

EAST CAROLINA TEACHERS' TRAINING SCHOOL  
GREENVILLE, N. C.

School Government  
vs  
a- Teacher Government  
b- Student Government

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I think one indictment that may with justice be made against our modern educational systems is we have done too much surface plowing and not enough subsoiling. We are also in an age of educational experimentation. Experiments, if properly thought out before made, then fairly and honestly tested add something to the sum total of knowledge on the subject. If, however, they are tested out to prove some pet theory they are pernicious.

The idea that I am going to advance to-day has not been tested out in all of its details. I do not claim that it is the panacea for all school ills. I do not claim that it is applicable to all schools or to all grades in a given school. I gave it a trial for nearly three years in a large City High School for girls, and I can say of a truth that here it worked in a most satisfactory way as the City Supt., the teachers in the school and the students themselves will all attest. All who saw it work approved.

The principles of Government are fundamental. Whatever the form of government the public schools should instill into the students the principles of said government. As Dr. Brumbaugh puts it, "The public school finds its chiefest defense, not in promoting the welfare of the individual but the welfare of the state itself. Its chief concern must be to equip each to co-operate with his fellows and then,



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and not until then shall it turn to the more individualistic task of fitting each one for the highest economic efficiency." (Report of N. E. A. 1908, p-84.)

Our government is a Democracy adapted to a large territory which gives us what is known as a Representative Government. Since it is not possible for each individual to participate directly in all forms of government activities we have a government by delegated powers. We delegate the law-making power to representatives of the people. With this form of Government all laws grow out of the conscious or subconscious spirit of the people. Place a statute upon the books that meet with universal disapproval and your law becomes a dead letter. This you see is psychology.

All principles of education must be laid on a psychological basis. In school administration we should at all times adjust ourselves to the psychology of the group to be governed.

In young children the reasoning faculty is not developed. They do this or that because they are told to do it and do not question why. If they do not obey they should be made to and for no other reason than because they have been told. They are selfish and act primarily on this basis. At this age a despotic form of Government, even a tyranny, is best. They should be kept busy, told to do things and made to do what they are told. With such pupils any form of student government is to my mind ridiculous, absurd.



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As they grow older, say at about the age of twelve to fourteen, at that age where boyhood begins to turn into manhood, the faculty to reason begins to develop and the social instinct makes itself felt in the life of each individual. At this stage of development the individual appreciates more than ever before and in my judgment, more than ever again, the privilege of participating in any and every form of social or group activity. At this time in life we can use the laboratory method for teaching our idea of government with the most telling results.

In early childhood thru despotic government teach the child in an unmistakable way, respect for authority and obedience to law, but with the quickening of the social instinct there should be a change in form of school government and such a change that the child will find in the school government a fertile soil for individual growth.

Now to our problem,-- Should this form of government be student government? I say-unhesitatingly, no. I have no patience with student government; for it is not founded upon sound principles. I do not believe it exists anywhere; for students in the grades are not sufficiently mature to establish and maintain a government that any sane educator would tolerate. Without judgment or the social instinct dominated with selfishness it is impossible to evolve a code of laws that will regulate social activities. Like begets like. Unless there is a social instinct you can never get laws to govern social activities. So we conclude that for the earlier years, student government is



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impossible. By student government I mean government by students alone.

Is this form of Government possible for the adolescent? While we must admit that there is a psychological basis to build upon, yet it is not all expedient. As the faculties are growing and developing they need direction and suggestion to help them develop properly. The student needs a wise counselor now more than ever before-- , more than ever after. At this age the ipse dixit theory should disappear and we should come and reason together. No longer should the pupil be forced to do but he should be led to see and then he will do. Just as the tyrant should rule in the earlier years, so now the broad, open minded, wise counselor should rule, but his rule should be by suggestion and not by might. To establish student government with this type of student is to fail to measure up to the greatest responsibility resting upon an educator; for at this age we do the best work for mature years.

Should our form of government be faculty government? Not long ago I was talking with one of our leading educators, "When we reduce it to its last analysis," he said, "all government in schools is faculty government." I do not agree with this idea. If we wish to train in the most efficient way for ~~citizenship~~ citizenship, we must in some way for the adolescent have some form of government in which the student in a measure at least, participates. Faculty Government smacks of the form of government found in an Aristocracy. The Czar and his nobles



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make the laws and the people obey them when they cannot break them. How often do we find the laws of<sup>a</sup> school obeyed only when the student cannot break them? When we stop to think the reason becomes apparent. The faculty, by delegating to themselves, the power to make the laws and the power to enforce the laws, also take to themselves all the responsibility and consequently all the conscience of the school. (What follows is for the Adolescent.)

