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THE LABOR HISTORY GAME: PLAYING WITH THE PAST PERKS PARTICIPATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the process of creating and implementing a board game for use with undergraduate college students as a participative classroom activity. "The Labor History Game", described in this paper was used as a primary review and quizzing tool to cover U.S. labor history and labor law.

INTRODUCTION

Business students often voice a strong preference for material and knowledge that they can use immediately or in the near future. Given such a bias, historical perspectives about people, events, or developments that led to current situations are often viewed as unnecessary consumers of valuable time. The development of the "Labor History Game" grew from a desire to find an alternative or supplement to lecturing which would more actively involve students in the process of learning about the key people, organizations and events in the growth of the American labor movement.

Inspiration for this game came from ideas presented for professional trainers by Eittington (1989), and Sugar (1987). Learning can, and often should contain an element of fun to involve learners, and can be particularly useful when teaching students or corporate employees during "down" times such as after lunch, or late in the evening. With college courses, nearly any break from the all too typical lecture experience can help to get students involved.

DEVELOPMENT

This game was developed for use in two undergraduate Employee and Management Relations classes at Boise State University. Both Classes were using Labor Relations:

Development, Structure. Process. (Fossum. 1995) as their assigned text. Much of the content material for the game can be found in Chapters 2 and 3 of that text, with supplemental material coming from An Introduction to Collective Bargaining and Industrial Relations, (Katz & Kochan. 1992).

Developing Objectives

Development of the Labor History Game began with consideration of the learning objectives. Rote memorization of dates was not an objective but rather that students recognize the names of key organizations and people and associate them with the events they are known for, as well as to recognize provisions of the major laws governing labor that were passed because of those people, organizations, and events. Formally stated, the objectives were: 1) Engage participants' active interest; 2) Enliven a topic which some students find difficult to learn; 3) Create an atmosphere of fun; 4) Provide an alternate format to lecture presentation.

Given the perceived "dryness" of the material, a format more involving than lecture was desired. The format was also limited to one hour and fifteen minutes for instruction, presentation, discussion, and evaluation by the afternoon class period. The popularity of games of knowledge, like "Jeopardy" and "Trivial Pursuit" seemed to indicate that a game format could work with this material and time constraint.

