

tions, but the insights gained into causes of behavior and how to effect changes in behavior will probably be permanent. In a letter to the teacher telling what she had learned during the year, one child wrote, "I learned what to do about Joan and other children like her."

Working for the solution of this interpersonal problem seemed to follow a sequence. The children first examined their feelings about Joan. They analyzed what Joan did to incite these feelings. Then they sought causes for Joan's behavior. This developed a picture of Joan's troubled home life and increased their sympathy for Joan. Thus motivated, they planned possible ways to help Joan feel better in school. The plans called for changing their own behavior toward Joan.

The recurrent discussions increased their perception of how one person's behavior affects that of another and also gave the children some conception of the length of time necessary to effect change.

Although the teacher never discovered who wrote on the lavatory wall, she learned that children can understand behavior. They can accept and understand their roles in a group and work constructively to improve the personality of the membership. The teacher also learned that by accepting children as they are, she could set the stage for children to accept each other. As an adult, she could not solve their interpersonal problems, but she could help to create an atmosphere in which children, with guidance, could work successfully for solutions.

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## *A School Council Aids Learning*

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This article shows how a student council, initiated and conducted by elementary school pupils, served as a better aid for learning. Thorsten R. Carlson is associate professor of education and principal of the Campus Laboratory School, and Edwena M. Moore is assistant professor of education and supervisor of the fourth grade of the Campus Laboratory School, San Diego State College, California.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS have proved that children can effectively structure and direct their own school government. The staff of the Campus Laboratory School, San Diego State College, because of their belief that real pupil control "originates with the children themselves," decided to en-

courage the re-development of student government and management of school affairs. The principle was unanimously accepted that the initiation should come from the children. Any indications of initiative or interest on the part of the children were to be earnestly encouraged and nurtured.

### **Children Take the Initiative**

The system of bus safeties had been in vogue in the school for several years. These children, appointed by the principal, were largely responsible for the behavior of the boys and girls on the buses which took them to their homes in the afternoon. Any infractions of what was accepted as good behavior were reported to the principal and were appropriately acted upon. Occasionally the children appointed to these positions were called to the principal's office for a meeting to discuss standards of behavior and the experiences of these bus safeties in seeing that the standards and rules were adhered to.

The staff decided that this group might be the one that should be encouraged to take on other responsibilities in the hope that a really representative student council might emerge from it. One of the staff members assumed responsibility as advisor and the group began to meet periodically. The problem of accounting for and parceling out playground equipment had long been a troublesome detail. The embryo student council, or Safety Council as it was then known, was asked to take this problem. After discussion of the difficulties and problems involved, the children decided to decentralize the allotment of playground equipment and to have appointed, from each room, playground monitors who would be responsible for the care and keeping of such equipment. From this time on the group began to recognize many problems which transcended monitoring of playground supplies and bus safety, and as rapidly as they indicated a desire to deal with them, and as rap-

idly as they were able to assume responsibility, these problems were delegated to the group for solution. The group decided, for example, to accept the problem of playground safety. A detailed system of rules, worked out by the staff, had been the guide line for governing behavior on the playground. The children reviewed the existing rules and recommended a number of changes and additions. These were approved and made official.

### **Children Extend Their Responsibility**

"Why do we need a lot of playground rules? All that is necessary is that everyone do what he knows he should do," said one of the children.

Another child commented, "Let's stop making up so many rules while sitting up here. Let's just remember how we really act on the playground."

"If it's safety we're working with, it can't stop at the playground; it has to take the children all the way home," was suggested by another council member.

The thinking of the group resulted in a simplified list of general safety rules which was published in the school paper. But council members realized that the publication of these safety rules was not in itself sufficient to bring about marked change. Hence the members of the Safety Council visited the different grade levels and discussed the best use of playground equipment and the proper organization and management of group playground activities. As new equipment was added to the playground, new rules were developed, which were, in turn, discussed with the children at all grade levels by members of the Safety Council. These experi-

ences, of course, were fine opportunities for learning in the fields of the social studies and the language arts.

The group continued to discuss many problems and issues related to the question of bus and playground safety. The thinking done by the group showed evidence of considerable maturity of judgment. Staff members decided, therefore, that the problem of handling cases of infringement of safety rules be referred or delegated to the Safety Council. In other words, the group was designated as a sort of court for hearing such cases. This new responsibility made the Safety Council into a recognized body. It became known to the entire school and to be a member of it was a distinguished honor coveted by all. Problems no longer stemmed just from the members of the group; other children from various grade levels appeared before the Safety Council to present problems that needed discussion and some decision as a basis for action.

By the end of the school year the group had ironed out its problems of organization and representation. The Safety Council, as it was still called, was made up of the representatives



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Student Council members discuss a safety  
proposal with the principal.*

from the fourth, fifth and sixth grades. The third grade also had participating representation without voting power. In the spring of that year the Safety Council planned for a school assembly program, during which the activities of the Safety Council were explained to the whole school. New and old members were introduced, safety badges were presented, and safety programs were put on by several grades. This assembly did much to build respect for the members of the Safety Council and to raise their prestige level.

