



Editorial Introduction: Children's Food Practices and School Meals

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Contemporary research on children's food practices has brought to the fore children's voice and agency, in an effort to recognize that children's intersubjectivities affect and are affected by their own bodies, their families, their peers, teachers and food-serving staff, schools, markets, the media, publicity, food policies and, ultimately, the whole food provisioning system. Albeit this body of work has offered major contributions to understanding children's agential and powerful capacities in negotiating their food preferences with others, recent calls draw attention to start moving beyond voice and agency in order to fully account children (and people more generally) as 'embodied beings in the world' with feelings, emotions and senses (Kraftl, 2013; Martens et al., 2013, p. 1). However, these are not calls for dismissing voice and agency as unimportant, these are instead invitations to give more attention in childhood studies to embodied practice, affective experience and emotions (see Blazek and Windram-Geddes, 2013). Children's food practices and school meals are excellent research sites where such invitations can be enacted.

Apart from attention given in this special issue by several articles touching upon children's experiences, feelings and sensory relations with food, all authors without exception focus on the school as a site of enacting practice, intervention, marketing discourse or policy reflection. Thus, they move away from a recurrent tendency to focus on the private sphere to a less chartered terrain of public spaces of food provisioning. As in many other domains, schools are considered strategic in disciplining and educating children's eating habits. Schools are chief places in establishing emotional relations and the articles in this issue try to bring attention to how relations between children and food take shape in schools as places of becoming. In this sense such places should be understood as processes (Bartos, 2013), since they are constantly being constructed through their relationship with children. In accordance with recent calls to account for children's emotional geographies (see Blazek and Windram-Geddes, 2013) school places are connected to emotions, sensations and the body. Thus, eating practices and meals in schools may be understood as key to children's food lived experiences. Moreover, school food offers a lens through which its 'multifunctionality' (see Morgan, this issue) is fully displayed: from nutrition to

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taste and pleasure, from economics and budget concerns to environment and social justice, from sociability and sharing practice to autonomy and choice.

It is because of the synergetic character of food and its important relation with children and youth embodied practices, feelings and experiences that the guest editors of this special issue hosted the international conference 'Food, Children and Youth: What's Eating?' in Lisbon in February 2014. The conference brought together scholars, researchers and practitioners from an array of disciplines within social sciences, public health and nutrition, from different countries within and outside Europe, and exploring disparate theoretical and methodological approaches to children's food practices. The conference was organized under the remit of a Portuguese National Science Foundation funded project 'Between School and Family: Children's Food Knowledge and Eating Practices' (PTDC/CS-SOC/111214/2009). This special issue is the result of a small selection of the excellent papers presented at the conference, and that could establish a fitting dialogue with the general theme and critical approach to children food practices and school meals that underscores this collection. Together, the articles reflect refined and complex insights in researching children's food practices by focusing either on the contexts of situated and embodied practice or on the discourses that mediate such practices.

Children's eating practices are becoming increasingly scrutinized and perceived as problematic, reflecting concerns on childhood overweight and obesity rates in several countries, in Europe and elsewhere. Apart from issues with excess food, food deficit problems (malnutrition, food insecurity) are becoming ever more present in both developed and developing countries, since the rise in fuel, energy and food prices (especially in the aftermath of the 2007–2008 crises and the austerity measures forcefully applied in some countries). Both food surplus and deficit are having major repercussions on the health and well-being of children. Various policies and initiatives have been designed to tackle perceived 'risky' and 'unhealthy' diets by children and some innovative initiatives on school meals and food education programmes have offered interesting insights on how to push the public and private sector agendas towards healthy, sustainable, secure and socially just food. In all these debates, policies and strategies, visions of 'eating well' are put forward, often clashing with the everyday life feelings of children and youths, their embodied practices and experiences in schools, in commercial spaces, among friends or family.

