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## **Pupil Participation in School Government at the Junior High School Level**

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PUPIL PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL GOVERNMENT  
AT THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

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A Research Paper  
Presented to  
the Graduate Faculty  
Central Washington State College

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Education

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by  
John Edwin Closner  
August 1962

THIS PAPER IS APPROVED AS MEETING  
THE PLAN 2 REQUIREMENT FOR THE  
COMPLETION OF A RESEARCH PAPER.

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Andrew In  
FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

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## CHAPTER I

### THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Much has been written about the needs of youth in a democratic society and the functions of the junior high school in meeting these needs. Most educators have recognized that:

All youth need to understand the rights and duties of the citizen of a democratic society and be diligent and competent in the performance of their obligation as members of the community and as citizens of the state and nation (14:9).

Numerous opportunities in the school curriculum help youth achieve this need. One of these opportunities is through pupil-participation in school government.

#### I. THE PROBLEM

Statement. The purposes of this study were (1) to review the available literature on pupil participation in junior high school government and (2) to outline some of the best ways to use this program.

Importance. The various student body organizations should allow the youth of the community, the state, and the nation to learn the rights and duties of citizens by becoming citizens within their own school. This study was

meant to determine which methods can be used within the student organization to further this goal.

## II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

There has been some confusion in the terminology applied to the program of pupil participation in school government. In the past, references have been made to student government, student self-government, pupil-participation in control, and student council.

Student government. When the program was much more limited in scope, there was considerable use of the term "student government." Frederick said that this term was never a good one, always something of a misnomer, and should never have been used at all. It implied that the students operated in an environment of their own, somehow sealed off from the larger school environment (6:43).

The terms "student self-government" and "pupil-participation in control" are also considered somewhat inaccurate and undesirable.

Pupil participation in school government. Kilzer, Stephenson, and Nordberg reported that "pupil participation in school government is a much more accurate and desirable term, and the organization which implements it is a school council" (13:141). This term does not imply that only

students are included in the program, but that both students and faculty share in the democratic process.

Student council. A number of different definitions can be found for student council. Fredericks gives a comprehensive definition, saying that:

The student council is a group of students selected by their fellow members of the student association to manage student affairs and to represent the student body at all times in all relationships. It represents their interests and makes decisions in the name of all the people of the school in the areas established by agreement, tradition, customs, or constitutional provision (6:23).

In this study the term student council shall be interpreted as "an organization of students, elected by the students to represent them and to speak for them in the many activities of the school" (12:1254).



## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Authorities have written many books and articles about the various plans and functions of pupil participation in school government. A limited review of some of the latest research will be presented here.

#### I. HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS AND TRENDS

The basic idea of students participating in the operation and management of their school is centuries old. Kilzer reported that pupil participation in government was utilized by Aristotle and Plato in Greece and later, during the eighteenth century, by the headmasters of Eton and Rugby in England. In the United States pupil participation was a feature in the colonial school, which had a monitorial system (13:139).

During the history of the movement students have been allowed to participate to varying degrees in the government of their school. From practices cited by Gruber and Beatty, scholars of good standing in a fourteenth century secondary school in England were allowed to supervise the other students' living habits and progress in study (8:2).

Later, during the Renaissance, most student participation in school control took the form of a monitorial system. The function of the monitor was largely disciplinary, but occasionally some of the older monitors acted as assistant teachers. During the Renaissance one school in Germany had a sort of student senate which gave some responsibilities and powers to the students themselves. Gruber and Beatty reported that this latter form has been generally credited with being the first example of student participation in the modern sense (8:3).

Although monitorial systems were a part of academies and public high schools during the early history of the United States, both the faculty and the administration were skeptical of student participation in school control in the modern sense of the term. Gruber and Beatty stated that near the end of the nineteenth century changes in the size, the function, and the personnel of the secondary school brought about changes in the attitude of the faculty and administration toward student participation in school control (8:4). Much of the development of the current program has taken place since then.