Game Board Design

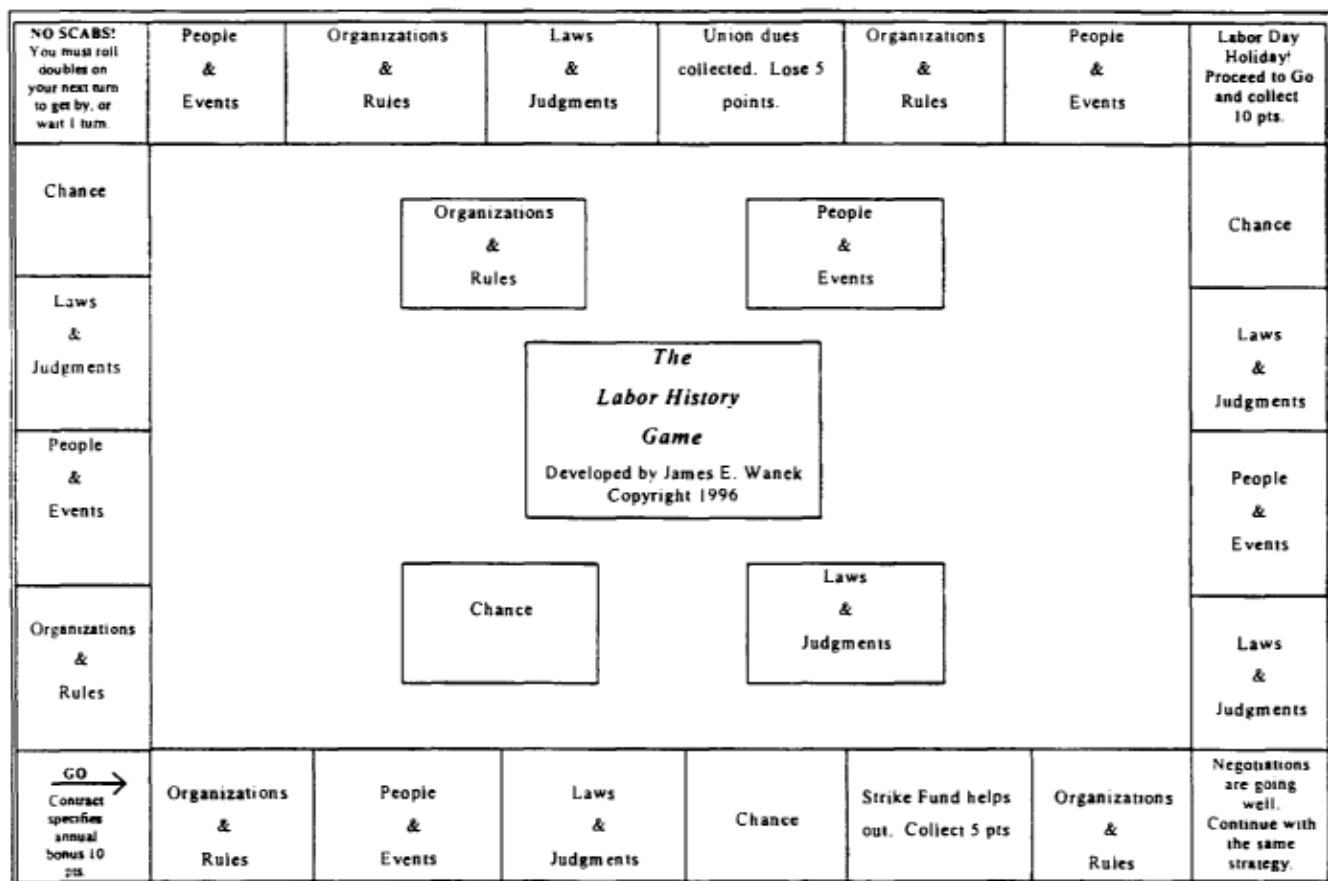
Once it was decided that a game could be developed, the "frame" had to be constructed. The frame is the part of a game board to be filled in with rules, instructions and information which

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should be friendly, yet challenging to players, while meeting training objectives (Sugar, 1987). In this instance, as with Sugar's game, a board track similar to that of "Monopoly" was adopted

because it was thought to be familiar to potential players and the square or rectangular board shape could accommodate 4-5 players comfortably.

FIGURE 1
LABOR HISTORY GAME BOARD



The track was designed to offer a good balance between action spaces where players had to draw a card from a category and answer a question and other spaces with an element of chance or luck. Too many knowledge spaces would make the game progress too slowly, while too many chance spaces would be seen as unfair by students who value performance. The 24 spaces (12 less than Monopoly) included five spaces for each of three knowledge categories: Laws & Judgments; People & Events; Organizations & Rules; and

three Chance spaces, and six other spaces which did not require that cards be drawn or answers given. The order of the category spaces was varied around the board to add uncertainty to the game, and to counteract any bias in the dice used to advance play. Light gray foam board was used to make the 16-inch by 20-inch game board. Bright colored card stock was chosen for the spaces and game cards to add visual stimulation. Colors used for the categories and related cards were as follows:

Organizations & Rules - rocket red: People &

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Events - terra green Laws & Judgments - lunar blue; Chance - solar yellow; Go, Other game spaces and instruction cards - cherry. Once the tracks were assembled on the game boards (using glue sticks and student office personnel. the entire board was covered with clear contact paper for protection.

The most legwork associated with constructing this game was in the hunt for pawns for players to use. While buttons, pen tops, coins, or just about any other small objects could be used, there was a desire to give the game a "professional" appearance. An attempt was made to find actual Monopoly pawns since the shoe, iron, wheelbarrow, etc. were appropriate items for a labor game, however local toy stores did not sell those pieces separate from the boxed games. One store, however, did have a jar of inexpensive miscellaneous plastic game pieces in bright colors from which sets of 5 were made for The Labor History Game.

