



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



SOCIAL
AND INDUSTRIAL
FOODSERVICE
INSTITUTE



LEARNING ACTIVITIES IN FOOD AND NUTRITION EDUCATION

A note on food and nutrition education...

Food and nutrition education goes far beyond the dissemination of information. It comprises a combination of evidence-based and behaviourally-focused educational strategies, which involve the active participation of all relevant actors and are reinforced by an enabling environment. **The aim is to build healthy food-related practices and outlooks, as well as understanding,** in communities, groups and individuals.

This orientation to practices and outlook may be a challenge for schools. For example, how can they actually get children to appreciate nutritious foods and eat better?

Nutrition education activities in schools

Schools are a natural setting for food and nutrition education as:

- Food-related habits in children are being developed;
- Schools have a wide reach, during a constant period of time;
- The effects can be spread to families and communities;
- Schools offer opportunities to practice healthy food-related practices
- They have qualified teaching staff;
- They can link food and nutrition education with other subjects (e.g. math, science).

Schools also offer a range of scenarios, players, and opportunities for observation and practice: the classroom, the playground, food vendors at the school gates, the school garden (if any), school meals and cooks, the kitchen or outdoor cooking facilities, water and sanitation facilities and all the community locations and people (neighbours, farmers, shops, kiosks, markets, gardens, etc.).



What activities?

Learning activities should be designed and selected to adequately fit a specific objective(s) of the overall food and nutrition education lessons plan, which can ultimately impact students' outlooks and practices. They can function as preparatory, input, practice or revision activities that fit into a generic formula, for example:



Establish and build on pupils' actual knowledge and experience;



Indicate the objective and raise questions;



Introduce new idea/knowledge/practice and get pupils familiar with it;



Organise for practice;



Include feedback and reflection on practice;



Conclude;



If possible, extend the practice or consolidate the new learning through homework or as preparation for further sessions.

In the planning process, it is also important to keep in mind that activities should:

- Have an active involvement of the pupils;
- Be age-specifically adopted and adapted;
- When possible, be action-based and practical;
- Be realistic;
- Be appropriate for cognitive and physical development;
- Provide an occasion for discussion, enquiry, observation and discovery;
- Foster positive decision making and goal-setting;
- Involve families.



Demonstrations, for instance, help to show students how to wash hands properly, the sugar content of various foods, how to prepare a nutritious snack, and even table manners.

Role-plays can be used to explore current attitudes and perceptions on a certain topic, or how to deal with potential scenarios (e.g. convincing friends and family to try out a new food, or resisting junk food). Stories can help to address problems and their probable causes, like food waste.

Case studies are good for identifying and understanding the causes of specific situations, such as a family not consuming enough nutritious foods. Observations and enquiries are other activities that enable pupils to find things out by themselves, for example what the food preparation habits are in their household, or how many times they are exposed to advertisements about food, or what other people do during lunchtime. These can be done as preparation for upcoming sessions, which could then start with feedback.

Talks and presentations are frequently used by teachers, pupils themselves and others, to get to know and remember relevant information and facts. These activities are typically used in food and nutrition education to present or review the basics for a healthy diet, the benefits of different foods, or the dangers of a bad diet. As effective food and nutrition education is a lot about practice, it is recommended that talks and presentations be kept to a minimum and be combined with other hands-on activities.

Games can be used to produce models or materials; deliver and reinforce content about a particular subject area (e.g. food groups, nutritional characteristics of specific foods, etc.); provide opportunities for testing theories and tinkering with variables. They can also serve as a starting point for discussion; have students reflect and document their learning process to recognize patterns in their performance and decision-making; and allow students to take on different points of view in a non-threatening way, among others.



Games can range from very simple and basic, to sophisticated and technology-based.

Other activities like **brainstorming** can contribute to sharing ideas, opinions and experiences within the classroom and beyond.

During the last years, many institutions have developed and designed learning activities for food and nutrition education that fulfil all the basic requirements, but also engage the pupils, create a fun learning environment and increase motivation. Internet-based resources, use of real-life settings and foods, and the development of social meaningful opportunities are common characteristics of these activities.



Some examples

The origins of food: A set of activities designed to get students to understand the processes that occur before food is consumed (can be adapted depending on the desired focus, from local small chains to long industry-based processes), which can enhance the value that children assign to food. Activities can range from field trips to farms, processing plants or markets, making presentations and research about a specific food's cycle, interactive online reality-games, to inviting actual people working with food (i.e. farmers, vendors, cooks) for talks.

Experiments: Children are naturally curious. The use of experiments in science and biology has long been practiced and endorsed; however, the value in food and nutrition education is not yet widespread. Experiments can be used to discover what happens to different foods when they rot (learning about bacteria and food storage), to miming the process of clogged arteries, all the way to finding out what happens when children try to change one small aspect in their diets.

Activities conducted in areas where food is being chosen, prepared and consumed: Learning opportunities regarding food and diets are plenty in settings like the school gardens, the canteen, vending places, kitchen and others. The options are ample including planning sample menus, preparing healthful dishes, measuring food waste, conducting cooking demonstrations, analysing what is served in the school meals, planning healthy food fairs, and many others.

Food cards: these can be made by the pupils themselves, with a name and picture on one side and food information on the back, which can be gradually gathered. Food cards can be grouped into food groups, collected to make good meals and dishes, sorted for nutritional value, combined for good taste or good nutrition, used for testing knowledge, used to play games, and “adopted” by individuals for all kinds of simple research tasks.



Learning objectives

The place of food and nutrition education in school raises many questions.

What should the students be able to know, understand and do by the end? Should food and nutrition education be mostly extra-curricular or part of the national curriculum? Should it be integrated across the curriculum or be an independent subject? Which subject (e.g. science, home economics, health)? How can the content be adapted to local context and culture? How much time should it be allowed? Who will develop it from year to year? Will it require teacher training and special materials? What facilities will be required? How will the learning be expanded beyond the classroom?

All these questions need to be discussed and carefully considered. But, whatever the formal role of food and nutrition education in school, it is imperative that the learning objectives which form the curriculum, include a good deal of practical

actions, which build children's skills, appreciation, observation and understanding, and have a positive effect on their food-related practices.

For example, some of these practical actions can be: choosing healthy snacks, comparing food prices, cooking and preparing food (practising at home if not possible at school), observing how and why foods are stored, finding out what others think about food, practising food hygiene, and/or washing hands.

These kind of objectives are achieved by practice, which is, in itself, motivating and empowering. The key is, therefore, to focus on **hands-on** learning activities that provide an **opportunity for applying the practices that are being promoted**. Involving parents, families and other community members, and linking with the actual settings where food is being prepared and eaten, is also crucial for consolidating and spreading what is learnt in the classroom.





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