

DEVELOPMENT OF A QUESTIONNAIRE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN TO  
DETERMINE THEIR KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE AND PREFERENCES  
FOR VARIOUS ETHNIC FOODS.

J.M. APPLETON, C.M.PATTERSON and N.L.McCREA.

With the growing acceptance of Australia as a truly multicultural society there is an increasing importance to educate our children to be aware of cultural diversity and to appreciate and be tolerant of differences that exist. Food is one topic that is relevant to all people's experience, but is also an ideal example of the differences and similarity that exist between different cultural groups.

The introduction of ethnic foods to children's diets has a great potential to increase the variety of foods that are eaten and hence increase the likelihood of a balanced diet.

It is recognised that the knowledge of, and attitude to healthy food must be positive before behaviour can be changed. Familiarity is one of the major predictors of preference in the 3-4 year old group of children (Birch, 1979). An attempt has been made to design a questionnaire to determine children's knowledge of multicultural foods, their attitudes to some of these foods and whether they prefer ethnic foods to foods with an English/Australian background. This questionnaire was designed for preschool children, but could be easily adapted for older primary school age children. Children at ten state preschools centres were interviewed and all children surveyed, including those of non-English speaking background, were asked the same questions.

To determine the knowledge of the children, they were shown pictures of various foods or utensils (chopsticks, wok) of ethnic origin and asked to identify the food or utensil and then to indicate if they ate that food at home or when eating out and if they had ever used the particular utensil. Their attitudes were assessed by showing the children caricatures of 'happy', 'normal' and 'sad' faces and having them indicate which one depicted how they felt about eating particular foods, eg pasta or chinese food. To determine the children's preferences, they were shown pictures of pairs of foods - one of English/Australian origin and an ethnic food and asked to indicate which one they preferred.

The results of these surveys indicated that most children had rather limited knowledge of the questions asked and this indicated the need for intervention in the preschool area.

BIRCH, L.L. (1979). Journal of Nutrition Education 11:77.