Developing Game Rules

Game rules were developed which supported the training objectives while keeping the pace of the game moving. The order of play is determined by each player rolling one die, with the highest score starting play, and then proceeding around to that player's left. Players select their own pawn in rank order based on their roll of the one die. One person volunteers, or is designated as "The ScoreKeeper" to write down points awarded to, or subtracted from each player on a score sheet. The score sheet lists each player by name in a column, with each round of play numbered from 1 to 12 in rows. Each player starts with 100 points and is awarded 10 points for each correct answer but not penalized for wrong answers. They also win 10 points for passing "Go" as an annual bonus and can win or lose points from Chance cards. Two other board spaces: "Union dues collected lose 5 points", and "Strike fund helps out collect 5 points" can affect scores.

At the end of play scores are added up with the highest score determining the winner. For classroom purposes winners can be given bonus points toward their grade or first exam score to motivate preparation and stimulate competition. In the event of tied scores, bonus points can be awarded to both players, or a "sudden-death" play-off of one question each can be used as a tie-breaker.

Play begins with the first player rolling two dice and advancing their pawn counter-clockwise that many spaces on the board. When a player lands on a space requiring that a card be chosen, the person to the right of the current player draws and reads the question. If the wrong answer is given, the reader gives the correct answer, which is at the bottom of the question card. If a player takes too long to answer, the Score Keeper gives a 10-second countdown to allow the player a last chance to answer, after which the correct answer is read and play moves on. The group can decide if a given answer is "close enough", with the instructor acting as final Arbitrator. For example, a number of laws are widely known by the name of their congressional sponsor such as The Wagner Act, instead of by their actual title, in this case The National Labor Relations Act.

The game progresses through 12 rounds of play, which lasts about 45 minutes when there are four players. A time limit, such as one hour can be used instead of a limit on the number of rounds of play.

Selecting Material and Writing Question Cards

Material for question cards for The Labor History Game came from a number of sources, but predominantly from Fossum's Labor Relations text. Chapter 2 "The Evolution of American Labor", and Chapter 3 "Labor Law and Federal Agencies". After reading the chapters and consulting previously written lecture notes, the three knowledge categories of Laws &

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Judgments, People & Events, and Organizations & Rules were determined to cover the subject matter. The TABLE function in Microsoft Word was used to create a grid of nine 2-inch by 3-inch cards with each page containing cards for just one category. The questions and answers were formulated and written directly into the card spaces provided. (In hind sight, it would have been faster and easier to use the test bank available with the text for writing the cards, however that option didn't occur to the author while the creative juices flowed!)

Initially, at least eighteen cards were written for each knowledge category, however more cards were added after the first time the game was played. In the current version of the game there are 35 Organization & Rules: 27 Laws & Judgments: 31 People & Events. There are 17 Chance cards.

Sample questions from each category are listed below:

TABLE 1
LABOR HISTORY GAME CARDS

<p>Which labor law or act allowed states to pass "right to work" laws?</p> <p><i>Taft-Hartley Act (Labor Management Relations Act) 1947</i></p> <p><i>Law & Judgments</i></p>	<p>Which labor law or act established the concept of "exclusive representation"?</p> <p><i>Wagner Act (National Labor Relations Act) 1935</i></p> <p><i>Law & Judgments</i></p>
<p>A boycott started by what group resulted in the application of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act to labor union activities?</p> <p><i>Danbury Hatters 1903</i></p> <p><i>Organizations</i></p>	<p>An example of "uplift unionism", this group opposed strikes, and short term gains in favor of long range social betterment of members.</p> <p><i>The Knights of Labor</i></p> <p><i>Organizations</i></p>
<p>What foreign event in 1919 colored the way Congress and the public viewed the activities of unions?</p> <p><i>The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia</i></p> <p><i>People & Events</i></p>	<p>When asked what labor's goals were, who said, "More, more, more?"</p> <p><i>Samuel Gompers</i></p> <p><i>People & Events</i></p>
<p>A court injunction has broken the strike! You are out of a job.</p> <p>Lose 1 turn.</p> <p><i>Chance</i></p>	<p>Pinkerton goons have broken the strike and busted your head!</p> <p>Go back 1 space to recover, but do not draw a card. Roll on your next turn.</p> <p><i>Chance</i></p>

