

of the region, securing help from county and federal agencies. In Mt. Vernon, one of the towns in Skagit County, they visited plants engaged in processing foods produced on the nearby farms. They read from government pamphlets, and farm and trade journals. To broaden their general background they read widely in the college library and viewed many films from the science department. They made many bibliog-

raphies of suitable material from books for children.

Not only had teachers become aware of the aspects of the community, but there was every reason to believe that in the future, the "stuff" of which the curriculum is made would be more vital to children. For it will be drawn in part from the land on which they live and from which they obtain their daily living.

The School Lunchroom—Workshop for Living

EPSIE YOUNG

Breaking bread together is a custom enjoyed by young and old. Transfer this custom to a school lunchroom and you have a purposeful area for learning, such as the one described here by Epsie Young, director, Elementary Education, Orange, Texas.

LUNCHROOMS as laboratories for learning! Laboratories just as truly as those in science, art, or home economics! School lunch service as an integral part of the overall instructional program! Today this is the thinking of children, parents, and teachers in the nine elementary schools of Orange, Texas.

This has not always been the case. Six years ago these same lunchrooms were—well, just lunchrooms,—providing very little opportunity for coordinated learning or teaching. Change took place when cooperative planning by the faculty and representative community groups became an actuality. There are no claims made for the perfection of the present program. Im-



Photos courtesy Orange (Tex.) Public Schools
The young hostess presides

provements are still on the docket. But Orange school officials do point with pride toward many of the present prac-

tices which make the lunchrooms laboratories for learning and living. Among the more tangible evidences of improvement is the fact that the percentage of children eating in the lunchrooms has increased three and one half times since the program of integration began.

In 1940, teachers of the Orange schools inaugurated a curriculum revision and improvement program which during the succeeding years has been continuous and all-inclusive. The first year saw an emergence of a philosophy of education that called for the application of reputable practices in child development to all phases of school life. This brought the lunchrooms into the instructional picture. They have been there ever since as laboratories around which life activities are converged and from which diverge important outcomes in understandings, practices, and personal satisfactions.

Criteria for Integration

The processes involved in instituting the integration included (1) the development of a broader concept of nutrition education so that the lunchroom laboratory might give meaning to the classroom instruction, (2) a better concept of health instruction to include the health and sanitation aspects of the lunch service, (3) redefining administrative procedures to permit necessary changes in teachers schedules, types of menus, and lunchroom equipment, (4) reorganizing the plan of instruction to tie in the lunchroom program with all areas of learning and children's work experiences, and (5) extending the pattern of home-school relations to include the lunchroom laboratory.

Early in the program very simple criteria which embraced the school's philosophy were set up. The school lunchroom as an area of living should contribute to the child's *total* growth and development. It should be a functional part of school and community living.

From the beginning it was obvious that continuous cooperation between dietitians and teachers would be necessary. The dietitians would be responsible for planning meals, obtaining and directing the preparation of foods, and acting as consultants to teachers and pupils. The teacher would teach nutritive values of foods and set up with the children desirable standards for food selection. With the children she would develop opportunities for social living. She would also follow up the laboratory experiences with further teaching when the occasion indicated the need.

Curriculum workshops held during the summers afforded more time for the further development of cooperative techniques. As social studies-science units were written, activities which contributed to nutrition and health education were included as integral parts of the whole "unit of experience." Lunchroom equipment was evaluated, recommendations for changes made, and designs for more effective use of the space and equipment plotted.

Administration Cooperates

Changes in administrative procedure were necessary to permit the carrying out of some of the recommendations. Meals no longer were served on an *a la carte* basis. Balanced meals consisting of a meat or a meat alternate, two vegetables, a salad, a half-pint of milk,



Handling money makes arithmetic real

and dessert were served. As often as possible, choices were made available.

Lunch periods of thirty to forty minutes were staggered so that each group could be served without too much bustle and confusion. Teachers sat at

tables with pupils, participating in the conversation, noting opportunities for further teaching. Often the situation was used to demonstrate the correct handling of the fork or the breaking of

a slice of bread into smaller parts, to encourage Susie to "try" the glazed carrots or the leafy vegetable, and to express approval of the way Tommy ate all of the food on his plate. Relaxation periods of fifteen minutes to one hour or more, depending on the age of the children, immediately followed the noon lunch.



