The Political Process in the Elementary Classroom

An Honors Thesis (ID 499)
by

Nancy K. Forbes

Thesis Director

Joan Schneider

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Jean Piaget's theory of child development consists of four stages that occur in all children on the pathway to adult thinking. These stages are related to the age of the child but since children vary, the stages are not dependent upon the age of the child. During the sensorimotor stage, from birth to age two, the development is visually oriented. The child cannot think any further than the physical present. Past and future make no sense to a child in this stage. In the pre-operational stage, ages two to seven, the child is very egocentric. S/he does not agree with any other opinions that differ from her/his opinion. The child can learn concepts, but s/he cannot form new concepts on her/his own.

The concrete operational stage, ages seven to eleven, occurs while the child is in grades two through six. This is a very exciting stage for children. The begin to organize separate experiences into a sum total. They are beginning to form values and use simple logic. These children still need concrete examples for they learn by seeing and doing. Piaget's final stage is the formal operational stage which occurs between the ages of eleven
and fourteen, roughly until the ninth grade. During this time the child begins to use adult logic and abstract thinking. S/he is capable of understanding concepts without concrete examples.

Based on Piaget's theory of child development, one would not expect a student to understand the abstract concepts of algebra without first the concrete manipulation of addition. Neither should one expect that same student to understand the complexities of the political process without prior concrete examples of how the political process works. Often the teaching of the political process is ignored until senior high school when most students are becoming active in the political process. According to Charles Andrain, those students with the most information are able to observe the political process in a much more abstract and impersonal perspective (1971). Therefore, the teaching of the political process should begin in the elementary grades and continue throughout school to provide the information to these future political participants. Concrete examples should be used to teach to political process in the elementary school which may then be replaced with abstract issues as the students mature, similar to the way that mathematics is taught to the students.

Between the ages of five and fifteen there is a growing awareness of the political process. During the
later part of Piaget's concrete operational stage, which occurs between grades four and six, the knowledge of the political process grows most rapidly (Connell, 1971). Connell feels that children have a surface knowledge of the political process from various news media, especially the television, but they need the in-depth understanding that could be provided at school (1971). Based on this research, grades four through six seem to be the most logical time to begin teaching the political process. But why should the students learn about the political process?

Between the years 1960 and 1980, voter turnout has declined drastically. Only 2.2 percentage points kept 1980 from having the lowest voter turnout in history (Kleppner, 1982). The total voter turnout in 1980 was only 52.8 percent, while in 1984 it was 53 percent, less than a one percent increase (Abramson et al., 1986). Why is there the apparent lack of interest in the political process? Charles Andrain states that one reason for voter apathy is that many eligible voters lack the knowledge to participate in the political process (1971). Other reasons that closely correspond are the age of the voters and the experience of the voter. Older voters are more likely to vote and participate because they have experience and knowledge of the political process (Teixeira, 1987). One possible solution to this voter apathy is to increase
the knowledge of future voters and give them more experience with the political process.

A single unit on the political process is by no means the answer to preparing students to become politically active in the future. Repeated exposure to the political process could be a step in the right direction. Hands-on experience and more information on the political process could be another step to producing politically active citizens. This unit tries to provide hands-on experience and information through classroom lectures, a mock election, and class discussions. It is hoped that this unit will cause students to become more interested in the political process and encourage them to continue to develop that interest. Even if only one student becomes interested and politically active later in life, this unit will have served a purpose.
Topic
What is a committee?

Time
25 minutes

Objectives
The students will be able to define committee, chairperson, and cooperation.

Preparation
Divide the class into four committees for the upcoming unit. Prepare a folder for each committee and include tasks for each committee (see attached sheets).

Procedure
1. Ask the students for a definition of the word committee and get a variety of responses.
2. Ask the students to think of times when committees would be useful. List these responses on the chalk board.
3. Discuss who is in charge of a committee, how that person is placed in charge and what that person is called.
4. Ask the students what type of behavior is appropriate for committee members.

Summary
Discuss what would happen if appropriate behavior is not used while working on committees.

