

SASKATCHEWAN ACTION RESEARCH NETWORK
Action Research Report

Research Question: Would using the group process in relation to the upcoming Saskatchewan election result in greater interest in the electoral process and individual growth of students' knowledge of elections?

Timeline: 2003

Criteria for success:

- Voting vs. not voting
- Student growth in knowledge about the electoral process
- Students' comfort with group work

Researchers:

Anna Fish, Bula Ghosh, Dianne Knippshild, Ed Bath, Lynn McCaig, Paul Stack, Renee Hunt

Locations of Project:

- Swift Current Campus, Cypress Hills College
Dianne Knippshild & Bula Ghosh
- Maple Creek Campus, Cypress Hills College
Ed Bath
- Southeast Regional College
Anna Fish & Renee Hunt
- Palliser Campus, Moose Jaw, SIAST
Paul Stack & Lynn McCaig

Summary of Outcomes:

- Our student survey indicated an increase in the value in every criteria of the post-survey to the pre-survey.
- This suggested that the group process had increased the level of student knowledge and provided a favourable learning experience.
- The survey did indicate that the students had a positive attitude towards the group process in spite of the challenges it may pose sometimes.

Action Research Process:

- Started and ended research on the same days at all five centres:
Start : October 20, 2003
End: November 5, 2003 (Provincial Election Day)
- Developed a questionnaire to survey the students on the following:
 - the merits and demerits of group process in individualized programs
 - previous knowledge on the electoral process
 - assessment of the new knowledge
 - learning styles
- Used the same questionnaire with or without minor modification to survey the students before and after the research
- The students were directed to work in groups and to conduct research on various aspects of the election. Depth of research varied from one centre to another.
- Compiled survey and anecdotal reports.
- Interpreted the results
- Shared the report with colleagues

Total number of participants: 62

Data Collection Techniques:

- Pre- and post- surveys of students
- Observation by instructors
- Anecdotal reports – more information available on request

Challenges:

The number of students who participated in the action research pre and post surveys were not the same. Fewer learners participated in the post survey.

Result interpretation:

The survey indicated an increase in the value in every criteria of the post-survey to the pre-survey. This suggested that the group process had increased the level of student

knowledge and provided a favourable learning experience. In addition, the survey did indicate that the students had a positive attitude towards the group process in spite of the challenges it may pose sometimes.

Copies of the survey and tabulated results are available for reference upon request. For more detailed information please contact:

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APPENDIX A: INSTRUCTOR ANECDOTAL RECORDS

II.

I have a very diverse group of students which includes ESL, GED prep and pre-tens. For the project, I put students in pairs according to their fluency in English and their computer literacy level, trying to balance out strengths.

The overall result, for various reasons, was that except for one pair of students, the assignment was done individually. In one pair of ESL and native English speaking students, the native English speaking student took over and did the research and reported alone. In another pair, the ESL student didn't want to participate, preferring to work on English proficiency instead. In another pair, one student was only part-time and was absent much of the time, so the other student proceeded alone. The two that worked together seemed to enjoy the process.

In the end, there was information produced on the platforms of each party running in the election, and it was distributed to all the students. The questionnaire results indicated that all students felt better informed about the candidates.

III. Comments on group work assignments on the Saskatchewan Election:

Day One

Initially students worked as individuals in a group. They all did everything, instead of delegating and sharing tasks.

Day Two

We talked about roles in a group, especially the role of facilitator. The facilitator had difficulty determining tasks to work on and assigning them.

Day Three

A list of possible tasks that each member or group within the group was generated to help the facilitator. This was the first day that they functioned as a group and I was excited to see what was unfolding.

Blizzards

We then had a week and a half of heavy snowfall and blizzards. Members that were at school were concerned that they would be doing all the work. With the election date looming it was important that we keep working in spite of many students being absent.

Day Five

When we finally had most of the students back at school, we began the task of determining and summarizing political party platforms. Party brochures were written at a level that they had difficulty doing this. Also, they could not relate to many of the items in platforms and found it difficult to relate to the common good of the general population of the province. With a great deal of assistance from myself, the party platforms were summarized.

Day Six

It was intended to have the students groups go through each platform and comment on each item, but the election was the next day, so we did it as a class project and included the other class at our campus. Students were given copies of the platforms, and as we went over them on an overhead, were asked to put a + if they saw an item as a positive, a - if they saw an item as a negative and a 0 if they had no judgment on an item. They could then determine which party's platform they agreed with the most.

Day Seven

We walked down as a class to vote. Note: First Nations students felt totally disenfranchised by the system. They see nothing or little in it for them and do not see themselves as part of the province as a whole. Only one first nations student voted. I do not know if this is typical of the province, but if it is, there is a tremendous challenge ahead to change this way of thinking.

IV.

Briefly, in all categories there was a marked shift to positive outcomes, except perhaps on preference for group work, though those who probably "hated" it prior to the project mellowed somewhat.

APPENDIX B: SELECTED STUDENT ANECDOTAL RECORDS

1. My views on doing this assignment are that it was nice to do something else for a change beside the same work all the time. It gave me a chance to see other views on how they feel about government. It also made me more aware of the issues the candidates thought were important and how they wanted to improve things if they get elected. Working in a group setting was a good idea it shows us how we have to work with other people even if we do not have the same views they do. So in sort it was a learning experience.
2. Increase post-secondary education operating fund by 5% every year for the next four years. Also to remodel the Student Loan Program to ensure all students in need have access to student loans.

I have found it to be very informative and interesting to see what the different party platforms are. It also has helped me to decide which party to vote for.

It will help me to take a post-secondary education, if the student loan program is remodeled