

We are embarking on a new adventure in culture and food education. Many children are no longer learning from their parents and grandparents how to make tamales or strudel. Home Economics is now called Family and Consumer Science in our schools. The implication (or is it a loud shout from the grandstand) is that it is more important to be able to purchase your meal than to cook it.

During 1993 two organizations took root in Santa Fe that were concerned with these issues. Deborah Madison initiated a Chefs Collaborative 2000 chapter and a group of local nutritionists formed SNAC (Student Nutrition Action Council).

During October 1994, Kelly Rogers, chef at La Casa Sena, Lynn Walters, chef/owner of Natural Cafe, and Michele Watkins, also of Natural Cafe, went into three public school kitchens to help prepare meals. We used donations of produce from Sun Valley Fruit Company, tempeh from White Wave Soyfoods, and black beans, garden vegetables and herbs from our restaurants and home gardens. During three mornings we helped the cafeteria staff prepare black beans, cornbread, cucumber salad, fresh green beans, and tempeh fajitas. Some of us believed, naively or possibly arrogantly, that if we just cooked fresh and beautiful food that the children would eat it and love it. We were wrong.

We found that many of the children wouldn't touch foods that they had not seen before. Maybe it looked interesting, but they didn't want to eat it. There were teachers who were thrilled with our experiment, and some of the cafeteria cooks were curious and interested to learn about new foods. The most exciting response was that of seven little boys who tugged at Michele's skirt to tell her that they really liked the tempeh fajitas. (Tempeh is not an acceptable source of protein in school lunch at this time.)

Shortly after this experiment, I had a call from Oldways to find out about the "wonderful things" we were doing with school lunch in Santa Fe, I will be forever grateful for that call. I laughed and said that we were trying, but getting nowhere. I was referred to Dr. Antonia Demas at Cornell University, who was cooking with children in the classroom and then serving those international vegetarian foods in the cafeteria.

In her research, Dr. Demas had found that children who cooked new foods in the classroom ate five to twenty times more of these foods when offered in the cafeteria, compared with children who had not had the classroom experience.

Antonia and I spent hours on the telephone discussing the many aspects of food in the school lunch program. Her experiential approach appealed to the cook in me. Antonia graciously agreed to come to Santa Fe to help us. The Santa Fe chapter of Chefs Collaborative 2000 responded to my excitement by deciding to contribute and raise money to bring her to Santa Fe. We raised \$1,200 plus a generous donation of a hotel room for a week.



"Some of us believed, naively or possibly arrogantly, that if we just cooked fresh and beautiful food that the children would eat it and love it. We were wrong."

LYNN WALTERS



While she was here, in March of 1995, she conducted 4 cooking classes at E. J. Martinez and Salazar elementary schools. The children made couscous salad in teams. They had 20 ingredients to choose from, including three kinds of beans. They were instructed to use as many ingredients as they wanted. The children selected no fewer than seventeen of the ingredients. They arranged the salads, dressed them, and named them. They ate the salads, discussed the food and voted for their favorite one.

Antonia, Deborah Madison and I met with Dee Johnson, First Lady of New Mexico, to tell her about the project and garner support. Antonia also met with Dr. Yvonne Gonzalez, Superintendent of Santa Fe Public Schools. There was considerable interest in her work, though not all were convinced that cooking was the way to improve the school menus.



"All children deserve to know where their food comes from and how to feed themselves well."

LYNN WALTERS



Several of us wanted to continue her work. Antonia helped us put together a "bare-bones" budget of \$78,000 to work in two schools for the school year 1995-96. Nina Dougherty, registered dietitian and member of SNAC, and I took this budget to the school board; but they did not consider it to be bare-bones. However, they were very supportive of the idea and allocated \$10,000 towards the project.

We applied for grants to three local foundations. We were turned down but

Food In Schools

(continued)

encouraged to apply again. We did, however receive a generous private donation of \$10,000. \$20,000 was a start, but it was a long way to \$78,000.

During April and May of 1995 Chefs Collaborative 2000 and SNAC worked with the teachers and principals of these two elementary schools to provide volunteer cooking classes for the students. Teachers Evelyn Quintana, Rosemary Montano, and Carol Rose, PTA president at Salazar elementary school, had received a small grant from Santa Fe Partners in Education, a local non-profit organization. The focus of the grant was health and nutrition. Our interests and resources dovetailed and we were able to conduct thirty-eight cooking classes. Volunteers included chefs and parents. We cooked steamed dumplings with Ponzu sauce, made tahini, stir-fried shrimp, pressed homemade tortillas and prepared many other traditional foods.

In November it was apparent that we were going to have to give up the project for the current school year or reassess. Looking at the budget, it seemed possible to change the focus from a research to a model project. Once again, the school personnel were very supportive. We began Cooking with Kids in January 1996.

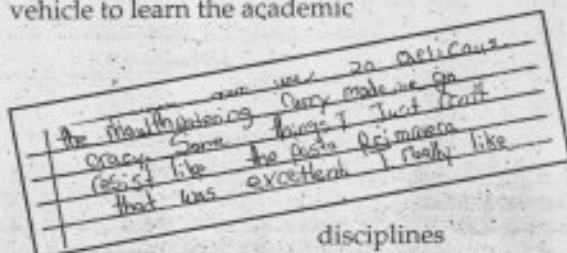
Four quarter-time food educators, including the director of the project, cook with all of the children of E.J. Martínez and Salazar elementary schools. This is a total of more than one thousand children. Once a month we cook a new dish with each class and then within a week we offer that meal as the school lunch. We track participation in school lunch, comparing the days with the new foods with the regular menu. The children keep food journals. We will also coordinate with teachers at both schools involved in gardening projects. From January through May we will cook five new meals, all delicious vegetarian foods from other cultures. We include a North African tajine with couscous, East Indian red lentils with basmati rice, a Mediterranean salad, a Native American dish, and a meal including black beans and blue corn from Mexico.

Undoubtedly we are going to learn from and be amazed by the children. All children deserve to know where their food comes from and how to feed themselves well. If we do our jobs, perhaps one day there will be a food educator in every school and a garden in every school yard.

Good to Teach: Food in the Curriculum

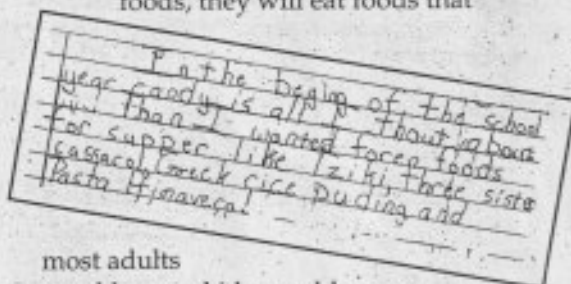
Antonia Demas, Ph.D.

Teaching food studies in a variety of educational settings with people of diverse ages, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds has been my life's work. For 25 years I have used food as a multicultural vehicle to learn the academic



disciplines through hands-on experience that is fun. I especially love working with children to explore the fascinating story of our food. Why? Because children first learn about the world through their senses and are eager to explore the world sensually. Cooking engages all of the senses.

Over the years I noticed that when children have a literal hand in cooking new foods, they will eat foods that



most adults would swear kids would never touch. Because of this consistent observation, I decided (at middle-age) to pursue a Ph.D at Cornell University to document this observation in the scientific literature.

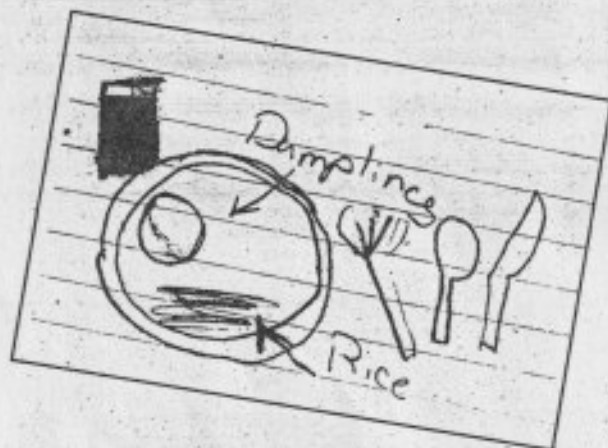
The research project I conducted took place in an elementary school in Trumansburg, a rural community in upstate New York. I worked with half of the classrooms (grades K-4) as my intervention group and the other half served as the control. New foods were introduced in intervention classrooms as part of science, math, geography, and social studies. The children cooked with their peers and sampled new foods in their classrooms. Authentic food-related materials were used in the preparation and activities that supported the food theme.



Within a week of the classroom experience, the same food was served as part of hot lunch to both intervention and control children. The intervention children consistently consumed much more of the new food (up to 20 times as much) as the

I have learned to eat healthy
as foods. I have changed my favorite food
from candy to broccoli.

control children who rarely touched it. This study demonstrated that hands-on experience with healthy, diverse foods dramatically increased acceptance and consumption of those foods.



Plans are underway to continue the research and expand the program to other parts of the country. A year ago Lynn Walters, a chef in Santa Fe, contacted me after learning of my research through Oldways. She was interested in impacting school lunch and after discussions, she and I decided to collaborate with a parallel study in Santa Fe. The local chefs raised money to bring me to Santa Fe for a week where I met with many from the community. It was clear that the organization and enthusiasm for this project were in place in Santa Fe. I was especially excited because this was clearly a grassroots effort to do something positive for the children of the community.

In January, two schools in Santa Fe will begin a monthly food education project based upon this work. In addition, a school in Rochester, NY for emotionally disabled children and a school in NYC will implement the curriculum. Lynn Frederick, a food consultant in NYC, convinced one of the public schools with a disadvantaged population to use this work as an educational theme.

I am currently trying to get funding to do a major research project in this area. It is important that more data is collected so that other schools can see how effective this type of education can be. A school garden is planned to serve as an outdoor food lab in conjunction with the classroom food education. The expanded research proposal includes collaboration with Tufts University, Chefs Collaborative 2000, and Oldways.

I liked the Curry
best. It was ^{so} ^{delicious}.

In the meantime, it is encouraging to see that a version of this work will occur in three different communities in January. The contribution that chefs can make are invaluable to the success of this program.

Nutritionists for the most part, are not passionate about food. Chefs are. It is this passion that needs to be relayed to children. By working together we can help to create a generation of food literate people.

I used to be almost
a complete carnivore until I
started fourth grade. I learned
about some grasses in my
parents' home countries that I
didn't know existed. Learning
nutrition, I know, has done
something good for all of us.
Your teaching has put another
spark of life into us. Now,
thanks to your children are
the future.