### **The Safety Council Becomes the School Council**

"The way problems are coming in we shouldn't be a Safety Council, but a school council," said one of the children.

Such observations often arose from members of the council when their duties and responsibilities transcended those of safety. This trend in their thinking was completely consonant with the development of the council as staff members had, two semesters previously, hoped and expected it to be. The children came back in the fall of 1949 eager to start the council again. An election assembly and safety program was held early in the year and the new members enthusiastically came to grips with the problems of the new school year.

The Safety Council visited the school council of a neighboring school and came back with many ideas and suggestions. They decided at this time to change the name to School Council because they were interested not just in safety, but in all phases of good citizenship. They felt, however, that they

must go slowly because they were not yet ready for an organization as elaborate as the one they had observed in the school they had visited.

Following the visit one of the children made the comment, "That school has a fine council but it wouldn't fit our school."

"I think we've done very well in just a year—why, we started with nothing," added another member of the council.

During that semester the School Council managed the Junior Red Cross Drive and accepted several other responsibilities. The group drew up a set of by-laws for what might be called the beginnings of a constitution. The School Council is now a recognized group with objectives initiated and accepted by the pupils.

### Children Prove Themselves

The children move slowly and deliberately in arriving at their decisions. They are not easily coerced, nor are they readily "carried away" with their ideas. They have a keen sense of responsibility. One child expressed himself with considerable feeling after an important decision, "It isn't always fun to be on the council."

The children have a fine sense of justice and fair play. They occasionally feel that a child has had a "raw deal" and so express themselves. They sometimes suggest that a child be given another chance. Or in the case of another child, "We all like to tease him. Maybe part of his troubles are our fault. We all ought to try to help him."

Neither are children naive in the ways of influencing behavior. A council member weightily suggested in the



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A playground problem is studied at firsthand.*

case of a child who had repeatedly been before the group, "Why not try complimenting him once in a while—he has been good lately, but let's not do it all at once or he'll think something's funny." The children end all hearings with the hope that the defendant won't have to appear again. They never fail to express this hope to the child appearing before them.

Possible new areas of responsibility, such as the cafeteria, a school paper, assembly programs, the school savings bank, are still in the future. The children take on new responsibilities as they indicate a readiness and an expressed desire to do so. It is particularly satisfying when one hears children say, "That is what we decided to do," or, "We agreed that it was not fair to do it that way," rather than saying that the teacher or the principal said that we should not do that. When such spontaneous reactions are observed, staff members believe they are really influencing behavior in the direction of



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A Student Council member suggests a solution.*

democratic ideals. The elementary school with such an atmosphere becomes a laboratory for practice in truly democratic participation and living.

#### **A Point of View**

Is the rationale underlying a school council consistent with modern philosophy of education and psychology of learning? It is generally accepted that

the important task of the elementary school is to develop happy and effective citizens. This objective can best be achieved by the children through the living of happy and effective lives in an environment that is arranged to provide opportunity for democratic living in all its varied and interesting facets. In this statement lies the justification for student government.

Man learned through experience, during the slow evolutionary development of modern society, that certain rules and regulations are necessary for the efficient functioning of any group. He learned, too, that guide lines for effective living, such as rules and regulations, are almost impossible to enforce unless they emerge from society through education and other social forces. He found that direction of human behavior stems from within, from the wellsprings of life and thought itself. This practical point of view is one of the fundamental tenets of democratic thought. That society, in other words, is most effective which provides its own government. Authoritarianism may bring well-being for a time, but the better life for the greatest number for the greatest length of time comes through acceptance of a social pattern of behavior which emerges from human convictions arrived at through experience. The more literate and intelligent the people, assuming political and economic acceptance of the theory, the faster and more thorough the evolutionary process.

The theory is equally applicable in other types of learning. The effectiveness of the learning process, other factors being constant, varies in propor-

tion to the complete identification of the learner with the purposes of the activity. If the purposes are learner-initiated (often with adult guidance) and therefore practical, vital and real, the activity proceeds at a high level of motivation. The administration of the multifarious activities of an elementary school, other than the strictly curricular, has been characteristically authoritarian. The assumption has been that the elementary school child is not sufficiently mature to govern activities affecting the entire school. The rules and regulations that were handed down through the administrative hierarchy were adhered to because of the knowledge of retribution following transgression. The principal, under this procedure, frequently meted out punishments of various types. Experience with democratic classroom and school organization has convinced many that children are very capable of providing their own government, under wise guidance, for the entire school regardless of the size of the school. In fact, experience has convinced many educators that adults could solve their problems more readily if they were to approach them with the relatively fresh, untrammled, imaginative thinking so characteristic of children.

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