This program gained additional support in 1955 from the Executive Committee of the National Association of Secondary School Principals. They approved and adopted a resolution which read in part:

We believe that in every secondary school there should be an organization through which elected student representatives may have the opportunity to participate in some phase of school administration, especially in the extraclass, or student activity program. This school organization is generally known as the student council (18:43).

A limited number of studies have been made to determine how many schools have a program of student participation in school government. In one study made in 1926 of three hundred junior and senior high schools throughout the United States, Rugg found widespread interest in the attempt to train for citizenship by giving pupils opportunity to participate in school government. He reported that 90 per cent of the schools selected at random declared they were making an effort to try this movement (17:135).

Another study was made in 1952 of two hundred twenty-four junior high schools named as outstanding by the different state departments of education. Gaumnitz reported that a student council was found in 88.8 per cent of the schools included in the study (7:23).

Gruhn and Douglas reported in 1956 that most junior high schools in the United States had some kind of a student council and many schools an exceedingly successful one (9:307).

The trend, based on current theory and practice, seems to be in favor of the movement to encourage and utilize student participation in school government.

## II. OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM

One of the major goals of public school education is to produce good citizens. The purpose of all the elements of education, including the program of pupil participation in school government, is to contribute to this end. This objective, to promote desirable citizenship training, was given by Kilzer as one of the two primary objectives of the program. The other objective was to promote the general welfare of the school (13:168).

Many other objectives for the program can be found in the literature or in constitutions of student councils. Common among these are:

1. To develop qualities of good leadership and followship.
2. To develop a high morale and sense of pride in the school.
3. To promote proper student-faculty relationships.
4. To provide a clearing house for student opinion.
5. To allow students to participate in or manage allied activities.
6. To allow students to assist in the management and internal administration of the school.
7. To provide for the exercise of initiative, responsibility, and self-expression on the part of the pupils.

8. To develop faith in the democratic process.

### III. ORGANIZATION OF THE PROGRAM

Principles of organization. The administration, faculty, and students should understand the general philosophy of pupil participation in school government before trying to establish such a program within the junior high school. Kilzer warns against forming a student council before all members of the school have been properly oriented and have shown themselves to be sufficiently enthusiastic, capable, and willing to assume the implications of real participation by pupils in school government (13:168).

Each school should develop an organization which will meet its needs as the teachers and pupils together have determined those needs. Pupils should be given many opportunities to experience democracy. However, too much responsibility thrust upon pupils before they are able to use it may leave them confused and floundering. Pupil participation in school government should be introduced slowly in the junior high school, or the pupils may not be ready to accept their responsibilities. For this reason school government in the junior high school demands that pupils and teachers work together.

Types of plans. There are several plans for pupil participation in the management of junior high school affairs.

No one plan can be said to be the best. Again it depends upon the needs of the individual school. Two of the general practices employed quite extensively were given by Gruhn and Douglas. They were:

1. Participation through a formal pupil organization, such as a student council which has specified and continuous responsibilities and duties in the management of school affairs.
2. Participation through various pupil committees and groups that are created from time to time to meet specific needs in school management (9:306).

The formal of these two practices can take various forms. Most common is the student council, ordinarily a representative pupil group given certain duties and responsibilities in managing the school. Council members may be chosen by the various homeroom groups and serve for a specified time.

The all-community council plan is used in a few schools. This plan, similar in structure to the town meeting form of government, is only practical in schools with a very small enrollment. In such schools it would be feasible for all the students to meet and participate in the management of school affairs. However, this plan does not provide any opportunity for experience in representative government.

Another plan that has been used is the federal government plan. It follows the structure of the American

government, with a constitution patterned after the Constitution of the United States. A group of homerooms make up a state, and each homeroom has its own municipal government (10:15).

Constitutions. "One of the basic ideas behind an effective student council is that the council should operate with a constitution" (2:63). The constitution should be developed by students through the democratic process and be approved by the principal. Once a constitution has been adopted, it should remain in force with only minor variations made through the amending process.

