Who’s in Charge? A Role-Playing Activity to Promote Student Understanding of Governance Issues in an Introduction to Education Course

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Capitalizing on role playing simulations, this activity provides the opportunity for students the governance process of a local school board and how board decisions impact various stakeholders in the community. The activity incorporates active learning strategies that allow students to go beyond the surface level of understanding. This activity is adapted from an activity created by the Resource Center for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention.

The Governing Board Meeting

Objectives: At the completion of the session, participants will be able to have a discussion where they:

1. Analyze and explain the governance structure of a local school district,
2. Analyze and explain how school board policy is influenced by various stakeholders in a community,
3. Analyze and explain the potential impact board policies have on financing issues, and
4. Analyze and explain the political and economic influences on education at the federal and state levels.

Time: 60-75 Minutes

Note: This lesson can be split into two sessions: one for preparing the students for the mock board of directors meeting and the second for the mock meeting and debriefing discussion.

Materials
- Role descriptions for the governing board meeting
- Handout: Board President Directions
- Clock for timekeeping

Preparation
1. Place a table at the front of the classroom. Place 5 chairs at the table for the board members. Identify an area in the front of the room near the board member table where members of the audience (the other participants’ assigned roles in the simulation) can approach to speak to the board. If your class is larger than the roles identified, consider creating extra parent, youth, and tax payer roles.
2. Project or post the board meeting ground rules on the blackboard or flip chart paper.
3. Project or post the board meeting agenda on the blackboard or flip chart paper.

Procedure
I. Introduce the Activity

Tell students that they are going to explore the process of making policy decisions in public education, particularly with controversial issues. Explain that they will take part in a mock governing board meeting. In the board meeting, the role players will decide if their district should add contraceptive education (education about various birth control methods like the birth control pill, Norplant, etc.) to their current family life education program.

Tell students that the main purpose of the activity is for them to experience the governance process of a local school board. Students will experience how boards make decisions about controversial topics. In addition students will observe or practice advocating for important opinions, as well as understand the pros and cons of providing contraceptive education to youth.

II. Distribute Role Cards and Name Tags

Explain to the students that there are 16 roles in this activity. If the class is comprised of more than 16 students, create extra cards for parents, students, and local tax payers.
Distribute the role cards; ideally this will be done the class period before the activity takes place. It may be a good idea to provide students with the website link to the state legislation regarding sex education in schools so that they have the opportunity to research it prior to the board meeting.

Make sure the "Board President" role card is given to a student who feels comfortable in leadership roles and speaking in front of groups. Give the "Board President" the handout entitled: "Board President Directions."

**Facilitator Note:**
The instructor should assume the role of a board clerk. In this way the instructor can be part of the simulation while making sure that timelines are followed and help the student role playing the governing board president maintain order. The clerk’s job is to make sure the students playing the other roles observe the proper amount of time in addressing the board as well as not engaging in others in conversation.

III. Present the Board Meeting Agenda and Ground Rules

Review the posted board meeting agenda with the students. Explain that it is a simplified version of an actual board meeting agenda.

Board Meeting Agenda

I. Introductions (2 minutes)
II. Presentation of the Issue
   - Purpose of Meeting (1 minute)
   - Present Current Family Life Education Policy (3 minutes)
   - Meeting Visitors Share Opinions (15 minutes)
   - Board Members Ask Questions (10 minutes)
III. Board Members’ Discussion (5-8 minutes)
IV. Board Members Vote (2 minutes)
V. Adjournment (1 minute)

Explain that this board has only five people, one board president and four other board members. All other participants – students, parents, the minister, etc. – are visitors. Explain that the board president will run the meeting. The facilitator will function as the board clerk.

Present Board Meeting Ground Rules:

- Once the meeting begins, stay in character.
- Only one person speaks at a time, so if more than one of you wants to speak at the same time, raise your hand and the board president will call on you.
- If things get confusing or out of hand, the leader will call "Time Out" to help the group get back on course.
- Be respectful, even if your character adamantly disagrees with another character

IV. Stage the Board Meeting (up to 45 minutes)

V. Debrief the Activity [http://pacific-edge.info/orid/]

1. What was the topic?
2. Who was present?
3. What did you observe about the meeting?
4. How do you feel about the topic of contraceptive education?
5. Should this topic be taught in public schools?
6. What happens when we don’t discuss contraceptive education?
7. Who or what was the most noteworthy aspect of the simulation?
8. How did this activity add to your knowledge about organizing and paying for education?
9. How might the knowledge you gained from this activity impact your role as an educator?
10. How might you influence the discussion of this topic in your home? Community? School? District?

Adapted from
Resource Center for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention