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Children's views of cooking and food preparation

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Children's views of cooking and food preparation

Abstract

A series of consultations with 8 and 9 year old children in three schools in England and Wales are set out. The aim of the consultation was to determine how children view the world of cooking and food.

A technique called draw and write was used to ascertain the views of the young people. There was an interest in and reports of cooking and food preparation in the home among the children in all three schools. Families played a significant role in the food preparation of food and in helping the young people prepare food.

The reports from the children in this survey display a disparate food culture. The Wales and Herefordshire schools showed a greater propensity for chips and fried foods as the mainstay of many meals, this inclination was less evident in the London school. Yet other aspects of global food culture such as fast food and burgers and pizzas have clearly gained a hold. But there is also an attempt to include them within traditional mores and values related to food such as the 'proper meal'.

The ubiquitous preference for chips and fried foods indicates that at an early age children are developing preferences for processed foods high in fat. This was also evident in the number of drawings and words that mentioned visits to McDonalds and the use of brands names such as 'McFlurry'.

The stories from the children indicate that the prominent person in the household for the transmission of cooking skills is still 'mum', although there is evidence from the current stories of men becoming more involved in the kitchen. There was an interesting sub text with stepfathers in the London school seeming to play a large part in the 'emotional work' of food preparation.

Overall the research suggests a lot of commonality, but also differences between the schools in terms of how food culture is interpreted geographically.

Key words

Cooking , young people, draw and write, cuisine, families.

Background

This article describes a consultation with Year 3 and 4 pupils (eight and nine year olds) in two schools in England (London and Herefordshire) and one in Wales (Haverfordwest in south west Wales). The purpose of the consultation was to determine how children view the world of cooking and food.

The research was funded by the Glaxo Wellcome Foundation and Barnardo's under an initiative, Right Fit, which was designed to listen to and consult with young people on health issues. This consisted of nine consultations with young people focusing on health and health issues conducted in 2001 (see Barnardo's 2002). A background report from MORI (1999) commissioned by Glaxo Wellcome and Barnardo's set out some of the issues why young people don't eat 'greens and fruit and vegetables'. It also identified some of the actions that young people want to be taken, such as fruit and vegetables to be available in cafés, tuck shops and indicated a high level of interest in food. Other research such as that from the Good Food Foundation (1998) found that the most favoured cooking activity was making a sandwich, which 36% of young people nominated with only 7% nominating cooking a pizza. Any data relating to hands-on cooking or cooking from scratch are not apparent in the findings from the Good Food Foundation.

There is widespread social concern over the apparent disappearance of cooking skills among young people, this has resulted in a range of initiatives being funded by

Government (Lang and Caraher 2001). Food activists call on the halcyon days of cooking (usually the post WWII era) while others point to the weakness of evidence to back any such assumptions (Murcott 1997, Hardyment 1995) and others to the enslaving process that domestic cookery imposed and continues to impose on women's lives (Attar, 1990). The reasons for the claimed demise of cooking skills among young people is generally attributed to two changes: the removal of cooking from the National Curriculum for schools in England when it was restructured (Leith, 1997) and its replacement with the Design and Technology curriculum; and the lack of cooking in the home as more and more we rely on ready-prepared foods with the result that young people lack a role model. Cooking skills are in fact viewed by many as no longer necessary in a hi-tech world. In Scotland and Northern Ireland, however, an element of practical cooking was retained within home economics, although this is not mandatory for all pupils.

Despite these concerns, the empirical evidence on the demise of cooking skills is lacking. Only one national survey has been completed but that was not exclusively with young people (Lang, Caraher, Dixon and Carr-Hill 1999, Caraher, Dixon, Lang and Carr-Hill 1999). What is clear, is that the landscape of cooking is changing, as technology becomes more common in the home, this in turn changes the nature of the food we buy and prepare and the relationship of the individual with food preparation. Poor cooking skills could be a barrier to widening food choice and thus reduce the chance of eating healthily. Indeed, a recent study from the National Consumer Council (2003), reported respondents on low incomes identified the barriers to a healthy diet as being too tired to cook and not

being able to cook, despite believing that pre-prepared foods to be more expensive and less healthy.

Results such as those above have raised the concerns of many agencies about the absence of cooking skills and their relationship to healthy eating among young children. These concerns have resulted in a number of initiatives in schools to address this perceived imbalance. Despite this there is little work with children themselves that tells us their viewpoint. We need to know more about this from the perspective of the young person in order to develop effective programmes that engage with young people and work on their interests not those of the adult world.

Methodology

The use of children's drawings and pictures has a long history in health-related research (Coles, 1986; Coles, 1990; Wilkinson, 1988; Johnson, Hill and Ivan-Smith 1995). In practice the use of drawings as a research technique seems to have been used to assess the information needs of children and or to make judgements on clinical matters such as diagnosing personality disorders or abuse. This has sometimes based on an assumption that the subject's level of knowledge is deficient compared with some notion of a normative standard. We did not use the technique as a tool to assess knowledge, but rather to identify children's experience and perceptions of cooking and food preparation. Despite its limitations, its use among children of this age can be appropriate as it allows them to express their feelings and views without the limitations of a method such as a questionnaire (Pridmore and Lansdown, 1997). A balance is provided in the method by

the combination of drawing and writing. The supplementation of the drawings with written descriptions by the children is one attempt to triangulate methods. Greig and Taylor (1999) and Pridmore and Bendelow (1995) report on the danger of children using abstract ideas in their drawings and of telling a story because they think they *should* instead of reflecting their own views. The use of a scenario and the supplementation of drawings with writing helps build in some safeguards. The draw-and-write method for all its faults can be seen as a bottom-up approach, based on developing communication with the child and actively engaging them in the research process. The principle is one of doing research with children as opposed to on them with the underlying principle based on participatory research (Greig and Taylor, 1999; Wang et al, 1998).

Some critiques of the method express concern about its '*open-endedness*'. This critique is one of qualitative methods in general, where the focus on the child as an actualising human being is judged to be too open and not subject to enough control (see Miles and Huberman, 1994).

In attempting to ascertain the child's view of the world we were aiming to ground our theorising in the child's view of the world (Greig and Taylor, 1999; McCall, 1994).

Based on this a '*draw-and-write*' exercise was developed that could act as an indicator of the mindset of the target audience. The technique allowed children to express themselves in either words or pictures or both. Children worked in the way in which they were most comfortable. Our instructions to the children were based on the following narrative:

I'd like to introduce you to our friend Grubb. (Show picture of Grubb)
Grubb doesn't come from Earth – normally he lives on a planet a long,
long way away, called Planet Nosh. We're going to pretend that 'Grubb'
is coming to Earth because he wants to learn how to cook. AND he's
hungry. We want to show and tell Grubb all about cooking on Planet
Earth." [see figure 1 for a representation of Grubb]

The young people were asked to write on the back of a *paper plate* three things: 'your name, class and whether you are a boy or girl.' There then followed two separate exercises. The first to draw a picture of or write about a food/meal that they would really like to make for Grubb and to share with him when he visits. The instructions here were to use the opposite side of the plate to show the meal/food. The second part of the exercise was to draw a picture of someone who is cooking at home and then to tell the story of what was happening in their picture. The sessions varied from two to three hours and the researchers were supported by teachers in the exercise. Where words were not used, the researcher/teacher asked the child what the drawing was and this was annotated on the drawing by the researcher.

Insert Figure 1 A representation of Grubb

Our sampling of the three schools was purposively driven to represent a range of urban and rural, deprived and affluent areas. In total 82 pupils took part in the research across all the schools, with the breakdown as follows:

London (L)	34
Wales (W)	19
Herefordshire (H)	29

The school in London was located in a deprived areas and drew its students from the surrounding area, the Hereford school was in a mixed economic area, with of rural/urban hybrids of both affluence and poverty. The Haverfordwest school represented a mixed largely rural area with some affluent and deprived communities. The research took place in May-June 2001.

Analysis was aided by use of NUD*IST, (QSR NUD*IST, 1997; Gahan and Hannibal, 1998). This is a software package that helps researchers to manage and explore qualitative data and helps to link ideas and construct theories about the data. The analysis focused on identifying themes and a conceptual mapping of emerging themes from the drawings and the stories told. Data on all drawings was entered into NUD*IST using two headings to describe each picture. First a description of the drawing in terms of its content and secondly all the words on the drawing were entered.

Insert Figure 2 Sample drawing showing words and picture for transcribing

Figure 2 shows a drawing with some words, the data entered into NUD*IST was under three categories:

1. Each drawing was given an identification code eg L for London, W for Wales and H for Herefordshire, an indication of gender B or G and a code number was assigned to each individual so plates, pictures and narrative can be matched up

2. Words used to describe the drawing:

- sister
- oven/hob
- saucepan

3. Words in drawing:

- Sister
- and she is cooking dinner
- paster [pasta]
- I make chaket potato [jacket potato], chip's [chips] and pizar [pizza]

Analysis involved grounded theorising using the data to develop the emerging categories as opposed to a predetermined coded response. These emerging categories did not exist as separate entities, there were overlaps between the various aspects so a response might include reference to cooking as well as ethnic dishes. As far as possible assignment of responses to two categories was avoided by a judgement relating to the emphasis and the order in which the responses appeared. Initial analysis resulted in the development of 14 categories, reanalysis resulting in combinations of some of the categories and rejection of some resulted in this being reduced to 8 categories, which are the headings used to report findings in the results section. One example of this was the conflation of the four categories of *pizzas*, *burgers and chips* and *'McFoods'* into one category. Others were

rejected as evidence for their existence could not be found across a range of interviews. A form of triangulation was attempted by seeking similar expression using Boolean searching within NUD*IST. If similar expressions or descriptions were not found in at least two other interviews then the original category was excluded from the final reporting.

In addition the class teachers in each school were interviewed for their opinions and views of the general attitudes of the children to food and of the results of the draw and write process.

Results

The results are reported under a number of headings (see list below) with the codes L for London, H for Herefordshire and W for the school in Wales, with B or G representing sex of the respondent and the number a code attached to each individual so plates, pictures and narrative can be matched up.

- Ethnicity
- Traditional foods and the proper meal
- Fried foods
- McBurgers, chips and pizzas
- Tea and coffee
- Mum in the kitchen
- Men in the kitchen
- Celebrity chefs

A short summary of each of the above categories is provided below along with drawings from all of the schools to illustrate the key issues. The children's spellings and

descriptions are used as they appeared in the drawings, any interpretation is placed in hard brackets [].

Ethnicity

The London school was the one where the issue of ethnicity was raised as having a direct bearing on food choice and cooking. This was not surprising given the catchment area and ethnic make up of the west London area (some wards from which the school draws its pupils have 80% from ethnic minority groups).

Insert Figure 3 L/G/08 Martha and ‘kous-kous’

Two students both with parents from North Africa stressed the importance of what they described as ‘our foods’. Figure 3 shows the experience of Martha who was anxious that we should be aware of the importance of ‘kous-kous’ and how to prepare it. She expressed immense pride in her food and was anxious to let us know that she was proud of her heritage and the role that food played in it, she was careful to explain this to the researchers. She described the situation in her picture of cooking in the home, to accompany her plate drawing as follows (see figure 3), as follows: *‘This is my stepdad cooking sausage casserole it is for dinner. Kaus-kaus defrost peas, pour hot water in a bowl pour defrosted peas in the bowl with the Kaus-kaus, mix it wait 5 minutes then it is made.’*

In contrast the large number of children from an Asian ethnic background in the London school did not talk about food in these terms. They were more likely to draw food or tell

us stories in terms of preparing ‘traditional’ British foods such as chips or a ‘proper meal’ (in terms of British cuisine). In the two other schools there was little mention of ethnic foods or evidence of the influence of ethnic cuisine on everyday eating or food unless we accept pizza as an ethnic food. There was for example only one mention of curry, this despite the claim that we have in the UK a multi-ethnic cuisine with ‘chicken tikka-masala’ being the embodiment of this fusion as the most popular pre-prepared or convenience food eaten in the home in the UK.

Insert Figure 4 W/G/04 Showing chips with ketchup, beans and sausages.

Traditional foods and the proper meal

Following on from this lack of evidence for the modern fusion or ‘creolisation’ of British cuisine, the children in the three schools expressed a preference for a meal structure which may be described as ‘traditional’ British and consisting of the ‘proper meal’. The proper meal in British research has its roots in the work of Douglas and Murcott. Douglas (1973/1982) in her observation of the meal structure of British working class families, noted a tripartite approach to the meal. One main part is supported by two unsupported elements (for example main meal with soup and dessert). This is expressed as an algebraic equation $A+2B$; Douglas is proposing a grammar of the meal which emphasises the social order. This concept is one that has been developed by Murcott (1982, 1995) in her work on families in South Wales. A meal is seen as an occasion/event where food is consumed according to rules related to issues such as time, place, sequence of courses and so on. Many of the pictures and stories painted both these scenarios with the meal

being organised around a family gathering and an attempt at some internal order and structure being attempted. For many of the children the proper meal was created by incorporating elements of what can be seen as British food such as bacon, sausages or other elements of what can be interpreted as British cuisine (eg fish, chips and peas).

The category of the ‘proper meal’ which usually is represented as having a main part (such as meat) supported by two subsidiary elements such as ‘2 vegs’ was prominent in the drawing and stories of the children across all three schools (see figure 4). A popular representation of this was the roast dinner on a special occasion such as Sunday. One girl from the London school described her picture as follows ‘*my dad cooks everyday today he is cooking Sunday dinner, Rost chicken, rost potato, runner beans, [summer] pudding*’ (I/G/10). There were also attempts to combine foods such as pizza or spaghetti, with other foods so a ‘proper meal’ structure could be formed. This came across strongly in some drawings when one or two slices of pizza were used to form the core part of a main meal and were then supported with other foods such as vegetables or chips.

Fried foods

Overlapping with the previous category and straddling the following category of pizzas, burgers and McFoods, there was a strong tendency for the children in the Herefordshire and Wales schools to draw pictures and tell us stories of preparing a meal with fried food as the centre piece. This was very often a mixed plate of food with fried food serving as a central element of the ‘meal’. Figure 4 from a girl in the Welch school shows a typical representation with a description around the side of preparing chips ‘*in the pan*’.

This category also included other foods, but fried foods were most often those at the centre of the plate or the story, even where there were other foods on the plate.

Occasionally some of the pictures and descriptions of meal include three items of fried foods, for example, chips, chicken covered in batter and sausages.

Pizzas, Burgers and 'McFoods'

While overlapping with the previous two categories there was a definite tendency for pizza and burgers to be favoured as something the children themselves liked or something they would like to serve to 'Grubb'. This was more evident in both the Herefordshire and Wales schools than the London school. This may be the influence of eating out in restaurants such as McDonalds and or of the growth of eating pizza in the home. There were occasional references to foods such as 'McFlurry' or 'chicken McNuggets' being prepared in the home, where a branded product has assumed a generic title to describe a drink, chicken sticks or nuggets of chicken. We have labelled these 'McFoods' to describe the general category.

This was supported by the stories that the children told us of going to 'McDonalds' to eat and that this is where they would like to take 'Grubb' to eat. In all three areas, visits to McDonalds were seen as part of everyday food culture.

Tea and coffee

This was identified by many of the children as something they prepared at home with a minimum of supervision from parents and they typically told us the story that they prepared and brought this to their parents in bed at the weekend.

Again some identified this as occurring with the help of older siblings or of one parent offering a minimum of support or supervision. There was an evident joy in being allowed and able to serve beverages to parents.

Insert Figures:

Figure 5 Mum cooking sausages (H/G/05)

Figure 6 Mum ‘cooking a spanish dish made out of potato chips rice and mint’s and green beans’ (L/G/02).

Mums and dads in the kitchen

The person who was seen to frequent the kitchen was mum and the majority of the pictures reflected this (see figures 5 and 6). They showed ‘mum’ in the kitchen, this was followed by a category which usually involved an elder sister either preparing food or helping our ‘story tellers’ or drawers prepare food. So the issue of preparing food was still gender related.

The drawing by girls of older sisters helping them in the kitchen was also a noticeable feature of this part of the research. Again given the age of the pupils consulted this is perhaps, not surprising, but indicates that some supervision of young children still occurs in the home, whether directly by parents or older siblings.

Figure 7 Dad cooking (W/B/16).

Figure 8 Dad cooking everyday and today - Sunday Dinner (L/G/10).

A minority of pictures showed dads or step-dads in the kitchen (see figures 7 and 8). This was true in all three centres but was more noticeable in the drawings and stories from the London school; here there was also a noticeable number of references to step-dads and second families as in the mention of step sisters etc. The London school was different from the other two in respect of dads helping in the kitchen and a separate breakdown is given of the analysis of the picture in table 1. This shows nine reported incidences/drawings of dads in the kitchen preparing food compared to 6 for ‘mums’.

Table 1 Breakdown of the 34 London pictures

Children themselves preparing food in the home	11
Mums preparing food	6
Older sister preparing food	2
Dads preparing food	9
Others	7

Celebrity chefs

There were lots of mentions and drawings of celebrity chefs, with the naked chef or ‘chiff’ with ‘jamey oliver’ or the ‘naked chief’ and a couple of ‘Delia Smiths’ (see figure 9) receiving mention (these are British celebrity chefs who have television programmes, the three most mentioned were Jamey Oliver aka the naked chef, Delia Smith and Ansley Harriot). This was a significant aspect of many of the drawings especially those which dealt with the narrative of where they would take ‘Grubb’ to eat.

Insert Figure 9 Celebrity chefs: Delia Smith, making a cake (W/B/06).

The mention of celebrity chefs was much greater in the Wales and Herefordshire schools. As was the portrayal of chefs and male chefs. When describing a story of taking ‘Grubb’ for something to eat many of the children described the meal being prepared by a chef or ‘chiff’.

Discussion

The findings reported here belie the claims from other research and reports in the media that children are not engaged with, interested in and exposed to cooking both at home and at school.

A representation emerges from the stories and pictures of the children over the tension between the claims for a British food culture that has multi-cultural influences and the folk tradition embedded in the need for food to conform to cultural and structural mores (The Guardian, 2001, James 1997).

Basu (1999) notes that chicken tikka masala is the most common pre-prepared meal eaten in the home in England. Spencer (2002) in his history of British food notes that the global larder has always been a feature of the British Isles with the empire been used a food store. The difference now days is that we do not just import raw materials to spice up an indigenous food cuisine but that we import cuisines such as Indian, French or Thai (Spencer 2002). In a similar way food is often used to explore family relationships gender, age, ethnicity and as a metaphor for society. Robin Cook the then Home Secretary said in 2001:

Chicken Tikka Massala is now a true British national dish, not only because it is the most popular, but because it is a perfect illustration of the way Britain absorbs and adapts external influences. Chicken Tikka is an Indian dish. The Massala sauce was added to satisfy the desire of British people to have their meat served in gravy.

Robin Cook's Britain may be that of the south of England, due to the influence from takeaways and prepared foods on eating in the home. A trend which according to Warde and Martens (2000) tends to be more common in the south of England. At once what emerges from the children in the three schools is that some foods are universal e.g. pasta, while the influence of cuisine remains is less harmonious and may reflect both a regional and class divide (Hardyment 1995, Symons 1998, Warde and Martens 2000). The children indicate that they are subject to many influences, some of these influences are related to specific foods (eg pizza, pasta), others to types of food preparation (fast food) and yet others to traditions of eating (folk models such as British traditions or ethnic background).

British cuisine has always borrowed from other cultures and Hardyment (1995) claims that the pinnacle has been found in borrowing from the French gastronomic tradition for its standard. Here in the stories and drawings of the children we see the creation of a new or a number of new creolised cuisines.

Some aspects of global food culture such as fast food and burgers and pizzas have clearly gained a hold and become universal in the way we eat now (Hardyment 1995, p 186-188). The changes are related to visits to fast food restaurants, as indeed the children's own stories clearly show, such visits have an influence on food choice and food preparation in the home. Fast food has its own set of rules and behaviours that, in the past, have been distinguishable from those found in traditional food and domestic eating. This is due to the trend towards eat outs - take-aways eaten in the home - and the mechanisation of the home. The modern kitchen is capable of reheating and reassembling food in the same way that a modern mechanised fast food restaurant can do. This has resulted in the rules associated with eating out and particularly with fast food being imported into the home. This has, in contrast to past times, resulted in a democratization of food culture in that fast food has increased the choice to all and exposed all sections of society rather than just a cuisine based on affluence or perceived status and available only to the few (Barber, 1995; Chase 2000). Many households in the UK are now familiar with the cuisines of China, Mexico and Japan. The children showed this trend towards fast food in the home but tended to balance it with an attempt to import traditional mores such as introducing a internal structure to the meal. This was most evidenced when the children added vegetables to dishes such as pizza to create an internal order i.e. a=+2 b structure. The Wales and Herefordshire schools showed a greater propensity for chips as the mainstay of

many meals, this propensity was less evident in the London school. This often resulted in a smorgasbord of food where fried food was present indicating that the young people were seeking to find ways of combining them to form a 'proper meal'.

Ritzer (1998) has pointed out how fast food has managed to impose its own set of rules such as self-service, the role of enjoyment and the expectation of speed. The ubiquitous burger and the chips are prominent in the stories told by the children and indeed they indicate a strong preference for these foods. In common with Caplan and her colleagues (1998) work with adult respondents in London saw who food such as pasta as British, many of the children in the schools we worked clearly saw some foods in this light.

The ubiquitous declared preference for chips and other fast foods indicates that at an early age children are developing preferences for processed foods high in fat. This was clear from the stories which mentioned or depicted visits to McDonalds, and was also evident in the use of brands names such as McFlurry or McNuggets to describe a drink or foodstuff. There was also some indication that visits to McDonalds and other fast food outlets have become frequent events as opposed to special occasion events. The influence of the media and advertising is apparent in the dual impact of branding, with some foods being referred to by their generic title such as McNuggets for chicken pieces, and the power of personality in the identification with and of celebrity chefs.

Millstone and Lang (2003) in their atlas of food show the increase in the use of eat out, take-away and convenience foods. While these trends can be seen in the stories and drawings of the

children, there is also a tension between the stories they tell of their 'everyday eating' and the formality of the 'proper meal' - the informality of the everyday included the use of convenience and processed food, the formal meal prepared for Grubb introduced an element of cooking from basics and attempts to introduce an order or structure. This both agrees with and contradicts with Short's (2003) contention that in the modern world domestic cooking incorporates elements of not only the informants' practical cooking abilities and use of techniques, but also as their timing, planning, judgement and organisation abilities. She also found that modern 'cooks' in the home have little hesitation in using pre-prepared or processed foods. We found that, the formality of the situation and the need to treat Grubb as a guest, resulted in the stories of the meal the children would prepare in the home for Grubb included aspects of the proper meal and one that did not consist of pre-prepared foodstuffs but like Murcott's respondents included an element of cooking from scratch. This is in contrast to the situation described by the children when many drew pictures or told stories of taking Grubb to eat at McDonalds, when asked where they would take him/her to eat.