Evaluation
At the end of the unit, the students will fill out an evaluation form on all of the members of their committee.
Committee Evaluation Form

EVALUATION FORM

Committee Name:
Committee Member:
Grade:
Comments:

By:
Registration Committee

Your committee is important to starting the election. Without your committee nobody would be allowed to vote. You will need to work together and put aside all of your personal differences in order to succeed. At the end of the election, you will be responsible for grading the members of your committee. This grade will be recorded in the grade book.

Your duties include:

1. designing a registration card.
2. explain the purpose of the registration card.
3. explain how the registration card is to be filled out.
4. registering all eligible voters.
Ballot Committee

Your committee is responsible for a number of things. Your most important duty is to keep Election Day running smoothly and honestly. You will need to work together and put aside all of your personal problems to reach all of your goals. At the end of the election, you will grade the members of your committee. This grade will be put into the grade book.

Your duties include:

1. designing a ballot with the names of the candidates.
2. making a ballot box.
3. being the judges and clerks on Election Day.
4. making the voting booth.
5. checking registration cards.
6. watching voters sign the poll book.
7. passing out ballots.
8. watching the voting booth.
9. counting the ballots.
10. announcing the winner.
George Scott Committee

You are responsible for many things. This committee is very important. Your goal is to get people to vote for George Scott, although you do not have to vote for him. In order to reach your goal, you will all have to work together and put aside your differences. After the election is over, you will grade the members of your committee. This grade will be put into the grade book.

Your duties include:
1. writing a speech about George Scott.
2. presenting the speech to all of the eligible voters.
3. making posters and banners for George Scott.
4. decorating a bulletin board in support of George Scott.
GEORGE E. SCOTT

HOMETOWN: Marysville, California

PARTY: Royals (Mascot--Lions)

BIRTHDATE: June 29, 1931

RELIGION: Protestant

COLLEGE: University of Southern California

Yale Law School

EXPERIENCE: California Senator

Lawyer

FAMILY: Laura Scott (wife) English teacher

James Scott (son) Yale Law School Student

Joyce Scott (daughter) Georgetown University student

PLATFORM:

SCHOOL: The school year should be the same number of days, but the school day should be longer.

HOMEWORK: Homework should consist of fun activities such as watching television and discussing what was seen.

PUNISHMENT: Privileges at home, such as television, should be taken away from students.
Pattern for George E. Scott
Alfred Hall Committee

You are responsible for many things. This committee is very important. Your goal is to get people to vote for Alfred Hall, although you do not have to vote for him. In order to reach your goal you will all have to work together and put aside all of your differences. After the election is over, you will grade the members of your committee. This grade will be put into the grade book.

Your duties include:
1. writing a speech about Alfred Hall.
2. reading the speech to all eligible voters.
3. making posters and banners for Alfred Hall.
4. decorating a bulletin board in support of Alfred Hall.
ALFRED J. HALL

HOMETOWN: Springsdale, New York
PARTY: Hooters (Mascot--Owls)
BIRTHDATE: December 19, 1929
RELIGION: Protestant
COLLEGE: University of New York
Harvard Law School
EXPERIENCE: Governor of New York
Lawyer
FAMILY: Jessica Hall (wife) Retired nurse
Amanda Hall (daughter) University of Chicago student

PLATFORM:

SCHOOL: The length of the school day should remain the same, but the school year should be longer.

HOMEWORK: Homework should only be given to students as a punishment.

PUNISHMENT: Detentions and homework should be given to students as punishment.
Pattern for Alfred J. Hall.
Topic
What is an election?

Time
25 minutes

Objectives
The students will be able to define election, republic, and democracy.
The students will be able to write a paragraph on why elections are important.

Preparation
Be ready to define the terms for the students.

Procedure
1. Ask the students to name some special events that happen every four years.
2. Ask the students to define election. If there is no response, explain that an election is the process by which the public chooses people to represent them in the government.
3. Discuss why elections are important to the United States, prompt the students if they cannot think of any reasons.
4. Explain that our government is by the people, for the people, and of the people and ask the students what this means.
5. Explain that this process is what makes our country a republic, a nation where the people have indirect power in the government.
6. Ask the students to define democracy and then explain the differences between a republic and a democracy.