The true solution to the problem so it seems to me, is to be found in a combination of student government and faculty government in such a way that the student feels that he has an active part in the management of school affairs and this I term School Government.

The student body will see the wisdom of allowing the purely professional questions to remain with those who are especially prepared to solve such questions, if certain questions that concern only the student end are left to the students. Let me explain by giving a concrete example, one solved by the student. In the school in which we tried out this idea there was a gymnasium on the same floor with the lunch room. At noon some of the students wished to dance, others to promenade upon this floor. We had in this school representatives from each division of the school, elected by the students in the several groups. These representatives met with the principal in what we called a school council. In the Council the question of dancing or promenading at noon came up. I told them this was a matter that concerned only



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their convenience and that I would abide by their decision. At first they voted that I say to the school that they, the students are requested by the Council not to promenade at noon. This was done. There was no definite law made by the Council and the natural consequence followed. In a few days the dancing and promenading began to conflict. At the next meeting it was decided to refer the matter back to each division of the school for a vote. (This was done without any suggestion on my part). As a result of the vote it was decided, at a call meeting of the Council to hear the returns from the election; that all promenading should be stopped. When the results were announced to the school the next morning, they were given a talk on the initiative and referendum. They fully understood the meaning of the term, and the promenading ceased. There was never any more trouble. Here is a case that was of no concern to Principal or faculty, only the student body was interested. On the other hand the course of study, text books, methods of teaching and other matters of a professional nature were never brought up in the Council.

This form of government outlined above styled by me School Government, has many things in its favor. It lessens friction between the head of the school and the student body, between the teachers and the students; for it abolishes the "me and thou" and establishes in its stead a we.

It makes the students feel a personal interest in the school and its welfare; for they see that they have an active part in making the school. They can point to things they have done.



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If the head of the school has in Council with him a representative body of the students, by suggestion he can have the students do many things that they would not do. For example, we had no faculty supervision over the corridors when the classes moved, neither did we have faculty supervision over the student body at the noon hour. And there was absolutely no need for such supervision. Our lunch room was indeed a model for neatness. The duties of the teachers are lightened along many of the lines of discipline which at the same time the students are stimulated in self discipline, self control.

It reveals to the teacher the student point of view and thus enables him to do with intelligence many things that either he would never do or do in ignorance. Many of the serious cases of discipline are due to the fact that the teacher is ignorant of the student's point of view. When the teacher knows how the student views the question he is best able to handle properly the situation. I believe most of our troubles in school arise from ignorance on the part of the teacher. I have said that in nine out of ten cases of discipline, the teacher is at fault. Not at fault of motive, but fault never-the-less.

It helps the head of the school to shape school spirit. The spirit of every school is good if properly directed, but it is quite difficult for principal or teacher to find an effective way of shaping it. Students are as fond of doing right as of doing wrong. If they can be rightly



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directed they will take pleasure in doing the proper thing. After this Council had been in operation about a year the students instead of hazing new students, without a suggestion from me, took pleasure in showing every attention to those first entering the school. It was the spirit of the school. It was clear that they had a personal interest in every individual in the school.

I will stop. Had I the time and you the patience I could enumerate good effect coming from such an organization almost indefinitely and give examples.

The building was not defaced in the least; vulgarity on the part of the students was rooted out; the substitute teacher was treated with the greatest of courtesy; students sat in rooms and worked without any one to supervise them; went to the library and worked without any one in the room but students; cheating on examinations was practically eliminated, etc. etc.

This form of Government is in accord with our national idea of Government, consequently, when a student comes thru such a school he goes forth into the community a better citizen with a true as well as a higher ideal of our institutions. He is better fitted for life. All school teaching should lead to better citizenship. This kind of training does this in the truest sense; for it leads the student to have less fear but more respect for law. It reduces fear of law by showing him that law is based upon justice; when this is realized, there naturally follows more respect for law.



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I end where I began, by saying this has not been thoroughly tested, but it has been tested in one school and found there most satisfactory. It produces results.