

FOOD IN A MULTICULTURAL PRESCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

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When implementing a multicultural environment children must learn aspects of a culture which will be relevant to their own experience. They should be exposed to the richness and diversity of others - both in their own preschool group and in the world around them (Wardle 1990). Food is relevant to every young child's experience and because of the diversity of food between different cultures, food activities are an excellent way of introducing multicultural ideas into the preschool environment. It is important that many activities revolve around the same theme, and cooking and food related activities can be one of many activities used to reinforce an anti-bias, multicultural environment.

A thematic approach is a good way to begin a multicultural cooking programme. The theme could be (1) a particular country with many of the activities of the preschool, as well as cooking, revolving around that country. (2) a meal; for example, breakfasts from different cultures, including our own, could be prepared over a period of time. (3) a type of food; for example, meatballs or bread from various countries could be prepared and/or examined and discussed.

It is important that cooking activities involve using healthy ingredients so children are provided with healthy food and good eating habits are encouraged. There could be a supply of utensils in the preschool that are from different cultures (Chinese porcelain bowls and spoons, clay pots from Turkey) and children could try eating with implements different from ours, or with their fingers. Organisation of the cooking sessions could be group activities to encourage working together or single portion recipes where children become confident in their individual cooking abilities.

This proposal has been developed into a check list that teachers can use to evaluate the curriculum in their own preschool. Open ended questions are also included to determine the opinions of teachers and obtain further ideas for multicultural anti-bias preschools. It can be used to assist and encourage preschool teachers to plan a developmentally appropriate strategy to create a multicultural environment with food as one of the components.

The use of ethnic food activities should be a part of any multicultural, preschool environment. Food can greatly extend children's understanding and appreciation of their own world and that of other people who effect their lives.

WARDLE, F. (1990). Child Care Info. Exch. 54: 39.

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