**Summary**
Discuss what our nation would be like if we were not allowed to vote freely.

**Evaluation**
The students will write a paragraph consisting of at least five sentences about why elections are important to the United States.
Topic
Who can vote?

Time
25 minutes

Objectives
The students will be able to list the United States voting requirements.
The students will be able to define Amendment Fourteen, Amendment Fifteen, Amendment Nineteen, Amendment Twenty-three and Amendment Twenty-four.

Preparation
Make "Matching Amendments" bulletin board (see attached page).

Procedure
1. To start the discussion, get the students' opinions about who can vote in the elections and list these on the chalk board.
2. One at a time, write and discuss the following voting requirements on the chalk board.
   - Must be a United States citizen
   - Must be at least 18 years old
   - Must be a resident of district for at least 30 days
   - Must be registered to vote
3. Ask the students if these requirements seem to be fair and discuss why/why not. Have the students add requirements that they feel should be included in the list.
4. Ask the students if these requirements have always been so fair. List the following Amendments on the chalkboard and discuss them one at a time.

Fourteenth Amendment— forbids discrimination and allows all men to vote (1868)
Fifteenth Amendment— allows black men to vote (1870)
Nineteenth Amendment— gives women the right to vote (1920)
Twenty-third Amendment— gives the citizens of the District of Columbia the right to vote (1961)
Twenty-fourth Amendment— gives the right to vote to all citizens who are at least 18 years old (1971)

Summary
Discuss why elementary students are not allowed to vote.

Evaluation
The students will complete the "Matching Amendments" bulletin board.
Make sentence strips that list the Amendments from the lesson plan. On separate sentence strips, list what each Amendment did concerning voting. Place the strips on a bulletin board with the Amendment name on one side and what it did on the other side. Attach yarn to the Amendment strips. Allow the students to try to match the sides together and check their answers with the answer key.
Topic
Who can be president?

Time
25 minutes

Objectives
The students will be able to list the requirements a person must meet in order to run for president.

Preparation
None

Procedure
1. Ask the students who can become president and list their answers on the chalk board.
2. Write the following requirements on the chalk board one at a time and discuss them.
   Must be born in the United States
   Must live in the United States at least 14 years consecutively before running for president
   Must be at least 35 years old
3. Compare the students' answers to the real requirements.

Summary
Discuss any other requirements that the students feel should be added to the real requirements.

Evaluation
Have the students make a quiz over the material covered thus far. Then collect all quizzes, pass back to the students, and have them take someone else's quiz. The author of the quiz will then grade it.
**Topic**
What are decisions?

**Time**
25 minutes

**Objectives**
The students will be able to define decision, consensus, authority, and voting.
The students will be able to state when each type of decision is appropriate.

**Preparation**
Make copies of "Decisions" worksheet.

**Procedure**
1. Ask the student what a decision is and get a variety of responses.
2. Ask them different ways that decisions are made in the classroom. Prompt students, such as the teacher decides, the class votes on an idea, or the whole class agrees on an idea. List the responses on the chalk board.
3. Explain to the students that these are all types of decisions. Write the type of decision next to the students' responses that were given earlier (teacher--authority, vote--voting, class agrees--consensus).

**Summary**
Discuss times when each type of decision would be best.

**Evaluation**
The students will complete "Decisions" worksheet.
Decisions

DIRECTIONS: Read each statement and decide which type of decision, consensus, authority, or voting would be best. Explain your answer.

1. A ship is sinking. How should any action be decided.

2. You and your friends are deciding what to do after school.

3. Your class is electing a president.

4. Your class is going on a field trip.

5. Your family is going out to eat.

DIRECTIONS: Describe a situation in which each type of decision would be best.

Authority

Consensus

Voting
**Topic**
What is a poll?

**Time**
15 minutes for discussion
2-3 class periods to take, tabulate, and publish a poll

**Objectives**
The students will be able to define poll, tabulate, and front-runner.
The students will be able to take, tabulate, and publish a poll.

