The concept of real problem situations as teaching materials has been emphasized in other articles in this magazine. Ella Callista Clark, principal of the Atwater Elementary School, Shorewood, Wisconsin, further illustrates this concept in her description of how children at the Atwater Elementary School deal with their problems.

“DID YOU SEE that car whiz through our driveway just now?” asked a sixth grade boy of his companion as they approached their school. True to the times came the response, “So what?”

But Tom was seriously concerned. “That car could have hurt some of those kindergarten children entering the campus by the driveway. I’m going to bring that matter up at our representative assembly tomorrow. You know I’m chairman of the Grounds committee.”

Group Action Eliminates the Hazard

Accordingly, the next morning when the president of the school’s representative assembly called for new business the matter was presented to the group. It consisted of the committee chairmen and two elected representatives from each room in the building from the first grade through the sixth.

Tom said he felt that it was the responsibility of the Student-Teacher Association to do something about this driveway hazard. Another child ventured the opinion that the group needed more information before intelligent action could result. She suggested that they investigate the matter further and also talk it over in each home room, bringing to a later representative assembly the thinking of everyone in the school. As the result of much observation, discussion, and planning, eventually the driveway was closed to all but delivery trucks; chains were installed at each end of the driveway; and the Grounds committee, in cooperation with the entire Student-Teacher group, assumed the responsibility of educating people to discontinue use of the driveway which was truly a serious hazard to the safety of many children.

With faithfulness to their responsibility, the committee saw to it that the driveway chains were kept in place. Because the entire school membership was completely in sympathy with this new safety measure, combined efforts served to expedite the plan further. They wrote and illustrated articles for the school paper appealing to parents, police, and others to cooperate in routing traffic on city streets instead of by the shortcut through the school driveway.

This is an illustration of how a group of tomorrow’s citizens learns the ways of democracy by actual participation in recognizing and solving their own problems. Such outcomes of a Student-Teacher Association are possible only in a school where the children, faculty, and parents believe that the best mate-
rials of instruction are found in life itself. In an effort to teach democracy mainly by child participation in the affairs of the school, this Student-Teacher Association has been growing steadily in its contribution to child development.

Democratic Government in Operation

Patterned after the local government of the suburb in which the school is located, this Student-Teacher Association operates as nearly like the community government as is practicable. In the spring the children and teachers select from the present fifth grade (next year's sixth grade) candidates for the four major offices. These candidates are chosen on the basis of qualifications of leadership which their peers feel they possess. This step provides an excellent opportunity for emphasizing to tomorrow's citizens that the success of a democracy depends to a large extent upon the people's intelligent choice of worthy candidates for public office—an admittedly crying need in the adult world of today. The seriousness and the enthusiasm with which the children look forward to their committee work indicate that children appreciate an opportunity to grapple with real problems.

The children of grades four, five, six, and all adults in the school are considered "of age" to vote in the election, which takes place after the suburban election and utilizes the same plan of registration, ballot clerks, and voting. In preparation, the voters hear the campaign speeches of the candidates who, with their managers, have been busily at work on this venture in various school classes. The art room buzzes with excitement as slogans, flyers, and posters are fashioned in an effort to get all voters to vote and vote intelligently for candidates who give greatest promise of the leadership so necessary to the success of the Student-Teacher Association.

In the English classes children delve into techniques of persuasion employed in effective presentation of forceful talks. In the social studies classes appropriate recordings, excursions to the Village Hall, dramatizations, films, and other visual aids vitalize an understanding of the history of the American election, the functions of government, and the privileges of citizens. Current events and the current local election yield timely information on how to conduct an election. Not to be forgotten either is the appreciation of the rights and duties of citizenship which even young Americans learn to cherish. The election over, the interest in these matters persists because the school government is the business of everyone in the building.

Leadership Skills Develop

Once each week the representative assembly of the Student-Teacher Association holds a thirty minute meeting. The child president, whose duties parallel those of the village president, presides. This representative assembly consists of the chairmen of the various committees, two elected representatives from each home room, and two teacher sponsors elected by the faculty for one-year terms. The child representatives are elected by their classmates for only one school quarter, giving many children a chance to act as representative.

