MANAGING LARGE CLASSES: THE APPLICATION OF DAVID EASTON’S SYSTEM’S THEORY

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Abstract
Cross disciplinary borrowings are very necessary in the exposition and expansion of knowledge. In this paper, an attempt will be made to adopt and adapt the System’s Theory of David Easton in Political Science, to the Management of Large Classes. Political Science itself has adopted theories from Anthropology, Biology (Structural Functionalist Theory of Talcott Parsons), Physics etc. the System’s Theory of David Easton is reviewed, its applicability to the large classroom setting is looked into.

Keywords: Large class, curriculum, teaching aids, communication, evaluation.

Introduction
Large classes have their peculiar problems – bulk marking materials, class management to prevent noise-making and laxity on the part of student, coordinating large numbers of students with diverse entry behaviours, evaluation etc – difficult to maintain. By adopting and adapting the System’s Theory of David Easton to the teaching-learning process, it will be easy to reduce the difficulties of managing large classes.

Before delving into this paper, it will be desirable to conceptualize the key terms in this presentation.

Objectives
The beneficiaries of this paper, after reading it, should be able to:
1) Systematically manage a large class;
2) Marry theory and practice;
3) Marry political thought and educational thought;
4) Work deeper and deeper into the realm of Philosophy like David Easton

Conceptualization of Key Terms

Large Class – To define a large class, we first of all have to define a class. A class is a “group of persons taught together; their course of teaching” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary). Classes that have up to 80 or more students are referred to as large classes (Carron et al. 1992; Corey S.R. 1989).

Curriculum – The “Planned and guided learning experiences and intended learning outcomes, formulated through the systematic reconstruction of knowledge and experience under the auspices of the school for the learner’s continuous and willful growth in social competence” (Tanner & Tanner 1975).

Teaching Aids - (Social Science / Education) any device, object, or machine used by a teacher to clarify or enliven a subject

Communication – Dale (1969) in Ughamadu (2000) defines communication as “the sharing of ideas and feelings in a mode of mutuality”. Because of this active interaction involved, the present writer will prefer to use this last definition as the working basis for this paper. With the conclusion of
The conceptualization of Key terms, it is now necessary to expose the systems theory of David Easton, applying it to the large class situation.

Exposing the Systems Theory of David Easton

The system’s theory of David Easton seems to have evolved from the Structuralist-Functionalist approach of Talcott Parsons. People like Herbert Spencer, Talcott Parsons etc. turned to Biology to build up an organistic conception of the society (Merton, Robert K 1959; Wallace, Ruth and Allison Wolf 1995). Systems’ Theory of David Eastern as adopted for classroom purposes will bring clarity, lucidity, and comprehensiveness in the management of problems associated with larger classes.

Easton’s scientific approach to politics which is being adopted and adapted to large classes can be summarized as follows: The Political system is delimited i.e. all political system have precise boundaries and fluid process of decision making. Greatly simplified, the following steps are observable. Changes in the social or physical environment surrounding a political process produce “demands and supports” that act on the status quo. These demands and supports are input in the political system. These demand and support groups stimulate competition in the political system, leading to decisions or “output”, directed at some aspects of the surrounding social or physical environment. After a decision or output is made (e.g.) specific policy), it interacts with its environment, and it produces change in the environment. These are “outcomes”. When a new policy interacts with its environment, outcomes may generate new demands or supports and groups in support, or against the policy, will bring new input (feedback) or a new policy to the related issues.

The diagram illustrates;

**System’s Theory of David Easton**

Adopting and Adapting this Political Theory to the Classroom in the Teaching-Learning Process

Feedback from outcomes lead to step (1) It is an ever cyclic story in which we have the following, all classrooms (large or small) have precise boundaries and fluid (changing) system in knowledge dissemination to students, by teacher/educational instructors. The classroom model will be explained thus:

1) Changes in societal ideologies make demand/supports on the quality of what is to be taught in specific classroom situations;
2) These new demands will lead to new ways of teachers/students viewing educational qualities;
3) After new teaching methods are adopted, the classroom climate will experience some differences (outcomes) and teacher-student will react differently to the new methods;
4) The evaluation of the new teaching techniques will lead the teacher to newer teaching methods in the future;
5) The feedback leads to new policies on teaching. The story is never ending.

The diagram illustrates;
**St. Ifa’s Adaptation of David Easton’s Theory to Large Classes**

![Diagram of St. Ifa’s Adaptation of David Easton’s Theory to Large Classes]

Explaining the diagram will conclude our exposition of adopting and adapting Davids Easton’s Systems Theory its large class administration/management. Now the environment is represented by societal beliefs, ideologies, among others. They form the demands and the supporting system of the classroom environment. These demands and supporting systems create new curriculum /syllabi and teaching methods required by the students. The classroom (large or small) is cognate with the political system in the Eastonian Model. Large classes are, however, the present consideration. Inside the classroom, some things have to be tidied up for efficient running;
1) The teacher and his qualities;
2) The organization of the students;
3) The educational/ teaching aids used by the teacher-students in the teaching-learning process;
4) Communication flow between teacher-students;
5) Conduciveness of the classroom system ;
6) Lastly, an efficient evaluation process.