**Preparation**
Have examples of various types of polls.

**Procedure**
1. Ask the students how reporters decide who will do well in an election.
2. Ask them what this person is called.
3. Explain that the poll is a way to get the opinion of the public in the quickest manner. Tell the students that a poll has many uses, such as finding out favorite television shows, election front-runners and public opinion.

**Summary**
Ask the students what types of polls they could take. List the responses on the chalk board.

**Evaluation**
The students will get into groups of four to six and make a poll. They will then give, tabulate and publish the poll.
Poll Examples

Favorite Things

DIRECTIONS: Fill in the blank with your favorite thing.

1. My favorite color is _______________________.
2. My favorite book is _______________________.
3. My favorite food is _______________________.
4. My favorite teacher is _______________________.
5. My favorite subject is _______________________.

Other possible topics
Least favorite things
Occupation
Movies
Books
Television shows
Hobbies
Movie stars
Topic
What qualities should a president have?

Time
25 minutes

Objectives
The students will be able to list desirable qualities in a president.

Preparation
Make copies of the "Ladder to Success" worksheet.

Procedure
1. Ask the students what qualities they look for in a friend and list these on the board, discussing each one.
2. Discuss whether or not these qualities would be important in a president.
3. List other qualities that a president should have, such as honesty, experience, and integrity.

Summary
The students will discuss why these qualities are so important to have in a president.

Evaluation
Using the qualities discussed, the students will complete the "Ladder to Success" worksheet.
LADDER TO SUCCESS

DIRECTIONS:
Fill in the ladder rungs with qualities that you feel a good president should have. The most important should be at the top.
Topic
What are political parties?

Time
25 minutes

Objectives
The students will be able to list the two major political parties.
The students will be able to write a research paper about a political party of the past or present.

Preparation
Read the prepared fact sheet.

Procedure
1. Begin by asking what a party is--a group of people who come together for a specific reason.
2. Ask them to go farther and explain what a political party is--a group of people who come together because they have the same political beliefs.
3. Ask them what political parties they have heard of in recent times.
4. Ask if they have heard of any other political parties in the past.
5. Give the students a brief history of political parties, using the attached information sheet.
6. Discuss the reasons why there are two main political parties and list the reasons on the chalkboard.

Summary
Discuss why people belong to political parties--a sense of belonging, a desire to change government policies, and
an interest in politics are some reasons.

Evaluation

The students will write a two to four page research paper on a political party that has been discussed in class. The assignment will correspond with Language Arts and will need to have specific grading criteria set up by the teacher.
POLITICAL PARTY HISTORY

After George Washington decided not to run for president again, the public began to disagree about who would succeed him. People began to group together based on their political beliefs. Those who felt that states' rights were important formed the Democratic-Republican party with Thomas Jefferson as their candidate for president. Those who wanted a strong central government formed the Federalist party with John Adams as one of the more prominent party members.

In the 1800's, the Democratic party was formed from the Democratic-Republican party. The Democrats held the first national convention in 1832. Differences arose in the party over the issue of slavery. Abraham Lincoln and those who opposed slavery broke away and became the Republican party. The Federalist party gradually lost members and faded out of the political picture.

From time to time other parties were formed but they never had the support of the public. The Bull-Moose, Independent, Socialist, Whig, and Communist parties are examples of parties that have had small followings in the United States. History has shown that third parties do not last and party strength goes through time periods. The Eighties have been a stronghold for the Republican party.
Topic
What are party platforms?

Time
20 minutes

Objectives
The students will be able to define party platform and write why it is important to the political process.

Preparation
Find a party platform from the recent past—Weekly Readers, newspapers, and magazines are good sources.

Procedure
1. Ask the students what a platform is—something that you stand on.
2. Carry this definition over and ask what a political platform is—it tells what the party believes in or stands on.
3. Read an example of a party platform to the students and give them copies to use for future reference.
4. Discuss the example and why it is so general.

Summary
Discuss what would happen if the parties had specific platforms.

Evaluation
The students will compare platforms from each party and discuss them both.
Topic
What are primary elections?

Time
25 minutes

Objectives
The students will be able to define primary election.
The students will be able to complete the "Indiana Primary" worksheet.

