

TABLE MANNERS IN THE CAFETERIA

LAST spring we realized that, in spite of talks in the different classrooms on table manners and the right kinds of food for lunch, we were getting nowhere. A conference of the teachers was called. Thinking that the drab, untidy appearance of the two cafeteria rooms was probably the chief cause of the poor table manners, we decided first, to correct the appearance of the rooms; second, to give in the classrooms an intensive study of proper eating; and third, to carry over this information into the cafeteria.

The girls had been eating in one cafeteria room and the boys in the other, the children adapting themselves as best they could to the tables. We first lowered about half of the tables and benches to suitable heights for the smaller children. These were grouped in one room. The tables were painted a bright apple green and covered with a bright orange-colored oil-cloth, and the benches were varnished. The walls and ceiling were whitewashed; the wood work in the room was painted the same bright green as the tables. A green imitation of wainscoting was painted around the room. Curtains of orange oilcloth were notched for the windows.

In the meantime, in many of the primary grades doll tables and doll dishes were brought to school; and the children were taught how to set the table correctly, how to handle knives and forks, how to sit at the table, and how to pass dishes. Two children were allowed to sit at the table at one time while the rest discussed what was being done. Then another two were asked to take their places and in turn were criticized until all had had actual lessons in table manners. All this time the duties of the host and hostess were stressed. In the upper grades the same facts were taught through reading, through talks by teachers

and children, and through pictures. Days were spent in making out well-balanced lunch menus.

With the exception of the painting all the work was done by the children. A committee was formed and with the principal went over the cafeteria rooms to decide what was to be done. They measured for the oilcloth, went to the different stores to see where it could be bought the cheapest, and when bought, they cut it into proper lengths for the tables, tacked it on the tables, and cut the correct lengths for the curtains and put them up. As we used about thirty-seven yards of this material, much arithmetic was involved. The children showed happiness and interest over the improved appearance of the tables.

The next problem was to carry over what had been learned in the rooms to the cafeteria. Each room selected a child to serve as a host or hostess for his room. These met with the principal to discuss plans and, as these has been talked about in the rooms, the children were ready to act. The children finally decided that the following points were to be observed:

- to wash hands before eating
- to enter the cafeteria in a quiet manner
- to remove all food from bags or boxes and arrange neatly on napkins spread before them.
- to wait for the host or hostess to give signal to begin eating
- to talk in low tones
- to break large sandwiches in half
- to pass all waste paper along the side of the table (not across it) to the host or hostess who was to put it in the waste receptacle
- to remain at the table until the whistle blew
- to leave no crumbs on the table.

Plain white paper napkins were bought by the thousand, cut in half on the paper cutter, for only a half napkin is given to each child. Large numbers of these are placed

in each room where, just before lunch, all who are going to remain for lunch receive one from the host or hostess who has charge of everything pertaining to the cafeteria. These napkins are placed on the table with the edge parallel to the edge of the table; the food is removed from the bags and placed on the napkins.

At first we were doubtful about this plan for fear some child would be embarrassed. Later we found it to be the best thing we did. For the first week or two the teacher in charge and the principal quietly observed the kind, the amount, and the appearance of the lunches, but said nothing. Later those who had poorly balanced menus were privately spoken to and told what to bring. One pale boy was seen to have five different cakes for lunch one day and nothing else. This was corrected. Nothing was ever said to any one child about the appearance of his lunch but in a few months a great change was noted both in the kinds of food and the neatness of the preparation. The cashier reserved the right to correct the selection of food of children who bought their lunches. A limited amount of candy cannot be bought until the regular lunch is eaten.

As many of the children ate too rapidly in order to get out to play, it was decided that no one was to rise from the table until about half of the children had finished—when a whistle was blown. This, in a way, corrected the bad habit. The whistle meant that they could leave but were not compelled to; many of the children remained quietly eating and chatting. We found that the children had better times with the rooms eating as a unit, instead of the boys as one unit and the girls as another. Besides, it was much easier to keep order.

The host and hostess meet with the principal once a month to discuss affairs and take back to the rooms any suggestions offered at this time. Some rooms change the host or hostess frequently and some keep

the same ones for a long time. When the teacher wishes to know what is going on, or when the host or hostess suggests that she is needed, the teacher eats with the children but volunteers no adverse criticism. One day when a teacher was eating with her group, there came in a boy who did not customarily eat at school. When the whistle blew he started to leave. The hostess, a very small girl, said, "You cannot leave until you say, 'Excuse me.'" He immediately replied, "I won't say it." "Then you will have to stay until you do say it," said the hostess. After a fairly long time the boy meekly said, "Excuse me, Peggy." All this time the teacher ate quietly on, wondering about the outcome.

The whole atmosphere of the cafeteria has changed since the responsibility has been placed upon the children. The period is now a pleasant one due to the grouping of children who have the same interests. The conversation is easy and spirited: the hostess is one of them and they do not have the feeling that an older person is checking on them. One host's deep voice often booms out: "Keep quiet, can't you? Ain't you got no table manners?"

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THE ALTERNATIVE TO REVOLUTION

IN one of the most vivid episodes of the Old Testament, the prophet Elijah is surrounded by a people divided in loyalty between the worship of Baal, one of the numerous gods of the idolatrous Israelites, and the worship of the Lord who was, to Elijah, the true God. Like the followers of Baal, before Elijah forced the issue, we, before the depression sobered us, were content to drift. We were so busy clipping coupons we refused to consider basic issues of national policy. Why bother about the conflicting claims of the Lord and Baal as