

Paths of Public Policy

Analyzing Decision Making in Times of Crisis

Tools		
<i>Kit software:</i> Decisions, Decisions: Colonization; Inspiration; mPOWER; World Book Encyclopedia	<i>Other:</i> Computers; the Internet; AppleWorks; EdView	<i>Optional:</i> A digital camcorder; iMovie

Project Duration

Six to nine class sessions over a period of about two weeks

Introduction

Leaders, governments, and whole societies must sometimes respond to problems or crises that are a threat to the society or the well being of its citizens. In such situations, decision making becomes both very important and very complex, with every decision having its particular consequences, which often lead to further tough choices. How does analysis of crisis decision making help reveal some of the fundamental aspects of governance and political life? How can experiences of virtual decision making push students toward more thoughtful consideration of public policy issues and the cause-and-effect relationships of policy decisions?

Project Overview

Students begin this project by taking on the role of a U.S. president who must respond to a simulated crisis set in the future. After brainstorming ideas for similar scenarios, groups each select and develop a scenario, and then create simulations that allow others to respond to the scenarios by making a series of decisions. The simulations, created in mPOWER, require the students who create them to analyze their scenarios, and the underlying real-world issues, in depth.

Phase 1: Analyzing a public policy dilemma of the future

Invite students, working in groups of four, to explore the simulation in Decisions, Decisions: Colonization, which puts students in the position of a U.S. president forced to make decisions about a space colonization crisis. During its simulation session, each group traces its path, recording (in AppleWorks) the choices it faces and the decisions it makes each step of the way.

With the whole class, discuss the structure of the simulation and what it reveals about public policy decision-making processes in general (every decision has its particular consequences, each of which leads to new choices). Based on each group's experience of a different decision path, work with the class to build (on the board) a tree diagram representing the choices and paths built into the Decisions, Decisions: Colonization simulation.

Phase 2: Exploring and selecting scenarios

With the whole class, brainstorm a list of potential scenarios that could precipitate a public policy crisis, and thus lend themselves to simulations like the space colonization scenario in Decisions, Decisions: Colonization.

Students then meet in their small groups, discuss the class list, add their own ideas, and finally settle on a scenario on which they want to focus. To become familiar with the issues underlying the scenario and the various possible stakeholders, students research World Book Encyclopedia, library resources, and the Internet (using EdView). Groups then use Inspiration to map out tree diagrams showing at least three layers of choices and consequences relating to the handling and resolution of their crises. (See the tree diagram "Who gets the water?" on the kit Web site for an example.)

Phase 3: Building simulations

In their small groups, students use the Inspiration tree diagrams created in Phase 2 to guide them in making their own simulations in mPOWER that represent the various choices and consequences involved in their respective scenarios. Each simulation, by exploiting mPOWER's hot buttons, mimics the hierarchical branching structure of Decisions, Decisions: Colonization.

Phase 4: Sharing the simulations

Groups rotate through each other's completed simulations, learning about the issues each deals with, taking note of the various public policy paths, and relating choices and consequences.

In a closing discussion, students compare the simulations they have experienced and express what they have learned.

Technical and Facilitation Tips

Facilitation Tips: Phase 1

- If you do not have as many computers or Decisions, Decisions: Colonization CDs as there are groups, you may want to explore the Decisions, Decisions: Colonization simulation as a whole class, using a large screen monitor or projection device.
- If time permits, groups can go through more than one simulation session, allowing the class to complete more of the tree diagram.
- Instead of constructing the tree diagram on the board, you can construct it on a transparency projected onto a screen. Another option is to use Inspiration and a projection device.

- Creating a tree diagram that represents every possible decision path in Decisions, Decisions: Colonization would be time-consuming, since there are approximately 162 unique paths. Tracing only a small portion of these paths will be sufficient to demonstrate to students the complexity of the decision-making process, and to provide a model for what they will be doing in Phases 2 and 3.
- Groups will need copies of the Advisor Briefing Books before they begin the Decisions, Decisions: Colonization simulation. These books are included on the CD in PDF format and can be printed.
- Even though the decisions in the simulation are made by a U.S. president, they represent the kinds of public policy decisions that may have to be made by leaders of other countries, leaders of businesses, and citizens in general.
- Each group may require as long as a whole class session to effectively explore the simulation; the whole-class portion of the phase will occupy another session.

