What's to Eat

A Close Look at Food Around Our School

K-1 Classroom

Phase 1

Food memory drawing saying Pringles for lunch

"I have two gummy worms, a chip, a iuice. box. and a sandwich for lunch."

It was the beginning of a new school year for a class of 5 and 6 year olds in a Kindergarten/First grade at University Primary School. Projects are a part of the school curriculum. But for many children, this would be their first experience with a project. The teachers chose the topic of food because it would be a familiar topic for everyone and it would help ease the transition from home to school. At an early staff meeting, teachers brainstormed the many learning opportunities that could arise from studying food. The K/1 teaching team generated a concept map, Teacher Food Topic Web, that included activities across disciplines, resources, big ideas, and required curricular objectives and basic skills.

It is important for teachers to think about the major concepts that may guide student investigations. Big ideas involved in the study of food may include:

All people need food to be healthy.
Food comes from a variety of sources.
Food is related to cultures and lifestyles.
Many occupations are in some way related to our consumption of food.

The food project began when students excitedly talked at the first group meeting about the lunch and lunch boxes that they had brought to school on this first day. For some, eating lunch at school was a new experience. Students spontaneously explored the lunch boxes for color, shape, size and weight. During project/activity time, the teachers invited students to continue talking about lunch boxes as well as to examine classroom plant and animals. The teachers made books about food, fish, plants, and turtles available for perusal. At whole group language and literacy, the teacher shared "*What's for Lunch, Charley*?" Students discussed what each of them had in their lunch before they washed their hands and went to eat.

During the next whole group meeting, the students recalled their past experiences with food and teachers wrote their ideas on sticky notes and affixed them to a chart. In this beginning brainstorming, many of the ideas were simple statements such as:

ASH: I eat chips.
CS: Everybody eats lunch.
JC: We eat meat.
PJ: I do not eat meat.
EA: I do not eat meat, either.

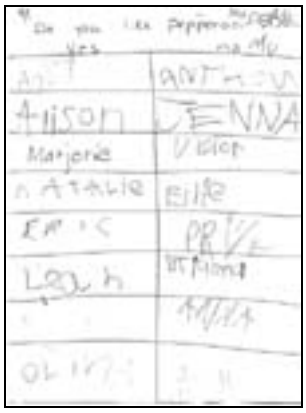
This sharing was a first step in getting to know each other's customs, beliefs, likes, and dislikes about food. On another day, each child revisited his/her ideas, explained them further and noted similarities of their ideas to those of their classmates. Students explained similarities and what category they thought their idea would fit and why. Together the teachers and students grouped similar responses into categories. They argued over which of their ideas fit suggested categories. The teacher elicited nominations for titles of categories and students voted for their favorite titles. The teachers labeled the categories according to most number of votes. The Student Food Topic Web 1 is an accurate portrayal of how they made their final decisions. Not all children wanted their ideas included in the category named by their peers. Therefore, some of their ideas are outside of the labeled categories. During these conversations about categorizing their ideas, teachers noted children's current level of understandings about food.

RW decides which category to place her idea.

Students make cookies with play dough.

To encourage further discussion and conversation about food, the head teacher shared stories about preparing her lunch by going to her garden to get tomatoes and making bread in her bread machine for her sandwich. Students shared stories about what they ate for breakfast and what they brought to school for lunch. The teacher asked students to record their stories on paper with pictures and words. The teacher took dictation for those who were hesitant to write. The students shared their memory pictures with their classmates, again noting similarities. With the teacher's guidance, the students categorized, labeled and displayed their stories on the wall in a graph.

Students made representations from memory of chocolate chip cookies, pizza, and pancakes.



This is a child-generated questionnaire asking, "Do you like pepperoni pizza?"

Students chose ways to represent what they knew about food with clay, paint, and homemade play dough. Teachers developed an oral questionnaire and wrote down students' responses to document their beginning understandings. (Teacher Food Questionnaire – Pre-Assessment). The teachers' questions prompted students' interest in questionnaires and they wanted to develop their own. Students polled their classmates about their food preferences.

Questions Students Asked Their Peers and Families

EA: Do you like shrimp & fried rice?
AB: Do you like hot dogs?
AC: Do you like granola?
JEC: Do you like Pringles?
JIC: Do you like cheese?
EE: Do you like brownies?
AF: Do you like pepperoni pizza?
AF: Do you like mango?
AHA: Do you like salad?
AHO: Do you have a peanut butter jelly sandwich?
BH: Have you ever eaten "Honey-comb" cereal?
PH: Do you like "Life" cereal?
MM: Do you like pepperoni pizza?
EM: Do you like cheese?
DM: Do you like French cinnamon crackers?
VM: Do you have a sandwich for lunch?
VM: Is Macaroni and cheese good for you?
CP: Do you like bread?
OP: Do you like apples?
SR: Have you ever eaten oatmeal?
BS: Do you like cinnamon bread?
LS: Do you like Brazilian food?

CS: Do you like toast with honey?
AW: Do you like apples?
RW: Do you like junk food?

A student was curious and asked parents to respond, "Do you like Brazilian food?"

The student organized her findings into a bar graph.

Students raised questions after noticing differences in the responses to the questionnaires. Teachers recorded their questions and had students illustrate them. They categorized their questions into five groups that formed the study teams for Phase 2 of the project investigation.

Questions About Food

How does food help our body?

VM: Is macaroni and cheese good for you?
SR: Why when bubbles touch your heart, your heart stops?
AHA: How do fruits help your body?
OP: How do tomatoes help me get strong?
JIC: Why are carrots good for you?
JEC: Why do we have milk?
PJ: Why do we have to eat?
EE: How does blood come out of your body?
CP: How does food help my brain work?
EA: How do my bones get strong?

How does our body process food?

BSH: How do you chew up food without it going into your stomach?
CS: How does food grind up in your stomach?

What is in foods?

AF: What is in soup to make soup taste good?
LS: How do you make all kinds of food?
RW: How does cat food come?
AC: How does dog food get made?
AW: Why is pepperoni on pizza red?
NB: How does broth get made?

Where does food come from?

AHO: How do they put chicken in a plastic box?
DM: I'm wondering how the grocery store puts chicken in a container.
AB: How do you get chicken to the grocery store?
MM: How do you get turkey at the store?

How are foods kept fresh?

BH: How can you keep lemon from getting moldy?
SD: How can you keep food from getting moldy after the expiration date?

The teacher asked a parent volunteer to probe the students' thinking about their questions in order to clarify what they would like to learn more about. The parents' typed responses are found in the Expanded Questions Phase 1.