Murcott (1982) stressed the importance of the 'proper meal', as described earlier, and the central place of the cooked dinner. There was evidence of the continuation of this tradition or what Murcott calls the 'folk model', even when made from pre-prepared foodstuffs the importance of a cooked centre piece to the meal was important to the children. Charles and Kerr (1986a) in their study of 17 low income families found a similar trend with respondents in their research reporting a strong sense of deprivation, if not able to provide 'proper meals' on a regular basis (i.e. three to four times per week). So the 'proper meal' offers an internal structure to the family situation and the occasion or special meal. In line with the findings of Short

family meal occasions may be less formal –in terms of food preparation and the use of processed foods- than the occasion of preparing a meal for a guest which for the children in this research demands a special attempt to prepare food from scratch and to use raw ingredients.

This concept of the proper meal as outlined by Douglas and Murcott may be a British phenomena, but it is one that is changing as the cultural process of globalisation of food and food tastes is moulded. Yet, its influence is strong and still played a part in the accounts of many of the children in creating a formal occasion for a visitor (Grubb). There was an attempt to include them within traditional mores and values related to food. So as one child said to us when drawing their meal on a plate it is '*hard to get things to go with pizza*' as in the equivalent of two vegetables.

Mintz (1996) adds to the picture by proposing a primitive grammar of the meal consisting of CFL, which is a core food item (such as rice), a fringe item (such as a sauce) and a legume. This model has more application to the various ethnic cuisines which we are exposed to in the modern world than the A+2B representation. With industrialisation and the introduction of world or fusion cuisine this has changed to M+S+2V, meat plus a staple (e.g. potatoes) and two vegetables. We see this (con)fusion of cultures with the attempts of some of the children to serve complete dishes such as pizza with accompanying side dishes. Many of the drawings show this emerging tension with attempts to combine an A+2B approach with a structure based on M+S+2V.

For some of the children from an ethnic background in the London school, food which represented their ethnic background was an important category and way of expressing their identity. Caplan *et al* (1998) found a similar trend in older people from all ethnic groups in work carried out in London and Wales. Caplan and her colleagues found that for respondents from an ethnic background traditional British food was bland, boring and unhealthy. Many of those from an ethnic background had adopted a 'creolised cuisine' which included influences such as Italian, Indian and Chinese and they rarely described these as foreign. This is true of the children in this study in relation to Italian food, but less obvious in relation to Indian or other cooking practices or cuisine. Even the London school where a significant number of the pupils were from a South Asian ethnic background there was little evidence of this cuisine being an influence. This is in contrast to the findings from Williams *et al* (1998) who found British-born South Asians in the Glasgow area were more likely to hold onto traditional forms of food preparation as opposed to British-born Italians, at least for family hospitality occasions. The teachers in the London school provided us with some background and advocated that the children from a South Asian background were less likely to be vociferous about their ethnic background and culture heritage, due to fears of racism and a pressure to assimilate. This may also reflect a weakness with the methodology where the children tell us or draw the story they want us to hear, or even the story they thought we wanted to hear.

The prominent person in the household for the transmission of cooking skills is still 'mum' and older sisters, although there is evidence from the current stories of men becoming more involved in the kitchen. In this respect there are some geographical differences between the London school and the two others which are worth drawing out. Another influence was that of

the celebrity chef which were depicted in a sizeable number of drawings. Caraher Lang and Dixon (2000) have argued that celebrity chefs are influential in shaping the perception of food preparation and what is acceptable. Many of the children in our study were clearly aware of the celebrity chefs and their programmes on the television.

