

They Learn Democracy Early



Council candidates (above) bury heads as schoolmates vote. Then come responsibilities (below).



Council assembles to hear a witness (left) testify about infractions. After two violations, the council takes action.

by Mary Margaret Kern

FIRST, SECOND, and third graders in the Homewood (Ill.) Ridge Elementary School, are participating in an unusual experiment in democracy—a student council which they run themselves. Membership consists of a boy and girl representative from each classroom who, among other duties, help maintain discipline.

After two friendly warnings—the first from a council representative, the second from a representative plus the classroom teacher—any child who continues to violate a health, safety, or neatness rule is brought before the council for disciplinary action.

The children sometimes are harder on one another than adults would be and also are surprisingly grown-up in their points of view. One council judge, rebuking a

boy for a misdemeanor, said, "I suppose you thought I didn't mean it when I told you about this before because there weren't any grownups around. You have to learn to behave yourself *without any big people around.*"

Besides reprimanding troublemakers (none of whom has required further discipline so far), the council makes the rules for conduct on school premises, appoints hall guards, supervises paper cleanup on the school grounds, handles decorating of the halls for holidays, and assists with conducting fire drills.

Inaugurated by Mrs. Lucille Cavanaugh, primary supervisor, the council is considered unique in school systems because of the extreme youth of its membership. And through it, Mrs. Cavanaugh believes, foundations are being laid in young minds for the sound practice of democratic citizenship and self-discipline in later life.

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