students work to recognize persuasive material when they read it. This material may be located in a newspaper or prepared by the teacher or by other students. Debates will provide opportunities for evaluation of proposed solutions to problems. Students will also be asked to evaluate the merit of arguments stated by columnists on the editorial pages of the newspapers.

The course begins with a unit on the study of the newspaper and determining how it affects our views of politics and government. To illustrate the scope of events covered by the press nationally and the variety of opinions the press may reflect, more than one newspaper will be studied. Students will review the Beaches Leader, Florida Times-Union, New York Times and Wall Street Journal.

The Beaches Leader is a weekly publication that covers the political, educational, and social events
of Atlantic Beach, Jacksonville Beach, and Neptune Beach, Florida. Its editorial page is devoted mainly to issues of concern of these three communities.

The Florida Times-Union, Jacksonville's major daily, places heavy emphasis on local and state news. National and international events are not covered in depth, compared to other papers with a larger circulation.

The use of the New York Times and Wall Street Journal will effectively illustrate the idea that one newspaper may not cover all the points a citizen should consider regarding national issues. Different opinions may also be studied as students read each publication. Each paper frequently differs in its approach to an issue, and each paper varies in the depth of coverage on subjects of national importance.

I. The Newspaper

After completing this unit, students will be able to:

1. Define: values, fact, opinion.
2. Define: mass media.
3. Identify newspapers as a form of mass media.
4. List and describe the parts of the Florida Times-Union.
5. Outline the major parts of the editorial pages.

6. Identify statements of fact versus statements of opinion in the newspaper.

7. Describe how newspapers both shape and reflect values.

8. Compare the Times-Union to the Beaches Leader. Describe the similarities and differences between the papers.

9. Compare the Times-Union to the New York Times and Wall Street Journal. Describe the similarities and differences between the Times-Union and each of these two papers.

Unit II will cover the major documents that form the historical basis for American society today. The role of a free press will be a major theme throughout the unit.

II. Foundations of American Government

After completing this unit, students will be able to:

1. Define: government, democracy, republic, constitution, amendment.

2. Describe the purpose of the: Declaration of
Independence, Articles of Confederation, U.S. Constitution, Bill of Rights.

3. Tell which of the documents listed above guarantees a free press and explain the role of a free press in the development of our political system.

4. Locate an article that is about a member of: U.S. government, State government (Florida), City government (Jacksonville, Beaches--any of the three beaches). Explain how each article helps protect democracy.

The purpose of the third unit is to lead students to the decision that knowledge of current events and issues is necessary for them to choose candidates that reflect each student's personal values.

III. Citizenship and Political Parties

After completing this unit, students will be able to:

1. Define: citizen, alien.
2. Identify voter qualification requirements.
3. Tell what a political party is.
4. Identify the two major political parties in the U.S.
5. Locate articles that describe activities of a member of each political party. Summarize the account.


7. List and describe the major propaganda techniques used to influence citizens.

8. Locate articles that demonstrate two of these techniques.

9. Discuss the need for being well informed to make intelligent choices on candidates and issues.

The analysis of our federal system of government will begin with the legislative branch. An intended outcome for Unit IV will be the ability of the students to explain the political process through which legislation is proposed and passed. The complexity of the issues studied and the committee system developed to channel the flow of bills should be better understood as a bill is tracked through Congress.

IV. The Legislative Branch

After completing this unit, students will be able to:
1. Describe the function of the legislative branch of the national government.
2. Describe the organization of Congress.
3. List the special powers of the House of Representatives and Senate.
4. Locate an article discussing one of these special powers, for a member of the House and Senate. Describe the action being taken.
5. Determine the majority opinion of each political party on the action stated in number 4 above.

Unit V is designed to create an awareness among the students that the executive branch is much more than just the President. Analysis of the news should indicate the vast scope of the executive branch and illustrate the types of political decisions that originate in or outside of the oval office. Students will be challenged to take a stand on these decisions, through debates or by stating their opinion in question and answer sessions.

V. The Executive Branch

After completing this unit, students will be able to:
1. Describe the main function of the executive branch of the national government.