Moore stressed the importance of a constitution that is complete in coverage, simple in organization, and clear in style (16:466). Of course, no school should try to adopt a model form without modifying it to fit their needs.

Kilzer presented a recommended framework for the constitution of a school council. The major provisions of the framework are presented here:

- Article I. Name
- Article II. Purpose
- Article III. Source of Power
- Article IV. Membership
- Article V. Officers
- Article VI. Meetings



Article VII. Duties of the Council

Article VIII. Amendments

Some of the constitutions incorporate the bylaws in the constitution proper, but the general practice is to state the bylaws at the end of the constitution. They usually include the following:

Article I. Quorum

Article II. Committees

Article III. Elections

Article IV. Vacancies

Article V. Reports

Article VI. Amendments to the Bylaws (13:148)

Basis of representation. There are various methods of selecting representatives of the governing body. The most common, as reported by Mock are:

1. The members are elected by the entire student body.
2. The members are elected by the different classes.
3. Representatives are selected from the different organizations.
4. Selection is made on the basis of the homeroom.
5. The principal appoints the members.
6. The principal appoints a few leading members and they select others.
7. A faculty committee presents a list of names from which the students may make the selection (15:107).

The election of council members should be on a constructive basis. The governing body should be representative,

and each student should have a voice in making decisions through his elected representative. Each member of the council should be aware of his responsibilities to his constituents.

Dayman stated that in the junior high school the homeroom generally is the basic unit to which all students belong. In this group each student can participate in the discussion of policies and issues that need consideration. There should be a representative from each homeroom in the central governing body, which will be concerned with problems and policies that affect the entire school. It is essential that there be effective communication between the homeroom and the student council (5:37).

Areas of participation. The student council must be engaged in real work. It must feel that its function is an important one and that it has an important place in the operation of the school.

The student council should have its area of responsibility determined at the outset and be allowed to plan in the areas under its jurisdiction. Baxter listed the three areas of responsibility in every school as:

1. The area of responsibility belonging to the principal.
2. The area of responsibility belonging to the faculty.

3. That area over which the students may rule and within which they may act (1:118).

It is important that these three areas be defined clearly to all concerned, thus avoiding the necessity of administrative veto.

The responsibilities the pupils assume in the management of school affairs in the junior high school vary widely. Gruhn and Douglas, in a survey of junior high schools, found that pupils assisted as homeroom officers in nearly all schools, as corridor monitors in a great majority, and as schoolground monitors or office assistants in about half. An increasing number of schools were assigning pupils to traffic and safety patrols (9:306).

Educators are not in full agreement as to the responsibilities of pupils in making school policies and regulations and in correcting pupil offenders. Gruhn and Douglas reported:

The trend at the present is toward having pupils share in formulating those policies and regulations which have a direct bearing on pupil conduct. However, the advisability of delegating disciplinary responsibilities to the student council or some other council is indeed open to question (9:307).

The total number of activities in which the council might engage are many. Usually they include responsibility in planning and conducting such activities as assemblies, clubs, social functions, student elections, and certain school publications.

Several detailed lists of possible activities in which councils might engage can be found in the literature. However, it is important that each council plan its own program of activities based upon the needs of the school and the abilities, interests, and enthusiasm of council members.

Kilzer emphasized that the enthusiasm of a student council could be destroyed by too many restrictions. At the same time the administration and faculty cannot allow unlimited freedom in the selection of activities (13:142). This situation can be avoided by a student-faculty planned program of activities for the year.

#### IV. ROLE OF ADMINISTRATION AND FACULTY

Principal. "Authorities are agreed that the most important factor in an effective school council is the support of an enthusiastic, persistent, and competent principal" (13:143).

One primary role of the principal is to help the faculty and student body develop the philosophy of the student council. Some other major responsibilities of the principal include:

1. He should select a well trained sponsor and allow him adequate time in which to do his work.
2. He should provide a time during the day and a place for the council meetings.