Tech Tips: Phase 1

- When a new simulation session is started in Decisions, Decisions: Colonization, the software asks you to choose a mode of use: Whole Class, Single Team, or Multi-Team Rotation. If each team has its own computer station and Decisions, Decisions: Colonization CD, choose the Single Team mode. If you are doing the simulation as a whole class (see Facilitation Tips for Phase 1), choose the Whole Class mode. (In the Multi-Team mode, the software expects every team to complete a phase of the simulation before any team can move on to the next phase.)
- During a simulation session, the Decisions, Decisions: Colonization application keeps track of a group's goals and decisions. This summary can be viewed onscreen during, or at the conclusion of, a simulation session. To view the decision summary, choose Review Decisions from the Tools menu, and then select the appropriate tabs. From this dialog box, it is also possible to print the decision summary or save it as a text file (which can then be opened in AppleWorks).
- At several stages in the simulation, the application asks students to read material from their Advisor Briefing Books, which are included on the CD in PDF format. In addition, a summary of each advisor's opinion can be quickly accessed from the Decisions, Decisions: Colonization application. Choose View Advisors from the Options menu. From this dialog box, the summaries can be read onscreen, or all of them can be printed.

Facilitation Tips: Phase 2

- The scenarios listed in the class brainstorming session can be local, state, national, or international in scope. Scenarios should be based on real issues and have some likelihood of actually taking place. They can be based on specific events that need immediate attention (such as the invasion of one country by another) or crises that develop slowly (such as the lack of affordable housing). They can take place in the present, the near future, or the more distant future.

- Crisis scenarios that may be suitable for students' simulations include the following:
 - Energy demand in a region exceeds the supply.
 - A deadly epidemic spreads rapidly through the population.
 - A nuclear power plant has an accident releasing large amounts of radiation.
 - Traffic congestion worsens to the point of crisis.
 - Few people can afford health insurance.
 - A country in another part of the world invades its neighbor.
 - Global warming threatens agriculture around the world.
- Although the issues underlying each scenario will be real, the scenario itself, as well as the choices and consequences involved, will be invented by each group. In addition, groups may want to invent some specifics (places, for example) to add realism to their simulations.
- Groups need not feel restricted to making tree diagrams in which each branch is completely separate from the others. One consequence may flow from two similar decisions on different branches.
- It is important for students to be aware of the various stakeholders that may be involved in their crisis scenarios, and what their interests, values, and goals might be.
- Each decision point, or node, in a group's tree diagram should include two or three choices. Three choices may sometimes better represent reality, but two will keep the tree diagram, and the presentation created from it in Phase 3, simpler and easier to complete.
- Each branch in a group's tree diagram should end with an outcome that provides some kind of closure. These outcomes may be similar to those given in *Decisions, Decisions: Colonization*. For example, they can be fictitious results of public opinion polls, based on how the string of decisions may have pleased or displeased stakeholders, served the interests of society in general, or spent public money wisely.
- Each part of this phase (class and group brainstorming, research, and building of tree diagrams) will require at least most of a class session. It will be helpful if some of the research is done outside of class.

Facilitation Tips: Phase 3

- When groups meet to build their simulations, students can take on specialized roles such as Producer (coordinates technical processes), Editor (revises text), Writer (writes new material), and Graphic Designer (designs slides).
- Each group may want to make it clear who the decision maker in its simulation is: a president, governor, mayor, legislative body, or regulatory commission, for example. But it is also acceptable for a group to leave the role of decision maker open and indefinite, allowing the eventual user or viewer of the simulation to assume that he or she has the authority to make all the decisions involved in the scenario.
- For practical reasons, groups may sidestep the issues that would be involved in actual decision making (the developers of *Decisions, Decisions: Colonization* did the same thing when they assumed that every choice in the simulation could be made by the president of the United States alone).

