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<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Tng, Sai Tin</td>
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LEARNING EXPERIENCES THROUGH FOOD

Pupils can gain a wealth of experience from cooking and eating together! Planning, talking, sharing, doing and evaluating mix and blend into rewarding learning. Cooking and eating are learning by doing in an exciting and satisfying way.

Changing life styles, family patterns, and family roles have completely revolutioned food purchasing and preparation procedures in many homes. Knowing how to select, purchase, prepare, cook and serve food is no longer the province of mothers only. Fathers, mothers, and children of both sexes often assume this responsibility, sometimes to share family duties, often because each family member comes and goes at different times and must therefore obtain his/her own food.

Some of the things pupils can be expected to learn from food experiences are discussed in this paper. Nutrition education, motor skills, and social learnings are always involved, with the older pupils planning and organizing. Planning and organizing, integral parts of any cooking project, may be far more important than specific objectives.

Nutrition

In every cooking and eating experience pupils are learning about nutrition. Pupils learn through food experiences, by cooking and tasting and eating foods far more than by what adults tell them about tasting and eating. Pupils learn through watching what adults in their world eat and enjoy. They learn from advertising on television and radio, in magazines, newspapers, and supermarkets. Seldom is the nutrition education acquired this way accurate or adequate. It can be supplemented by teaching nutritional principles and giving reasons for following these principles.
Motor And Perceptual Skills

Preparing, cooking and eating food require muscle co-ordination and control. Separating the white of an egg from the yolk, stirring without spilling, mixing and folding are only a few of the motor and preceptual skills involved. No one of these is important in itself. Through gradual mastery over a large number of skills, co-ordination increases and confidence develops.

Developing Language

Action almost always promotes language development better than objects or pictures. Preparing, cooking, and eating food is action. The possibilities for enhancing language development through these means are endless. Pupils can learn the names of the foods they are preparing and eating, the names of the equipment they are using (blender, spatula), the names of the actions they perform (beat, dice, fold, knead), the names of the processes involved in cooking (baking, melting, and steaming). Pupils can learn the names of descriptive terms (raw, cooked, crunchy, tender, and salty), as well as the names of various forms in which food is commonly processed and served (pickled, dried, flakes, granulated, and puree).

Mathematics

Selecting, purchasing, preparing, cooking, and serving food require mathematical concepts and skills. Many opportunities come up for counting, adding, dividing, subtracting, assessing quantity, measuring, reading and writing number symbols, and so on. These are learned in a concrete and immediately useful ways. Pupils can learn measuring and quantity concepts such as a teaspoon, a tablespoon, a cup, \( \frac{1}{4} \text{ cup} \), 300 mls, 1 litre.

Doubling or halving the recipe provides experience in using computational skills.
Science

Many cooking experiences have elements of good science experiences even though they may not be labelled "science".

Pupils can learn processes used in science. Accurate measurement and timing, skillful use of tools, careful observation in using all the senses, questioning, prediction, estimation, manipulation, classifying, ordering, solving problems, experimentation, verification are examples of these processes. Other significant concepts in science include changes in states of matter, cause and effect relationship, specific gravity, properties of liquids, solids and gases, the effect of the environment on substances (mould, rotting, souring, drying) and characteristics of combinations of substances (dissolving, mixing irreversibility of some combinations).

Social Studies

Food traditions are a part of every era and of every culture. Pupils can learn about the "older days" and more about their own and other cultures through food experiences. They can learn more about the almost revolutionary changes that have taken place in food production, processing, marketing and preparation in the last half century. Children can learn more about their own and other cultures through food. Cooking the foods of many lands and peoples can give pupils a closer relationship and deeper appreciation of these lands and peoples. Food characteristic of the various ethnic groups living in Singapore can add to the understanding of countries where our ancestors come from.

Pupils can learn about occupations connected with food. Some food experiences could include trips to supermarkets, MacDonalds, a mushroom farm, a bakery, and the Sembawang Experimental Station.

Executive Abilities

Preparing and cooking food require careful organization,
sequencing, planning and following a plan, including cleaning up.

Completing an assignment from start to finish in a short class period promotes self-discipline, efficiency and organization.

Social And Emotional Development

Satisfying our body's need for food is one of our first pleasurable experiences. The sharing of food is a universal token of acceptance, hospitality, and love. For young children, food is closely tied with the development of trust, security and warmth.

The positive social and emotional learning that can result when teachers and pupils prepare and eat food together are many.

Pupils can learn consideration and courtesy for each other. Waiting for one's turn, sharing food, dividing it equitably, eating in a way that makes snack and mealtime pleasant, are all things that have to be learned.

Pupils can learn the satisfaction of successfully making something, eating and sharing it, especially when it can be shared with adults. The importance to pupil's self-concept of this and the mastering of the concomitant skills should not be underestimated.

Pupils can learn responsibility appropriate to their age. Preparing, planning, perhaps bringing the food or carrying it home from the store, doing a share of the work, cleaning up and putting away, are opportunities for responsibility that should not be withheld from pupils. Adult help and encouragement will help keep attitudes positive.

Pupils can learn respect for other people. They can learn to respect their likes and dislikes and their need for varying amounts of food. They can learn to respect and like foods from cultures and families other than their own. Equally important, the centre
and school can show appreciation for the traditional foods of the pupils culture and enhance their pride and self-respect. Pupils can learn about co-operation and just working together. They learn that working together can be fun and can work to everyone's benefit. Thinking and planning together ('What else do we need?' 'What comes next?'), helping each other and comparing, are all positive social learning experiences that cooking can promote.

References