Development Time and Expense

A rough estimate of the total time spent putting the game together, considering both the author

and student help, would be about 26 hours. This time estimate includes conceptualizing the game, and creating draft and final versions of the board - 2 hours: writing questions and game rules - 15 hours; printing and cutting out cards and game spaces - 1 hour: assembling and laminating game

boards - 6 hours: and purchasing game pawns and dice - 2 hours. The actual cost of fabricating 8 game boards and pieces came to approximately \$28.00 for purchased parts and supplies, and \$16.00 for copying costs. The games are sturdy enough that they should provide several years of use, and justify the modest investment in time and money

IMPLEMENTATION

A number of methods were used to introduce the labor history material prior to playing the game in class. Students viewed two short films, "The Rise of Big Business" and "The Rise of Labor" during the first two class periods, followed by a brief lecture presenting an overview of the historical development of unions contained in Chapter 2 of the text. Students were assigned Chapter 2, and Chapter 3, which contained more in-depth coverage of specific labor laws, as required reading. Additionally, a 2-4-page paper answering one of the discussion questions at the end of Chapter 3 was assigned. Finally, the class before playing the game, students were told that they would be involved in a group exercise based on the material from Chapters 2 and 3 and that there would be 10 point bonuses given to the winners of the exercise. Students were not told the nature of the group exercise.

Given time constraints, a formal pilot study was not conducted prior to using the game with an actual class. The rules of the game appeared quite straightforward to the author, and the difficulty level of the questions was similar to typical exam questions. The first class to play the game completed an evaluation and gave verbal feedback, which was used to modify the game before the second class.

The most frequently received suggestion was for a reduction in the punitive Chance cards and spaces. Originally, 9 different Chance cards were written and printed twice to yield a stack of 18 cards. Four

of the cards were "punitive" in that players lost points or a turn, while five contained positive outcomes. With duplicates in the deck, students felt they were coming across too many cards that adversely affected their scores. To remedy the situation, half of the punitive cards were eliminated, that is only one set of four in the deck. Additionally, three bonus question cards worth 15 points, one for each knowledge category, were added to the Chance deck.

Perhaps the most unexpected behavior occurring during the game, was the number of students trying to take notes! Two groups in the first class were writing down every question and answer, and consequently lagging far behind the other groups. Those students were encouraged to concentrate and rely on their memories, rather than trying to make study notes for material that they should have had prepared and been familiar with.

EVALUATION OF THE GAME

Both classes completed an evaluation of the game exercise, however, as described in the previous section, modifications were made to the game before being played by the second class.

In response to the question, "Did the game exercise achieve its stated objective?", all 51 participants said that the game achieved its four stated objectives. They also responded that the game questions reflected the material covered by the text, films, and class discussions, and each category adequately covered a broad body of knowledge. Six of the fifty-one students thought there should be more cards with a greater variety of answers. A couple of comments suggested there were too many questions for which "The Wagner Act" was the correct response, however that over-emphasis on the premier piece of labor legislation was intentional. Regarding the pace of play and number of players. 48 students thought that four players was the "right" number. 2 people thought more players would be better, and. I

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person thought the suggestion of playing in paired teams might be worth trying.

No statistically significant difference was found between the two classes on their rating of the amount of chance in the game, even though changes had been made to that category following receipt of the first class' feedback. (Mean ratings of 2.81 (n=26) and 2.72 (n25) for the first and second classes, respectively.) However, given that a rating of 3=About Right, further play and evaluation will be conducted before other changes are made.

Comparison of the classes' mean ratings on the difficulty level and pace of the game showed no statistically significant differences. Both classes thought the difficulty level was between "About Right" and "Difficult", (3.46 for the first class and 3.72 for the second), and the pace was neither too fast or too slow. (3.0 and 3.1, respectively).

SUMMARY

Educators are faced with the challenge of encouraging students to become life-long learners who develop a focus that goes beyond, "What do I need to know for the test?" One way to break the cycle of lecture note taking followed by test regurgitation is to make learning active and fun, rather than passive through methods like this game. Although still in the developmental stage, the results are encouraging, especially regarding student acceptance. In the words of one student, "Can't you just write up new cards every week so we can keep playing this game?" Responses like that deserve consideration, after all, when's the last time you had a student beg for a lecture?

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