- The simplest way for groups to structure their simulations is to have each slide (after the first one) include (1) the consequence of the previous choice, (2) the new decision that must be made as a result of this consequence, and (3) the possible choices of action (each set up as a hot button). However, groups may choose to put the consequences on one slide and the decision and choices on another, allowing space for images and more time for the viewer or user to absorb the information.
- It will take groups between one and two class sessions to complete this phase, depending on the complexity of their simulations.

Tech Tips: Phase 3

- Hot buttons on an mPOWER slide are invisible (or transparent) regions of the slide. When you click a hot button region, a selected action (such as jumping to a specific slide) occurs. Because hot buttons are invisible and cannot have their own labels, it is best to first create and position a text object that can serve as a label, and then make a hot button for the part of the slide where that label has been placed.
- To put a hot button on an mPOWER slide:
 - 1** Create a text object that can serve as a label or marker for the button. Position the text object where you want the button to be, and format the text appropriately.
 - 2** From the Slide menu, click Hot Buttons, then click Add New Hot Button.
 - 3** Choose from among the eight possible actions and click OK. If you choose the action Jump To Another Slide, choose which slide to jump to from among the slide thumbnails and click Select This Slide.
 - 4** Change the size and position of the hot button so that it corresponds to the text object you created in Step 1. Note that you can view, resize, and move a hot button in the Hot Button menu only. With other menus, a hot button is invisible.
- Because they are creating presentations with branching, hierarchical structures, groups will be wise to use the Jump To Another Slide hot button type almost exclusively. In this way, the order of the slides will be unimportant.
- Groups can include hot buttons on their slides that will allow users or viewers to return to the previous slide (if they change their mind about a decision).
- At any time, groups can preview their simulations by clicking Show Presentation in the Presentation menu.

Facilitation Tips: Phase 4

- In the closing discussion, you can ask questions such as the following:
 - In real life, how are decisions like the ones in your simulations actually made?
 - How can individual citizens influence the decision making your simulations deal with?
 - How are crisis situations different from normal public policy issues?
 - What makes a simulation seem realistic?

- Groups can complete the rotation through each other's simulations in a single class session, since each group's simulation should take about five minutes to complete. It may be possible to fit in the class discussion as well.

Tech Tips: Phase 4

- The completed simulations can be explored by other students from within the mPOWER application. Another option, suitable for this project, is to output each simulation as an mPOWER Player document. A Player document can be viewed on a computer on which the mPOWER application is not installed; the user or viewer simply double-clicks the document's icon. To output a simulation (presentation) as a Player document:
 - 1 Click Output Presentation on the Presentation Menu.
 - 2 Click Player Document on the Output Presentation Menu, and click OK.
 - 3 Select the location for saving the Player document, type the name for the file, and click Save.
 - 4 Select from among the options presented in the next dialog box, clicking OK each time.

Outcomes

After completing this project, students will be able to

- describe in some detail a public policy issue
- identify the various stakeholders related to the issue, and their disparate interests and goals
- analyze a given public policy issue and determine a variety of courses of action that could be taken to resolve it
- create an interactive, branching presentation using mPOWER

In addition, students will have

- developed skills in written and visual communication and the organization of information
- improved their abilities to analyze decisions in terms of options and consequences
- gained confidence and skill in their abilities to work in groups and contribute to a common goal
- learned skills or acquired knowledge relating to each of the state and national standards referred to in the Project Standards section

Project Standards

From the Secondary Language Arts & Social Studies Web site, you can identify select state curriculum standards and national educational technology standards that correlate to this student project. To locate these standards, go to the kit Web site and click the Curriculum button. Locate and open this student project and click the "Project Standards" button.

Assessment Suggestions

In Phase 4, groups' presentations can be peer-assessed by means of a teacher-created rubric covering such criteria as the following:

- The scenario seemed plausible.
- The choices presented during the simulation were realistic.
- The consequences of the choices in the simulation were realistic, and flowed from the decisions that were made.
- The consequences, decisions, and choices were described clearly.
- The presentation showed an understanding of the underlying issues and stakeholders.
- The presentation allowed for a variety of political philosophies, and maintained objectivity.

The rubric can be printed and distributed for students to use as they explore each group's presentation in turn during Phase 4.

Alternatively, the teacher can assess each presentation using the same rubric.