When a child is elected representative, his teacher records this information on the child's activity card which, at the end of the year, moves with him to
his next home room teacher. The classes utilize this record in such a way that everyone has at least one opportunity to serve as a Student-Teacher representative within a short period of time. This provision is made on the assumption that at certain times everyone will be called upon to be a leader in life situations, and it is the school’s job to give experience in leadership as well as in “followership.”

Agreement through Discussion

Representatives are free to bring up any matter which they or the room they represent wish to have considered at the meeting. Any problem which is to be put to a vote is always included in the typed minutes and each home room receives a copy of this list of topics for discussion. The following morning these items are discussed in each home room so that the two representatives will know how their constituents wish to have them vote at the next representative assembly. This often results in a spirited discussion and provides a truly vital impetus to purposeful use of parliamentary procedures in a real life situation. What better materials of instruction could one have for language, social studies, and reading?

Decisions which the representative assembly make are incorporated in the Student-Teacher Association Rule Book which undergoes constant revision. In fact, whenever children feel that a rule previously made is no longer fair or appropriate, they bring it up in the representative assembly. However, when children realize that rules represent the combined judgment of all citizens of the school, they usually appreciate the fact that their cooperation is highly essential to a school whose government is in the hands of everyone in the building. True, each person in this democracy has many rights, but for each right there is a corresponding responsibility; and, as in adult life, it is only to the extent that all assist in meeting responsibility that democracy can succeed.

Committees Do the Work

Every possible kind of work connected with operation of the school involving decisions in which it seems advisable for children and teachers to share is entrusted to Student-Teacher committees. The chairmen of these committees are sixth grade children although the membership of the committee may consist of as many children as are needed and they may be chosen from any grade level. Each committee also has a teacher sponsor who assists as needed, but refrains from dominating the work of the committee. After all, the committees exist primarily to give children training in meeting their own problems.

On each committee there are children chosen from the school at large, thus giving many children an opportunity to participate in the organization. For example, the Safety Cadet committee consists of one child from each room. This group, with a child chairman and a teacher sponsor, meets as need arises to consider matters pertaining to safety and order in the halls. The Safety Cadet chairman reports any recommendations of the committee to the representatives at the next meeting of the assembly and so the matter is brought to the attention of all children in the school. The Patriotic Observance committee assumes responsibility for all school activ-
ities related to recognition of matters of national and international importance.

Other committees serve the school in many ways. The Noon Leaders, a group of ten sixth grade boys, designate two of their number to assist each day during the noon hour in the program of noon rest and recreation. The Bookstore committee takes complete charge of the sale of all school supplies. The Grounds committee supervises the arrangement voted by the Student-Teacher Association of having each home room care for its assigned portion of the spacious campus. The Bicycle committee is in charge of bicycle racks and Student-Teacher Association regulations about bicycle riding on the grounds. Stage and Light Crew members take charge of all stage work, properties, curtains, light-board, spot light and house lights for plays and any kind of assembly. The Historian’s committee compiles the yearbook which records the organization’s activities each year. A Milk Service committee delivers milk to the 250 kindergarten children daily. Contributions are made by such committees as Junior Red Cross, Fire Drill, Lost and Found, Attendance Cards, Door Monitors, and Publicity.

“We Make Democracy Work”

How the children feel about the Student-Teacher Association apparently is summed up by a retiring child president who in reply to the question, “What makes democracy work?” said, “Not the president or congress but we American people make it work. We each have a responsibility. To keep a democracy going is the job of every American. With every privilege and opportunity comes a responsibility. Although very young, we citizens of Atwater School are trying to understand a democracy better by practicing the ideals we think make good citizens. In our Atwater Student-Teacher Association we all work together to make the rules for our school. We think the plan has been very successful. In order to have a pleasant home, every member has to do his part to make it so. In school we find it is the same way. We must share in the responsibilities and learn to work and play together. We feel that we are learning the fact that those who best control themselves can serve the school best and thereby enjoy more privileges. We are learning to respect the rights of others and also to share the responsibility of running our school.”

It is with Regret—

It is with sincere regret that the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development announces that, in view of the needs of an expanding organization as well as the basic fact of rising costs, its membership dues, as of February 1, 1948 will be $5. Recommended first by the Executive Committee and approved by the Board of Directors, members recently approved this action. Subscription rates will therefore be increased to $3.50. The change, as noted earlier, will take effect February 1, 1948. Any memberships and subscriptions received after that date are subject to the increased fee.
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