Preparation
Prepare copies of the attached worksheet. Make a large map of the United States and write the number of electoral votes each state has on the map. If it is an election year, make lists of all of the people who have been running for president.

Procedure
1. Ask the students to define primary--first or beginning.
2. Relate this definition to a political primary as being the first step in the political process.
3. Ask if any of the students have ever weeded flowers or a garden and ask why gardens are weeded--to get rid of the weeds so that the best flowers have a chance to grow.
4. Explain that a primary is a way to "weed out" people who want to be president so that those with the best chance to succeed (or grow) get the most support.
5. Explain that most states have primaries in which the voter is able to choose who the candidate should be for her/his party.
Summary

Discuss why candidates would drop out of the presidential race before the primaries are over, some reasons are lack of money, lack of voter support, and lack of party support.

Evaluation

During an election year, the students will complete the "Indiana Primary" worksheet which will need to be revised for the future.

During a year that is not a presidential election year, the students will write a paragraph explaining why candidates drop out of the presidential race.
INDIANA PRIMARY

1. The Indiana primary was held on ________________ .

2. The winner of the Democratic primary was ____________ .

3. The winner of the Republican primary was ____________ .

4. Indiana has _______ electoral votes.

5. The electoral vote is based upon the ________________ of each state.

6. Other areas that had primaries on the same day as Indiana are ________________________________ .

7. Primaries are important to the political process in the United States because ________________________________ .

8. One question that I have about primaries is _________

__________________________________________________________
**Topic**
What is a national convention?

**Time**
Two 25 minute sessions

**Objectives**
The students will be able to define convention and delegate.

**Preparation**
Get a video or a film of a political convention.

**Procedure**
1. Ask the students if they have ever heard of a convention and if so, define it—a large gathering of people.
2. Explain that the job of a convention is to pick a person to represent each party in the national election.
3. Explain that delegates are chosen to go to the convention for their party. Explain that some of the delegates can vote for who they want, while others must vote for the winner of their state's primary election.
4. Explain that at the convention people make speeches for specific candidates. After the speeches, the delegates vote on who will become that party's candidate for president.
5. Explain that they also chose the vice-presidential candidate at the convention in much the same way. Ask the students what things should be considered when voting for the vice-presidential candidate.
Summary
Discuss why a convention is so important to the political process.

Evaluation
The students will watch a tape of a national convention and discuss what was seen on the tape.
Topic
When is the Nation Election?

Time
20 minutes

Objectives
The students will be able to state when the election takes place.
The students will be able to define campaign.

Preparation
None

Procedure
1. Ask the students when the election takes place—the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. Ask the students why they would choose such an arrangement rather than a numerical date.
2. Ask why there is such a long time span between the primaries, the conventions, and the election.
3. Ask the students to define campaign.

Summary
Discuss why the campaigns are so important to the political process.

Evaluation
The students will write a paragraph about why campaigns are vital to the political process.
Topic
What is the Electoral College?

Time
25 minutes

Objectives
The students will be able to define the electoral college.
The students will be able to complete "Becoming the President" worksheet.

Preparation
Make copies of "Becoming the President" worksheet.

Procedure
1. Ask the students what it means to be popular.
2. Explain that the election that takes place in November is called a popular election. The public votes and decides which candidate is the most popular.
3. Ask the students if the winner of the popular election is now considered the new president--NO.
4. Ask if anyone knows what the next step is to the presidency--the electoral college.
5. Explain that each state has what are called electoral votes which are bases upon each states population.
6. Explain to the students that these electors were voted upon and now they will decide who the new president will be.
7. Explain that on the first Monday after the second Wednesday in December the electors meet at each state
8. Explain that the person who won the primary will get all of that state's electoral votes. Explain that these ballots are then sent to Washington D.C. to be counted by the President of the Senate on January 6.

9. Explain that in order to win a candidate must have a majority of the electoral votes—270 in 1988.

10. On January 20 the winner is finally inaugurated.

11. The popular election does not determine the new president, that is done by the electoral votes from each state.

Summary
Ask the students to explain the electoral college to a partner.

