



The Foodies Books In Practice



The Foodies Books have already helped many practitioners to engage children with basic seasonal fruits and vegetables. Some examples of how they have been used:

Growing For Eating In School

One primary school is using the books to support their Food For Life application, by using the Book of the Month foods as a starting point for their growing projects. Each class is growing a single crop, and when it is mature they are harvesting it, cleaning or preparing it, and the kitchen staff are using it in the school dinners. One of the Food For Life targets is for children to be involved in the choosing of school meals once per term. The children are given a choice of meals which are feasible for the kitchen staff to make in bulk, using the class's chosen crop and the class then chooses their favourite. The sequencing activities for each food are helping the children to understand how their crop is going to grow. The school has very little growing space so everything is being grown in a selection of containers donated by parents and other local people.

Building Familiarity

A family centre working with vulnerable families put on a series of music and book sessions using The Foodies Books as a foundation. A local music therapist worked together with staff from the centre to create song and instrument activities using the seasonal foods as a theme. The (pre-school) children listened to the stories, joined in songs about eating healthy foods and about the star vegetables and fruits from each story, became familiar with the names of each food and what they look like and then followed with a gentle tasting session. The children came mostly from families where the fruit and vegetable content of the diet is low and familiarity is lacking. Parents were present during the sessions but because the sessions were officially billed as a fun activity for children, the messages were absorbed without being perceived as preaching. Staff were confident that knowledge was increased for parent and child during the sessions.

Tasting In School And Then Taking Foods Home

Many practitioners are using the books as a way to get home grown foods into children's homes. For example a primary school reception class recently worked with the May story "Lettuce And The Butterfly" to teach children how to make salad dressing. The children grew lettuces from seeds, which is a quick and rewarding crop for very young children. Some were grown in small beds at school and others in little containers to take home. Parents were asked to send in an empty jam jar to make dressing. Two local chefs offered to come in for an hour and they supported the children to make the basic dressing from the May book's recipe, which they then took home with a full grown lettuce for their evening meal. The chefs also helped the children to make three different flavoured dressings with different ingredients in class and the children then tasted the dressings by dipping lettuce leaves in and voted on their favourite one. The practitioners could then be sure that the children had tried both dressing and salad leaves in class and that something had been sent home to reinforce the message again.

Trying Foods Regularly

The tasting activities each month are designed using a different set of five seasonal foods with some overlap each month. Several schools and children's centres have focussed specifically on the tasting element and are using the books strategically throughout the year to ensure that children get to try a wide range of basic foods. Because some foods come up several times, the familiarity builds throughout the year. A mixture of easily palatable sweet fruits and more challenging tastes are used so the fear of food is reduced by the inclusion of the "easy" foods. Using the blindfolds and guessing sheets makes the exercise into a game, and because reading the book and delivering the tasting game can all be done within a half hour, monthly repetition is achievable and is often linked into number and colour work, work on senses and textures and work on using words to describe.

Linking Foods to Shopping

Because the foods in the books are widely available British fruits and vegetables, the books tie in not only with growing activities, but also with farm shops, veg boxes and supermarket shopping. One childminder with both pre-school and school age children gets a regular organic vegetable box from a local scheme. She says that the star of the month always features in the boxes, and many of the supporting characters each month turn up regularly, so children can see the link between the shopping basket and the books. They use the veg to cook the recipes in the books, find new recipes in her recipe books or online, or make up their own to try. One school took a class group on a trip to a local supermarket and helped them to find and buy some fresh foods which were seasonal. An older class in the same school also did a calculation of foods miles on the supermarket foods, comparing local seasonal foods with ones which had been imported, despite being in season here.

Linking to the Eatwell Plate

In May half term a project ran for school-aged children in five libraries to get them to engage in a fun way with the Eatwell Plate, using The Foodies Books Paper Plate Exercise as a starting point. Children brought in a range of used food packaging from home and worked with two local artists. They found out about the different sections of the Eatwell Plate, then built a 5 foot wide collage of the plate, using the food packaging and dried foods to build a display for the library. The children then each made their own plate of food using the Paper Plate Exercise and trying to incorporate what they had learned about balancing colours and food groups. The collages are displayed with more detailed nutritional information in the children and families sections of the libraries. The exercise was particularly helpful in helping children see that many processed foods containing vegetables or fruit may often be high in fat salt or sugar, as they had to choose which section to place the packaging in.

Linking Food With Creative Writing

A primary school ran a Foodies Books project for World Book Week, where children in every class had to create stories or characters using fruits and vegetables as their theme. Every class took a different spin. For example class one drew superhero characters which were fruits or vegetables and learned how to spell and write the different attributes they gave them, and made big posters for their character. Class Three made short cartoon strips of an adventure in a supermarket vegetable section. Class Six wrote a story about fruits and vegetables which would be suitable to read aloud to young children and took them to read to the local pre-school. All the class efforts were displayed in the school dining hall for each class to see what the others had done.

Linking To Health Weeks

Some schools run themed Health Days or Health Weeks and the books fit well with this. One school ran a competition to create a poster to advertise a new food product, which children invented. The poster had to be colourful and include the recipe for the product, and all posters had to use a seasonal fruit or vegetable as a major ingredient. KS1 children used pens and paint and KS2 children were allowed to use I.T. to include downloaded images as well as work by hand. The winners at KS1 won Foodies Books and at KS2 won growing kits to grow something at home.

Getting The Messages Home

Some schools have used the books as a way to get the healthy eating messages into the homes of their children. One Reception class of 30 children bought two sets and is sending the books home in book bags, they can ensure that every child takes the Book Of The Month home once during the month. The staff read the Book of the Month to the class at the beginning of the month on the whiteboard so all the children are already familiar with the story. Because at Reception age most children need help with reading, it encourages the parent to read the books with their child. Next year they are going to repeat this and send home a printed version of the recipe to all parents at the end of each month.

These are just some of the ways a Creative practitioner can use the books to enhance their health messages. There are many more. The work around the books can be layered to reinforce the messages. Activities can easily be fitted in to mainstream teaching activities and not just as a tick-box / bolt on exercise.