Given a still limited literature on the experiences, feelings, emotions and visions of children regarding such school food reforms, various articles in this special issue aim at contributing to deepen this analytical position. Although some articles are strongly aligned with concerns common in the 'new social studies of childhood' (see Kraftl et al., 2012), where attention is given to children as active participants in the research design (Bruselius-Jensen, this issue), or in school food practices (Boni, this issue; Torralba and Guidali, this issue), their analytical scope moves beyond voice and agency by taking into account embodied food experiences and feelings. Therefore, most articles deal with children's engagements with and experiences of school meals in the context of food education programmes that have been implemented in different countries in Europe (e.g. UK, France, Spain, Denmark, Poland) over the last decade. In so doing they bring forward a set of topics for critical reflection, all based in empirically rich and diversified materials from different disciplinary backgrounds that span across the fields of sociology, education, communication, public health, anthropology, psychology, geography and planning:

1. the mismatches and tensions between the principles supported by school food reforms and children's tastes and practices;
2. children's creative tactics to eschew particular food orderings (e.g. nutrition, safety, hygiene, risk, table manners);
3. the school canteen seen as a relational and emotionally laden space where multiple and converging heterogeneous elements (e.g. children bodies, senses and emotions, carers, caterers, food education materials and booklets, teachers, meals) open up possibilities for holding in place conflicting food orderings (e.g. health, pleasure, conviviality, sustainability, social justice);
4. the venturing of private sector food education initiatives and its effects in the contexts of learning to 'eat well'.

Conceptual approaches and tools are utilized to grasp the relations of school food, bodies, feelings, emotions and practices. For example, the concepts of foodscape, lived experience, social interaction and framing are used to stress a relational and affective approach regarding children's engagements with school food. Indeed, many of the ideas that encompass the concept of foodscape seem to emerge as a common ground interlinking several articles in this collection, even if the concept itself is not always explicitly employed by the authors. Based in Appadurai's (1996) notion of 'scape', this concept is becoming increasingly used in food studies (Mikkelsen, 2011). More than mere food environments, foodscapes have often been thought of beyond the physical spaces of food production and consumption, allowing for exploring the interactions between food, people and environments. Indeed, foodscapes have been understood not just as places where people relate to food, but also as contexts where food is co-constructed, taking both physical/material settings and symbolic/discursive spaces (Brembeck et al., 2013), including 'the social, relational, and political construction of food' (Miewald and McCann, 2014, p. 537). The concept is especially helpful to analyse situated constructs and relationships with food in particular places (Miewald and McCann, 2014). In a Deleuzian perspective, foodscapes can also be understood as food-related structures that constantly evolve through the relationships established between food, people and other elements, affecting and being affected by them (Dolphijn, 2004; Brembeck et al., 2013).

Outline of the Special Issue

The first article, 'The Politics of the Public Plate: School Food and Sustainability', by Kevin Morgan, depicts the keynote speech offered at the opening session of the conference 'Food, Children and Youth: What's Eating?'. Having been a pioneering figure in the field of sustainable public procurement, Morgan explores the most pressing issues regarding the sustainability of school meals while reaffirming the right to 'good' food. It stresses the multifunctional and multidimensional character of food – that is, how food and eating are simultaneously a primary need for producing 'healthy' bodies, a pleasurable and sensorial experience, as well as a site for social justice mobilization, economic growth, ecological awareness, non-human relations, among other aspects. The discussion moves then to the difficulties (and opportunities) of creative and sustainable public food procurement, such as the perceived costs of sustainable procurement, the lack of information, the risks linked to innovation, weak leadership, the inertia around the development of initiatives, and legal issues. After giving some examples of civil society organizations promoting sustainability

through food procurement initiatives in cities, Morgan concludes by advocating the need for the development of public social partnerships that can constitute an alternative in schools and other sites to outsourcing food to private companies. Given the restrictive budgets of public services in the age of austerity, partnerships between non-profit civil society groups and municipalities can be feasible to ensure sustainable food arrangements in schools in particular, and in cities at large. This way, it reaffirms the right to 'good food' to children and the overall urban population.

Exploring a creative initiative in schools, the article by Pamela Louise Graham, Riccardo Russo, John Blackledge and Margaret Anne Defeyter queries the views of parents, children and school staff on a universal school breakfast scheme piloted in the UK. Drawing on semi-structured interviews in five schools in the North West of England, the authors sought to analyse the effectiveness of school breakfast initiatives as a tool for improving pupils' nutrition levels and eating practices. They argue that eating breakfast at school is intertwined with a wide variety of practices. It also requires sustainable funding, the definition of nutritionally balanced guidelines for breakfast meals and the coordination with parents by promoting better communication. The authors also show how school breakfast initiatives were valued by participants because such initiatives can contribute to perceived 'healthy' eating practices among children and youth, to alleviate household food insecurity, to improve academic performance and punctuality. Plus, the implementation of breakfast clubs impacted on family morning routines and the synchronization and sequencing of practices, to the point that some of the parents interviewed had a feeling of being less harried in the morning. The authors also point out that engaging directly with children's opinions, whose voice is often lessened in the planning of school meals programmes, might prove to be helpful in adapting certain aspects of school breakfast initiatives.

