An Analysis of a Student Council Workshop as a Training Institution for High School Leaders

JACK LAVENBURG *

ORGANIZATIONS known as student councils have long been a part of school programs. Student councils can be traced back to the ancient academies of Plato and Aristotle. Traditionally, the rationale for student councils is based upon the informal learning that accompanies their activities. Lately, educators have begun to realize that this organization should work toward building a "climate for learning" within the school. One source declares, "If the student council does not contribute directly to the main function of the school as an educational institution, it should not exist at all." [1]

Wood further defined this emergent philosophy when he wrote, "The student council . . . helps to create an environment in which students and faculty work together cooperatively for the betterment of the school and the well-being of each student." [2] Thus, problems turned over to the council should be real problems, not imitation government. Its goals should be student commitment to a total effort to upgrade the school program.

However, too often the success of a student council is limited. To a large extent, effectiveness is contingent upon whether or not leadership training is provided for the newly elected student leaders. As a result, leadership programs have been developed to meet this need. One of the new techniques is the summer workshop for leadership training.

The Oregon Student Council Summer Workshop is not unique, as more than 40 other states have similar programs. A typical five-day session is sponsored by the local state department of education. Participants are high school student council members. Workshop instructors are usually high school faculty members who express a keen interest in leadership training. Primary emphasis is given to small group discussion and activities that follow the theme of the morning general assembly.

Workshop curriculum ranges from parliamentary procedure to a discussion of the conditions needed for maximizing learning within the school environment. The Oregon Summer Student Council Workshop has been in operation since 1955. Each summer, approximately 450 students attend the three sessions held on the University of Oregon campus in Eugene.

An extensive review of the literature revealed no attempt has been made to evaluate any of the workshops operating in 47 states. Little was known of the results brought about by the various regional student council workshops. All judgments heretofore have been speculative rather than factual. This evaluation project was based upon factual and comparative results of workshop leadership training.

[1] Oregon Association of Student Councils. *Instructional Guide: Oregon Student Council Workshop*. Second edition. 1965.

[2] Donald I. Wood. "What's a Student Council For?" *NEA Journal* 54: 65-67; April 1962.

* *Jack Lavenburg, Assistant Professor of Education, Oregon State University, Corvallis*

The Problem

The intent of the study was to provide findings and conclusions that would prove useful to student council advisors, administrators, and classroom teachers. Attitudinal and behavioral changes that resulted from workshop attendance were identified and measured. This study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. Do student council representatives who attend the workshop exhibit a significantly greater degree of understanding of the student council's primary role than student council leaders from participating schools who do not attend the workshop?

2. Do student council representatives who attend the workshop exhibit a significantly greater degree of understanding of the student council's primary role than student council leaders from non-participating schools?

3. Do untrained student leaders from participating schools exhibit a significantly greater degree of understanding of the student council's role than student leaders from non-participating schools?

4. Do trained student representatives from participating schools demonstrate a greater frequency of positive behavior patterns than untrained student leaders from participating schools?

Procedure

Data were collected from Oregon high school student councils during the 1967-68 school year. A small sample group consisted of student council advisors in selected participating high schools. Student leaders who attended the workshop comprised the experimental group. Student leaders from participating schools who did not attend and student leaders from non-participating schools were designated as control groups 1 and 2 respectively.

In order to measure attitudes, a 55-item summated rating scale measuring each of the five daily workshop categories was developed. As part of the procedure, a split-half reliability coefficient of .64 was established ($n = 111$). Behavioral changes were measured by a rating instrument completed by the student council advisors of each participating school. Advisors were asked to contrast the on-the-job behavior of trained student council leaders and untrained leaders.

The pretest was administered during May and the post-test took place during the following fall. In this study, student councils, rather than individual council leaders, were randomly selected. The student councils, therefore, were considered the sampling unit. Fifty-four schools comprised the total sample.

Data Analysis

Analysis of covariance was used to answer questions 1, 2, and 3. Question 4 was tested by utilizing the chi-square formula. In all cases, the .05 level of confidence was used to determine significance.[3] Whenever this technique yielded a significant F ratio, the Scheffe method of multiple comparisons determined which combination of group means was significantly different.

In order that the reader understand this portion of the report, it is necessary to refer to the scaling procedure. Strong agreement to an item was marked 1 by the respondent. Strong disagreement, conversely, was scored as a 5. A neutral position on the five-point scale was indicated by a 3.

However, this numerical system was modified by the data processor. A continuum of 0 to 4 replaced the 1 to 5 scale. This will explain group mean scores that are reported as less than 1, and also indicates the attitudinal direction of the compared groups.

Findings and Discussion

A preliminary examination of the data revealed repeated differences between the attitude scores of trained and untrained student council leaders. Table 1 presents the summarized statistical analysis. The level of significance was set at .05. The attitudes of

[3] All items in the students' attitudinal instrument and the advisors' behavioral instrument were keyed to one of the workshop's daily topics. Each item is analyzed separately and grouped by topics.

the experimental group differed significantly with the two control groups with respect to student discipline and the need for evaluating the student council. Evaluation was endorsed, however, by all three groups. Curiously, the two control groups registered greater approval than the trained experimental group.

In three items, the attitudes of the experimental group and control group 1 differed significantly from those of control group 2. The first two groups disagreed with statements limiting the student council's activities to members only. In addition, these two groups displayed a more liberal attitude toward the need to plan for the future and indicated greater sensitivity to the needs of the general student body.