Preparation

- Review and print any of the Step-by-Step Cards that students may find helpful during this project. These include "Making a Presentation With mPOWER," "Getting Started With Inspiration," "Searching World Book Encyclopedia 2001," and "Searching the Internet With EdView."
- Print copies of the Decisions, Decisions: Colonization Advisor Briefing Books before groups begin the simulation. These booklets are included on the CD in PDF format and can be printed.

Resources

Internet

Desktop Movies in Education

<http://www.apple.com/education/dv/>

EdView

<http://edview.apple.com>

President of the United States

www.whitehouse.gov

US House of Representatives

<http://www.house.gov>

US Senate

<http://www.senate.gov>

Step-by-Step Cards

- Getting Started With Inspiration
- Making a Presentation With mPOWER
- Publishing Your Web Pages With iTools
- Searching the Internet With EdView
- Searching World Book Encyclopedia 2001
- Setting Up an iTools Account

Templates

- Who gets the water? tree diagram example

Additional Resources

- Organizing Information With Inspiration

Prerequisite Skills

To complete this project successfully, students should be able to do the following:

- use a mouse to navigate through a multimedia application by clicking icons and links
- search World Book Encyclopedia to find information on a specified topic (see the Step-by-Step Card “Searching World Book Encyclopedia 2001”)
- use EdView or other search engines to search the Internet for information relating to a particular topic (see the Step-by-Step Card “Searching the Internet With EdView”)
- make a basic tree diagram using Inspiration (see the Step-by-Step Card “Getting Started With Inspiration”)
- use mPOWER to create an interactive presentation with hot buttons (see the Step-by-Step Card “Making a Presentation With mPOWER”)

Background Information

Here is some information you may find useful as you plan how to implement this project or introduce it to your students.

- Tree diagrams like the ones students create in Phase 2 are used by a variety of professionals to advise public officials, analyze possible courses of action, predict the future, analyze political decision making, and develop computer games.
- In any public policy crisis, different groups of people will have different interests. Each of these groups may be referred to as a *stakeholder*.

Options and Extension Activities

Options

- Make group simulations available to students in other classes, both at your school and the local middle school. (See the Tech Tips for Phase 4 for an easy way of doing this.)
- Group simulations can be exported easily as HTML files and then posted (individually or as a set) to the Internet. From the Presentation menu in mPOWER, click Output Presentation, click “Export to HTML,” name the file and select where to save it, and then click Save. These files can be published on the Internet using an iTools account (see the Step-by-Step Cards “Setting Up an iTools Account” and “Publishing Your Web Pages With iTools”).
- Taking a cue from Decisions, Decisions: Colonization, students can illustrate the slides of their presentations with images they create or find on the Internet.
- To enhance the simulations they create in Phase 3, students can create desktop movies, using a digital camcorder and iMovie, that illustrate some aspect of their scenarios. A group could, for example, create a movie for the beginning slide of a simulation that explores a drought scenario by recording scenes of dried-up local reservoirs, wilting plants, and water taps that deliver no water when turned on. For other types of simulations, students could create scale-model scenes, or record each other acting out parts in appropriate costumes. For help using iMovie, visit the “Desktop Movies in Education” Web site.

Extension Activities

- Students can research local issues that are considered severe problems, determining how they have been handled by decision makers in the past, and what options exist for handling the problems in the present. The class can select one of these problems and hold a debate in which students take on the roles of different stakeholders and decision makers.

The Home-School Connection

- Students can ask family members for ideas about issues that may be used to create the scenarios in Phase 2.
- Invite family members to visit the class and view the mPOWER presentations. During a family night event, for example, the presentations could be set up on computers for family members to browse through.

This Project as a Model

This project demonstrates how mPOWER can be used as more than a “presentation” tool in the classroom. With its easy-to-use hot buttons, mPOWER allows students to create interactive desktop “applications” that can approach the sophistication of those produced by software developers. Knowing they can put their research findings and insights into a form that others can experience interactively, students can be motivated to new heights of achievement. This project also demonstrates the valuable coupling of mPOWER with Inspiration, which allows students to “storyboard” their mPOWER presentations, something that is particularly useful when the presentations are interactive and branching, rather than linear.