José Torralba and Barbara Guidalli's article prompts the rising debate on the relations between school meals and children's eating practices through developing a conceptual framework anchored in the concept of 'foodscapes' and combining it with the notion of 'legitimate peripheral participation' by Lave and Wenger (1991). Research data are based on a wide array of methods that include observations, focus groups, informal interviews and conversations with students, parents, lunchroom workers and administrators of several schools in Catalonia and one school in Madrid (Spain), together with audio and video recordings of eating contexts inside and outside the schools. The authors analyse children's food practices and debate the active role children play in structuring their food experiences in schools. The article discusses that learning to eat in schools is about contextualizing children's eating experiences in accordance to the specific elements of school's foodscapes. It involves comparing and articulating these experiences with others outside school, developing and learning to be an 'eater-in-context' where eating practices are collectively shared and situated in foodscapes composed of both material and immaterial resources. The authors call attention to the fact that nutritional initiatives at school tend to focus on the singular experience of children, and they would most benefit if they were understood inter-contextually, that is, considering the multiple foodscapes outside school.

Moving on to another case study in a different European country, Maria Bruselius-Jensen depicts the results from a wider action-research project on Danish public school meals and dining environments for children. The article entails an enquiry on the opinions of children aged between 13 and 15 about what constitutes a good

school meal. It is shown that situating children as daily school meal practitioners and understanding their lived meal experiences provides stakeholders with a pluralistic framework for planning school meals that combines both the nutritional recommendations and the pupils' perspectives and preferences. By engaging with children's voices, emotions and senses, school meals emerge simultaneously as social, spatial and sensory experiences, thus contrasting with the disciplinary and normalizing features of school meals regulations. The article highlights that promoting healthy eating practices through school meals requires positioning children as competent actors, able to negotiate healthy and pleasant meal experiences without necessarily undermining the values encompassed by nutritional guidelines.

'Contested Interactions: School Shops, Children and Food in Warsaw', by Zofia Boni investigates the social and economic interactions occurring between children and food in the school tuck shops situated inside school premises. Drawing from the materials collected through ethnographic research in Warsaw (Poland), Boni states that school shops became contested spaces as they have gained problematic contours due to children's particular economic autonomy. They are contested because they fluctuate between sites of food education and sites of economic autonomy. In these places children are able to make their own food choices, which often implies buying food products perceived as unhealthy, and to establish relationships with the sellers considered by certain groups of adults to be representative of bad parenting and lack of care for children's health. In those places children enjoy the food they eat, they enact embodied food relations, gain autonomy, build and consolidate their status within peer groups. As it is shown, children are invited to choose in accordance to their tastes and feel happy by enjoying spending their money and sharing the food they buy. Boni concludes that the relations between children and the school shops are not merely economic, but go beyond the market onto social, moral, emotional and political contexts.

Simona De Iulio and Susan Kovacs show the findings from a qualitative study conducted in France on the tensions between pleasure and risk discourses. Such discourses, which can be interpreted as orientations to food practices, are contained in several media devices produced by both public and private sectors and used for food educational purposes by teachers in primary schools. Making use of semio-pragmatic analytic tools, the study aims at grasping children at the crossroads of multiple forms of knowing and learning about food: pleasure, embodied taste, consumer choice, health, environment and conviviality. De Iulio and Kovacs argue these media devices contribute to disseminating several aspects of children's eating practices, such as table manners, food traditions, nutritional balance, food diversity, safety and environmental awareness. They conclude that while sensory education is not absent from corporate and educational media devices, most tend to underplay the pleasurable and sensorial aspects of eating to the detriment of nutritional discipline, health and environmental risk awareness. It is important to note that this study does not focus on how the discourses disseminated through these media devices are actually appropriated and used by children both in the classroom and in their food lived experiences. However, these discourses are important tools that circulate the particular meanings of 'eating well' that inform children food practices.

As a whole, this collection calls attention to the relevance of processes that intertwine food provisioning, conflicting discourses and tensions around school meals (e.g. public vs. private, health vs. pleasure, free choice vs. regulated provision), children's embodied food practices and sensory experiences situated in schools, as well

as the articulation of schools with other foodscapes. Without dismissing the importance of children's voice and agency, this special issue also acknowledges the recent move to understanding children as 'embodied beings in the world' where feelings, emotions and sensorial experiences should be taken into account in social research on food.

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