These points shall be explained, one after the other

1) **The Environment**
   As the diagram illustrates, the environment encompasses the curriculum, parental roles, societal ideology/ needs.
   a) **Societal Needs/ Ideology** – The content of the curriculum which should be related in the classroom, must reflect the needs, ideals, ideologies, values, and beliefs of the people.
   b) **The Curriculum**: is also part of the classroom extra-environment, its demand, and supports. The curriculum must be well organized; it must be socially relevant, it must be systematically planned, it must be easy to operate, and it must also, promote the continuity of experience (Maduewesi, B.U. Aboho, D.A, Okwuedei 2010; Woldwoski R and Ginsberg M. (1995); Barton K & Martin D. 1991).
The Parents – Parents should pre-discipline their children at home. Parents/guardians shouldn’t rush to schools to embarrass teachers that discipline their children/wards. Teacher-Parents must co-work to ensure student comportment in the classroom.

d) Societal Values – Parents-Teacher-Guardians should ensure students abhor wrong societal values. A most poisonous one in Nigeria is “who you know, not what you know”. These wicked ideologies prevent students from paying attention in the classroom. Thus, the parent, the curriculum and the society represent the environment substituting with the Eastonian Model.

2) Classroom
The classroom is cognate to the political system. The classroom should be windy, removed from distractions and spacious (Wise and Okey 1993)

3) The Teacher
The classroom teacher cognates the president in the Eastonian Model. He is Lord of all he surveys. Like the good president, he must democratize. (S.A Okpetu & J.T. Yusufu 2003). He must hearken to the desires of his people. All he is can be mirrored by his students. Thus, the teacher should be fair, punctual, hardworking, patient, respectful, tolerant and understanding (Ezeani, L.U. (2004); Akubue A.U. (1991), with these qualities, he will impact knowledge to the students.

4) The Students
The students should be psycho-socially ready to take instructions. They should be ready to learn new things. Teacher-parents and society should ensure that students are in the right frame of mind to learn (Hatch et al 1984)

Classroom Functionalism of these Variables

The following variables will now be analyzed.

1) Translating the Curriculum for the units of instruction
This is the pre-lesson preparation of the teacher: the breaking down of the curriculum for daily dosage of instruction in the form of lesson plan and lesson note. The teacher should have pre-determined objectives. The plan should be written in plain and simple language mode and form of instructions should be well spelt out. Students’ activities should be explicit; evaluation procedures should be well itemized.

2) Instructional Materials To Use
In a large class, many instructional materials will be needed: chiefest of these is the public address system (microphone). There might also be need for projectors, video tapes, flannel boards etc. (Wise and Okey 1993); short circuit television as in university of Ife, General Studies hall might be desirable if there is enough fund. (Ughamadu 2000).

Inside the Classroom – The Teaching-Learning Process
As earlier stated, the classroom is cognate with the political space, the place of action. Classrooms should be arranged to make ease of management. It is most preferable for students to seat in rows by alphabetical order of their surnames. This will ease the memorization of names against seats. This facilitates the marking of roosters or registers (Daves and McLeod 1984). In a story-telling class (History, social studies, religious knowledge) a circular arrangement might be preferable. If it requires calculation as in the sciences, the teacher should maintain his straight rows. It is easy to transfer papers from front to back in this formation, with each students transferring to the next, and vice versa. This is ample utilization of time and space (Everald etal 1990). In teaching a large class, the teacher should not stand like a statue, he should find time to move from the front to the back row and utilize the classroom space judiciously (Oluchuko 2004). Language of instruction should be easy, and in the vocabulary limit of the learners. Verbosity and pleonasm should be totally cut short. Communication should follow the Lasswellian Model – from student to teacher, and from teacher to student; not the straight and rigid rhetorical model of Aristotle. Questions should be used effectively, to know the pace the students are catching in on the lessons. Daydreaming students should be awakened with questions thrown at them. The class teacher should endeavor to engage the students in class activities to enhance their learning. There should be judicious choice of instructional materials. Cameras, video, televisions should be used to match the class size.

The Output
Evaluation takes the place of political pressure group action ; change in behavior takes the place of political output. The constructed test for evaluation must possess validity (the degree of the test to measure what it sets off to measure), reliability (consistency in measurement), objectivity (the extent to which a test score given by an expert agrees with the scores given by another expert to the same testes); Efficiency (the utility of construction and grading of the testees limited time in examination or testing period); Usability or practicability (concerned with wide range of factors that determine, if a test is practical for wide spread us. These factors include economy, convenience and interpretability of test scores) (G.A Badmus and C.N Omoifo 2010; Whawo D.D 2000).

After conducting a good test for evaluation, the constructor or teacher will need the devices of technology to compute marks and grade his students. Hence, the second level of the use of computer –computer managed instruction (CMI) – will come in handy. Evaluation will form new basis in planning instructional materials for the next class. This will form new input.

Conclusion
Summarily, it is clear that by substituting the systems theory of David Easton to the daily running of a large class, the problems of a large class (bulk marking, noise prevention, organization of data, teacher-student communication difficulty, can be solved). The whole process is explicit.

The curriculum, societal needs and influences become the environment, its demand and supports. The classroom takes the place of the political system as the area of play. The teaching methods become the polices; teaching aids or educational technology becomes the systems supports. The result of the evaluation becomes the output. The effect of the new output on the student becomes the new outcome. Finally, the adopted Eastonian model would be rendered thus:

Final Rendition of St. Ifa’s Adoption of David Easton’s Theory to Large Class Room Management and Control. It is an ever circlic story
References

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