In two other instances, the experimental group differed significantly with one of the control groups. Workshop-trained students agreed that school-wide learning is the main concern of the student council. This represented a statistically different attitude from that expressed by control group 1, but for unexplained reasons the attitude of control group 2 did not differ significantly from those of the experimental group. A somewhat similar reaction occurred in response to an item that stated: "Leadership ability can be developed." All three groups agreed. The experimental group's level of agreement was significantly greater than that of control group 2. However, examination of the two control groups' means revealed no significant attitudinal differences.

The student council advisors believed that the workshop-trained leaders exhibited superior behavioral characteristics. According to the judgment of the advisors, trained

Summarized Attitude Construct	Source	d.f.	M.S.	Groups	Means
Non-Democratic Practices	Between	2	7.8867	Exp'l	3.5897
	Within	76	.4867	Con 1	3.5335[b]
	Total	78	F = 16.447	Con 2	2.3400[a]
School-wide Learning	Between	2	2.7785	Exp'l	1.5611
	Within	76	.8445	Con 1	2.1431[b]
	Total	78	F = 3.289	Con 2	2.112
Student Discipline	Between	2	3.621	Exp'l	1.4831
	Within	76	.8139	Con 1	2.3181[b]
	Total	78	F = 4.4488	Con 2	22.372[a]
Development of Leadership	Between	2	1.2074	Exp'l	.3967
	Within	76	.2807	Con 1	.5777
	Total	78	F = 4.3012	Con 2	.8911
Meaningful Student Council Evaluation	Between	2	.797	Exp'l	1.4858
	Within	76	3.275	Con 1	.9546[b]
	Total	78	F = 6.6977	Con 2	1.0744[c]
Need for an Evaluation	Between	2	2.2003	Exp'l	3.5653[a]
	Within	76	.3285	Con 1	3.3108[b]
	Total	78	F = 6.6977	Con 2	28.578[c]
Council's Relation to Student Body	Between	2	.8430	Exp'l	.0889[a]
	Within	76	.0901	Con 1	.1119
	Total	78	F = 9.3649	Con 2	.4528[c]
An Effective Council Organizational Plan	Between	2	3.2251	Exp'l	2.3942
	Within	76	.8478	Con 1	3.0531[b]
	Total	78	F = 3.8038	Con 2	2.6133[a]
Need for Evaluation	Between	2	2.1250	Exp'l	.5578[a]
	Within	76	.4330	Con 1	.3873
	Total	78	F = 4.9068	Con 2	1.0406[c]
Purpose of the Organization	Between	2	.9676	Exp'l	.4831
	Within	76	.2489	Con 1	.6596[b]
	Total	78	F = 3.8870	Con 2	.8967[a]

[a] Experimental — Control 2 mean
[b] Experimental — Control 1 mean
[c] Control 1 — Control 2

Table 1. Analysis of Covariance of Significant Attitudinal Differences Among Three Groups of Student Council Leaders *

* Significance of multiple contrasts set at .05 level.

student council leaders may be said to accept faculty advice more readily, try harder to improve school conditions, provide a more comprehensive activity program, be more democratic, be more effective in problem solving, use parliamentary procedure more effectively, be more concerned with student council standards, and use the evaluation process more effectively. Six of the total of ten items reached the .01 level of confidence. Table 2 presents the summary of the behavioral data polled from the 32 advisors.

Behavior Analyzed	X^2	Level of Significance
Acceptance of Faculty Advice	12.81	.01
Effort Made To Improve School Climate	19.92	.01
Sensitivity of Council to Student Body	.22	NS
Effort To Improve Program	5.08	.05
Democratic Group Practice	7.26	.01
Effective Problem Solving	9.85	.01
Harmonious Faculty Relations	.02	NS
Effective Parliamentary Procedure	44.54	.01
Concern with Standards of Service	28.60	.01
Constructive Student Council Evaluation	5.08	.05

Table 2. Summary of Analysis of Behavioral Instrument

Conclusions

The data that were gathered warrant a number of conclusions. Of these, the most encouraging underscores the vote of confidence student council advisors gave to workshop training. More specifically, the results of this study tend to indicate that the workshop experience can produce attitude changes. Although these changes have been meager, they are distinctly in evidence, as approximately 20 percent of the items produced significant differences between trained and untrained leaders. It is quite possible that a greater impact was achieved. Many of the attitude statements revealed instances in which the between-groups variances exceeded the within-groups variance but failed to reach the required statistical significance.

It appears that the workshop improved on-the-job behavior. This is the outstanding conclusion drawn from the findings. In eight of the ten items, student council advisors judged the work of the trained leaders to be superior. Nevertheless, the findings imply that attitudes are not accurate predictors of behavior. This is exemplified by the discrepancy between the extent of attitude change and rated performance.

In certain instances, the results suggest that trained leaders tend to influence their untrained colleagues. Repeatedly, the attitudes of the experimental group and control group 1 differed from control group 2.

It is obvious that an effort should be made to encourage wider participation in regional student council workshops. The results of this study suggest that student-teacher relationships involving student council activity might reveal useful information for educators in this period of increasing student unrest and activism at the secondary level.

References

1. Maria G. Cameron. "The Leadership Training Class." *The Student Council in the Secondary School.* Washington, D.C.: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1962.

2. Paul B. Diederich and William Van Til. *The Workshop.* New York: Hinds, Hayden and Eldredge, 1955.

3. Robert W. Frederick. *The Third Curriculum.* New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1959.

4. Arthur C. Hearn. *Evaluation of Student Activities, New Directions for Student Councils, Number Six.* Washington, D.C.: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1966.

5. William S. Sterner. *The Student Council Advisor, New Directions for Student Councils, Number One.* Washington, D.C.: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1963. □