Children from the London school were more likely to mention fathers as being involved in preparing food than the students in either the Welch or Herefordshire schools. Perhaps related to this was the number of mentions of ‘step-dads’ and second families such as step-sisters or brothers from the children in the London school. The data from the London school indicates a larger number of dads than mums preparing food in the home (see table 1). There was a tendency for this to be ‘step-dads’, although the numbers are small, this may indicate the use of food and food preparation as emotional labour in creating greater ties with step-children. Findings from earlier work by Charles and Kerr (1986b and 1988) demonstrated the gender divide for household chores and more recent work by Gershuny and Fisher (2000) notes any the time saved by women on routine domestic work and cooking is being matched by a corresponding increase in time spent on travel and shopping. Overall, Gershuny and Fisher suggest that there has been little change in domestic circumstances with women still assuming the greater burden for cooking and household chores. Some other research indicates that men use the kitchen for occasion cooking, such as dinner parties. Almost 80 per cent women cook most or every day, compared with 25 per cent of men. On average, women respondents cooked on 5.8 days per week, men on only 2.5 days (Lang, Caraher, Dixon and Carr-Hill 1999; Caraher, Dixon, Lang and Carr-Hill, 1999). The children’s accounts of the domestic sphere from

the current research suggest more involvement from men in the kitchen than other research has indicated. There is also the associated finding from the London school of the high rate of involvement of step-dads in the kitchen in both cooking and as sources or learning for the children. Rather than the factors suggested by Warde and Hetherington (1994) that the determinants of men cooking were related to class and employment status, so that when the woman was in full time salaried employment the man was more likely to have cooked the last meal, this was in contrast to the situation with working class households, where there were no examples of men having cooked the last meal. Here we suggest that another determinant is the emotional work associated with cooking and food preparation and that men or fathers and especially step-dads may be using food as a bonding/emotional process. This cuts across some of the existing literature on domestic cooking skills which is often categorised as gendered foodwork - including the transmission of skills. Although our sample is small we have detailed descriptions of this process which make up for the lack of breadth in the depth of what is described. The respondents in the London school, given the area and recruitment could best be described as working class, similar to the working class group in Warde and Hetherington's study.

The central role of food as a means of expressing love and caring in the family situations can be seen in the way the children described the preparation of tea and coffee for parents at weekends. This may indicate a return in kind for parents, who have carried the burden of family cooking during the week. For the children it was also appeared to be a rite of passage being allowed to prepare and handle a hot beverage, with a minimum or no supervision.

The implications from this research raise many issues which need to be developed further and empirically driven. Food preparation and food choice are clearly influenced by social, regional, cultural and family circumstances. The children in the London school had a different approach to food than those in Herefordshire or Wales. Questions remain as to whether this is a consequence of family, urbanisation or a feature of the capital with a vibrant multi ethnic food culture or some combination of all of these? The stories from the children in the London school show how some from an ethnic background can use ethnic cuisine as means of reinforcing identity and others can use the dominant social mores related to food as a means of enculturation and possibly hiding their identities.

The degree of regional difference, hinted at in this research, certainly requires further investigation. The future development in the UK of regional government and the regionally based food action plans being produced should be informed by research such as this (Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 2002). There appears to be a tension between global enculturation and the folk traditions or customs of the 'proper meal' and the need to introduce both an internal and external order to the meal structure. In the current research the children showed creative ways of dealing with these tensions.

The need to understand these tensions and the way that children deal with them may be important in the development of healthy eating messages from public health nutrition campaigns. The interaction between these factors is obviously complex and the one that strikes us as one of the least well developed and explored are the regional complexities

and influences. The role of men in the kitchen and their interaction with children through the medium of cooking contradicts and adds to older research and deserves to be explored further especially in relation to the emotional work that cooking with family members may represent. A sub-category of this we find equally intriguing and worthy of further in-depth study is the role of step-dads (and possibly step-mums) in the kitchen with their new families and the possible use of food preparation as means of bonding. This may not mean that men spent much more time in the kitchen nor that they are necessarily sharing the workload of cooking but that they are using it in a very focussed and purposive way. More detailed study on these phenomena is required.

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