Evaluation
The students will complete "Becoming the President" worksheet.
NAME __________________

BECOMING THE PRESIDENT

Jacob Marshall wants to become President of the United States of America but he is not sure if he meets all of the requirements or not. Please list them for him.

1. ________________________________________________________

2. _________________________________________________

3. ______________________________________________________

Jacob can become president! His first step to the White House is the _______________ elections.

After all of these are over with, usually sometime in June, Jacob plans to go to a large gathering of his party which is called a _______________.

Surprise! Jacob has won the nomination of his party! Now he is off to make speeches and convince people to vote for him. This is called _______________.

Finally, it's the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November, more commonly called _______________.

Jacob can hardly believe his luck! He has won the popular election! Now he needs to wait until ________ when the electoral votes are counted by the President of the Senate. Jacob is thrilled to learn he has won _____ electoral votes. He is now the President-elect.

On _______________ Jacob is inaugurated as President of the United States of America. It was much work, but Jacob could not be happier about the result!
Bibliography


Appendix A:

Field Trips
FIELD TRIPS

1. Visit a polling place on Election Day. Check with the polling site officials beforehand to make sure that everything is prepared for a group of observers. Point out the campaign workers that are outside of the polling place. Explain to the students that may not go inside of the polling place to campaign. Also, ask the campaign workers for copies of the fliers for the students to examine. Explain to the students that these fliers must be thrown out upon entering the polling place. Once inside the polling place, notice the workers and discuss the various duties that they have. If possible, allow the students to look at the actual voting machine or ballot. Explain how both of these work to the students.

Upon returning to the classroom, have the students write a reaction paper to what they observed. Explain to the students that they need to use as many details as possible. Also, the students will need to write thank-you letters to all of those people involved in the trip. This list would include the bus drivers, tour guides, and any parents who helped with the trip.

2. Arrange a class trip to the state capital. Usually a tour guide will be responsible for pointing out highlights of the building. Remind the students that they will need to pay close attention to the guide
since they will be responsible for writing about the trip once again. Be sure to discuss all of the art work seen in the area, if possible correlate the discussion in an art lesson later. Also, if possible, visit the voting chambers and examine how the voting is carried out. Explain to the students what goes on before voting such as debate over the issue.

When the students return to the classroom, have them write a reaction paper using as many details and facts as possible. In the paper, have them include their favorite things about the state capital, including art work, the building, the area, etc. As soon as possible, have the students write thank-you letters to all of those who were involved in their field trip.

3. A trip to Democratic and Republican headquarters during an election year would be interesting to the students. Try to arrange to go to both places on the same day. While at each headquarters, the students should notice all of the posters and banners on the wall. The students should notice the various duties being performed by the workers such as campaigning over the telephone, and writing letters to voters. The students should discuss the purposes of the duties being performed by the workers.

Upon returning to the classroom, the students should write a reaction paper to what they observed.
This paper should contain a section that compares and contrasts the two headquarters. Details should be included as well as personal reactions to what the students saw. Thank-you letters should be sent out to all of those people who helped with the field trip.

4. If possible, attend a political rally with the students. This trip must be planned very carefully since most rallies are held in the evenings. Once there the students should observe those speaking to notice how they are speaking and how they are dressed. The students should also observe the people attending the rally. They should look for banners, buttons, and other campaign material. The reaction of the crowd is something that the students should notice, whether they are opposed to what is said or they support the speaker.

After returning to the classroom, the students should write a reaction paper to the political rally. They should include all of the details that they recall, as well as personal reactions. Thank-you letters should be sent to all involved with the trip.
Appendix B:

Bulletin Boards
Decorate a bulletin board with elephants, donkeys, and red, white, and blue border. Have the students bring in news articles about the election to place on the bulletin board. Before the students put the articles in place, have them give a brief summary of the article to the class.
Decorate a bulletin board with red, white, and blue construction paper, donkeys, elephants, and flags. Bring in campaign materials from past elections such as bumper stickers, buttons, posters, etc. Have the students compare the old materials to things being used in the current campaign.
Donkey pattern for bulletin board.
Elephant pattern for bulletin board.