3. He should be willing to offer advice to the council.
4. He should help sell the student council movement to the faculty, the students, and the community.
5. He should appreciate the value of working through the council even though it may be a slower way of doing things (4:208).

The principal constantly should be aware of the objectives and plans of the council in relation to the over all planning in his school. He should participate with the council and not administrate.

Faculty. Teachers can do a great deal toward making the student council work and toward establishing a more pleasant and congenial school community. Van Pool suggests that teachers should remember and practice the following principles:

1. Know exactly what the council is and demonstrate an interest in what it is doing.
2. Be cooperative, sympathetic and understanding with the council.
3. Understand that not all council projects will be successful.
4. Seek student help if necessary; make the council work by giving it important tasks to do (20:195).

Sponsor. The sponsor in any program of pupil participation in school government has a difficult but very important role to play. Sterner believed that the sponsor must serve in the role of (1) a planner, (2) a consultant,

(3) an advisor, (4) an evaluator, and (5) a teacher (19:49).

Most authorities agree that the sponsor must possess all the desirable qualities of an outstanding teacher. The sponsor must understand boys and girls, be sympathetic to their problems, and be understood by them. He must, at all times, preserve a fair-minded attitude toward all student-faculty problems and make evident that his interest is in the welfare of the whole school. To assure good student-faculty relations, the sponsor should be sure that the student council carries out its functions and lives up to the expectations of the faculty and administration.

#### V. EVALUATION OF PROGRAM

Evaluation is an important and necessary feature of a program of pupil participation in school government. The student council organization and its activities were established to meet definite needs within the school community. A sound policy should be developed for evaluating the student council and the effectiveness of its related activities.

A number of methods can be used to evaluate the student council and its program. Some of the methods suggested by Bowman were:

1. A detailed questionnaire or checklist to be completed by the members of the council and sponsor.

2. A written report from the members of the council and the sponsor.
3. A specialized committee.
4. A discussion group (3:203).

The use of more than one of these methods should help to insure a more thorough evaluation. Many authorities suggest use of self-evaluation by the council and evaluation by outside authorities. Also, evaluation should provide measurement after each project and measurement at the end of each term.

"A good program of evaluation," according to Bowman, "is continuous, concerns all phases of the program, is carefully written and filed, and is used for improvement" (3:204).

## CHAPTER III

### SUMMARY

"All junior high school youth need to be participating citizens of their school and community with increasing orientation to adult citizenship" (11:15).

Many of the offerings in the curriculum and the practice of democratic living in the classroom and on the school grounds have tended to help youth satisfy this need. One of the important experiences in democratic living has come through pupil participation in school control. This experience provides a method whereby students learn the rights and duties of a citizen by becoming citizens in their own school. They learn to recognize problems, discuss and study them, and attempt to solve them.

The practice of pupil-participation in management of their own school is centuries old. The present highly organized and important student association administered by the student council is the product of years of gradual development.

Each school should develop an organization to meet its specific needs. The planning for this student organization must be shared by the administration, the faculty, and the students.



A genuinely democratic student organization, to be truly functional, must possess certain basic factors:

1. The student governing body should be representative.
2. The student governing body should handle problems that are real to young people.
3. The student governing body should have its area of responsibility determined and be allowed by the administration and the sponsor to consider and act on those problems that are within its jurisdiction.
4. The governing body should be given status, that is, it should feel the importance of its activities and be allowed to meet during school time.
5. The group should be constantly evaluating its processes, and no part of the organization should continue to exist if the need no longer exists.

The basic purpose of the student council must constantly be interpreted to the students, the teachers, and the administration. In turn, the student council must have the support and help it may need from each of these groups.

From the viewpoint of the administration, the broad

purpose of the student council should be to develop citizenship within the group and in the school. The council can also serve as a sounding board for student opinion and as a partner in planning school events. Service to the school is also of central importance. Pupil participation, the pupils involved in significant decision making, is essential for young people if they are to develop democratic values and behaviors.

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