2. Describe the process by which an individual becomes the chief executive.

3. Locate an article that reports on the political campaign of a presidential candidate. Outline the report.

4. Identify the constitutional powers of the President of the U.S.

5. Locate articles that report on three of the powers being exercised by the President. Describe the action being taken.

6. Explain the organization and function of the Cabinet.

7. Locate articles that describe activities of five of the Cabinet departments. Explain the main theme of the article.

The federal judiciary is covered next. The emphasis of this unit will be upon the role of the courts in guaranteeing our rights. The rights of the accused and of society-at-large will be debated. Cases covered in the newspaper will be chosen. Liberal versus conservative court decisions will also be considered.
VI. The Judicial Branch

After completing this unit, students will be able to:

1. Describe the main responsibility of the judicial branch of the U.S. government.
2. Explain the structure of the three main levels of federal courts.
3. Identify and report on articles that apply to the judicial process at the level of original jurisdiction and appellate jurisdiction.

The seventh unit is designed to illustrate the practical need for political compromise and to describe the methodology of the checks and balance system. Selected newspaper articles will illustrate the political forces and leaders that shape our domestic and foreign policies.

VII. Separate But Equal Branches

After completing this unit, students will be able to:

1. Describe the concepts: separation of powers, checks and balance.
2. Explain the content of articles which illustrate the restraint of power of one branch by another.
Unit VIII introduces the structural similarity and differences between the governments in Washington and Tallahassee. Analysis of news articles will show the role of politics in both federal and state issues. Political issues that affect primarily Duval County residences will be debated by students.

VIII. Florida State Government

After completing this unit, students will be able to:

1. Explain the organization and function of the three branches of the state government.
2. Locate and summarize three articles which illustrate the operation of these three branches of government. The articles serve as the basis for comparative oral reports and decision-making discussions.

The last unit for the course addresses the operation of the Jacksonville city government and that of the beaches. The methods by which private citizens can communicate with and influence city government officials will be stressed.

IX. Local Governments
After completing this unit, students will be able to:

1. Describe the role of the mayor and city council at the local level of government.

2. List the four major independent agencies in Jacksonville.

3. Explain the content of articles that report on activities of the Jacksonville mayor, city council, JTA, JPA, JEA, school board.

4. Explain the contents of two articles that report on activities in Jacksonville Beach or Neptune Beach.
Chapter Five
Summary

The basic premise of this project was to design a curriculum that included intensive use of newspapers in the classroom. This approach should enhance the development of citizenship in each student and generate an attitude of positive political participation of students in the local, state, and federal governments. A review of research, including that of Anderson (1982), Weaver and Buddenbaum (1979), and Winhauser and Stone (1981), support this basic premise.

Anderson's 1982 study concluded that using newspapers in school created increased interest and knowledge of current events among students. It was also found by Winhauser and Stone (1981) that use of newspapers in the classroom contributed to the development of a newspaper reading habit. These interests and habits provide the foundation for citizen participation, as voting turnout and other political activity are associated with newspaper use (Weaver & Buddenbaum, 1979).

This curriculum was designed to positively influence young people's perception of the value of newspapers. By accomplishing this, the stage is set
to develop the habit of consistently reading newspapers to obtain information on civic and political affairs. Instruction and practice in the classroom on how to use the newspaper effectively will help students develop their skills to comprehend simple and complex political items and issues affecting their country or region.

A major advantage of this integrated curriculum over a highly textbook oriented curriculum is that a section of the subject matter is always current. Moreover, by using this methodology, political attitudes are more likely to develop among the students and are more likely to be transferred into action through the democratic process long after students have left the class.

The nine units of the curriculum were designed around the use of the newspaper. Daily lesson plans call for discussion of reported events or issues, in addition to panels and debates. Essays and immediate teacher feedback offer students opportunities to measure their individual progress in comprehending current events. An underlying motive for the curriculum was that by successfully mastering complex topics through the adult medium of newspapers, students will
generate a positive self-esteem. This development will provide students with new encouragement to develop and maintain their roles as informed participating citizens.
References


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