The cleanup vogue is underway

Another administrative change has been the free lunch for all teachers who participate in the lunchroom activity. This means practically every teacher, for a majority of all elementary children now eat noon lunch at school. To compensate the teacher for her lunchtime "teaching" a free period at

some time in her schedule has been arranged.

Increased services have also been part of administrative adjustment. The installation of an overall nutrition program with a special nutrition consultant as coordinator has given stability to the instructional program and has reached deep into nutrition education throughout the community. Services have also been received from the City-County Health Unit. The school shares the upkeep of the Health Unit with other city-county institutions and in return receives among other services cooperation in maintaining excellent standards in lunchroom sanitation and in the health status of the handlers of foods.

Students Learn to Change

Thus far no mention has been made of the children's part in these learning experiences. The change from hamburgers, sandwiches, soft drinks, and



Learning "buymanship"

candy bars was not made without protest. Here was the opportunity, the occasion for skillful teaching! The reasons for the change from *a la carte* service to balanced meals were explained. Direct teaching in nutrition was done. Children in the fifth and sixth grades planned menus for home and



Responsibilities are shared

school use. Such planning led them into a search for food combinations that included the "seven basic foods." It also became necessary to read the advertisements of local food stores to ascertain the vegetables and fruits in season and the meats, eggs, and fats available. This in turn led to understandings and appreciations of the many problems connected with the production, transportation, and prices of food. Children also recognized the need for planning by week instead of day by day.

Occasionally members of a group become so interested in the procurement of the various foods that they arrange to follow through a day's routine in the lunchroom. With the cooperative planning of teacher, dietitian, grocer, and principal, the day's "lesson" affords real experiences rich in understandings and appreciations. They discover the values of planning, of division of labor, and of the sanitary measures practiced, both in the food store and in the school lunchroom.

Younger groups visit grocery stores, bakeries, and dairies. They talk about foods that make one grow, that make the skin smooth and velvety, that are good for teeth, and so on.

Reports from home discussions concerning what mothers had read or had heard at a conference with the nutritionist indicated high interest in food values. Some way to prove, however, that lunches bought at hamburger joints are not equal in food value to the balanced meal obtainable in the lunchroom was necessary. For two years experiments with white rats were carried out. Though a variety of diets were used the most amazing result, to the children, was the rapid decline of the rat fed

on a diet of hamburgers and soft drinks. Following these experiments there were definite increases in the number of children eating in school lunchrooms. Another result has been the quantity of milk consumed. In one school it is a common occurrence for boys to take the second bottle of milk instead of a dessert.

The scrubbing of hands before meals is now accepted procedure. Various teaching procedures were used. Perhaps the most effective was the experiment carried out by one group of seven-year-olds. Two potatoes were first carefully scrubbed and then peeled by two different children. One child had *clean looking*, unwashed hands; the other child's hands had been thoroughly washed with soap and water. The peeled potatoes were then sealed in separate jars sterilized with boiling water. Within a few minutes the results were apparent. By the end of the day the vogue for washed hands was well underway.

Oldsters Help Youngsters

One of the most persistent difficulties has been the introduction of kindergarten and first grade children into lunchroom routines—handling trays, removing the cap from the bottle of milk, eating within a thirty-to-forty minute period, and clearing the tables for another group. Social experiences as well seemed to be of discouragingly low quality! The children made fair progress with the continuous help of the teachers, but the teachers had not had time to eat their own lunches. After several other suggestions were tried, the solution seems to have been found in using hostesses from the fifth and

sixth grades who work with the classroom teachers. Each hostess sits at a table with seven first graders. Before she becomes hostess, however, she, along with other hostesses, has a joint conference with her teacher and with the first grade teacher. Her duties, her speech, her table manners, and possible topics of conversation are discussed. Then the hostesses are introduced to the children with whom they are to work. Interesting results are developing. The hostesses are more concerned about their own table etiquette, they are fighting to overcome their own food prejudices, they are forming friendships with younger children, and they feel responsible for the success of the program.

Two hostesses planned especially attractive centerpieces of autumn grasses, another planned favors for her table for the Thanksgiving "banquet." Several desirable phases of gracious living are evident. Children wait for their hostess to be seated, take turns in saying "grace," wait until all at the table have finished the main plate to eat their desserts, and usually proceed in orderly manner to clear their tables. The first graders are happier. They are developing independence. It is easier to belong to a group of eight than to a group of thirty. The lunchroom has become more than a place where food is served—it is a center of social living.

Each Has a Job to Do

Responsibility for the general appearance of the lunchroom belongs to every individual. It is gradually developed through group and individual conferences. In some instances certain classroom groups either request or are

assigned to work experiences in maintaining a clean, orderly lunchroom. They also plan appropriate posters to show food values or to demonstrate the correct way to eat. If it seems advisable, silver is carried into the classroom and demonstrations of the correct way to use it are made and opportunities for practice are given. Other groups assume the responsibility of painting murals to give color and beauty to the room. Still others arrange table decorations.

With the increasing shortage of dietitians it has become necessary that the supervisor of lunchroom services have more assistance in collecting and accounting for the lunch money each day. Finding that too much of the teachers' time in one school was being given to bookkeeping, simple report forms were designed and a room committee of two children was named each week to collect money and make the report. Sixth grade helpers were assigned to assist the first grade teachers. The reports are easily checked by the building secretary and if corrections are necessary, the report is returned and corrections made. One sixth grader proudly remarked to her principal who had commented on an exceptionally neat report a first grader had made, "Oh, that is from *our* group. Mary and I help them."

Intelligent cooperation between home and school has kept pace with the progress made in the school's instructional program. With the aid of "room mothers" the social event of November was the Thanksgiving dinner served to every pupil and teacher. All food preparation was made in the lunchroom kitchens; seasonal decorations, colorful menus, and the programs were planned

and executed by the pupils; and the food was served by the mothers.

One practice which has served to interpret the school to the home is the sending home of the next week's lunch menus on Friday. This aids the mothers in planning home meals to supplement those of the school. For the homes of children who do not eat in the school lunchroom, suggestions for balanced meals are thus made available.

The classroom teacher also receives a copy of the menus. She is able to use it as a teaching-learning situation. As teachers and children study the menus they often decide to invite the dietitian to tell them more about the particular food in question. Recently a group of eight-year-olds was discussing the

merits of whole-grain bread. Though not agreed in their choices as to taste they did agree that the dietitian could give information on its food values. The group's interest in cereals grew, and cereals other than wheat were studied. There was also a marked increase in the number who now selected whole-grain instead of white bread for lunch.

It seems now that the lunchroom program is realizing some of its ultimate goals. Good food and health practices are evident in everyday living. Intelligent cooperation between home and school has been developed. An attitude of friendliness and goodwill is apparent as teachers, pupils, parents, and administrators work together on other problems yet to be solved.

Living Laboratory for Learning

BERTIE BACKUS

Adults often fail to allow youngsters to assume responsibility, even when readiness for it has been shown. Bertie Backus, principal, Alice Deal Junior High School, Washington, D. C. describes one junior high school program in which responsibility was assumed by students and the improved relationships which resulted.

"THE PROBLEM of adolescents is that they have nothing to grow into. Delinquents are not delinquents because their parents don't watch them, or because they haven't any place to play basketball, or because there are too many beer joints on every corner. They are delinquent because in addition to their tension over the individual failures and their individual families, they have no real part to play in the life of the world. They are boiling over with vitality and ability which our society does not want

or need. We insist that they stop acting like children but refuse to let them act like adults."¹

The junior high schools of the country are teeming with adolescents "boiling over with vitality and ability" which the school can and often does use in creating a community life within its borders, a life rich in opportunities for learning.

The cornerstone of any successful

¹ Della D. Cyrus. "What's Wrong with the Family." *Atlantic Monthly*, Nov. 1946.

Copyright © 1947 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.