

CHAPTER REVIEW

“Food touches every one of our senses, which are the pathways into to our minds...food is our shared language.”

SUBCHAPTERS

The Edible Schoolyard Project

Over 23 years ago, Alice founded the Edible Schoolyard Project at Berkeley’s Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School. There are more than one thousand students in grades six, seven, and eight, and more than two dozen languages are spoken on campus. Children come from every possible cultural and economic background, so food is their common language. The Edible Schoolyard Project has served as an incubator for a universal idea that Alice terms “edible education”—a hopeful and delicious way to counteract the industrialization of public schools and revitalize public education.

The Edible Schoolyard Project is an integration of a school garden and kitchen into the heart of the teaching mission. For the three years they are in school, students grow, harvest, and cook their own food in the garden and kitchen classrooms as part of their academic curriculum. In a history class about Neolithic times, for example, students might join their chef teacher and history teacher in hand-grinding heirloom grain berries in a stone mortar, and then make bread that they eat warm, right from the oven. In a science class, students learn about worm boxes and compost as they dig in the soil and tend to the raspberry patch; in a math class, students might measure the dimensions of a vegetable bed, or learn about fractions while baking. Through food, every subject comes alive, and students absorb their lessons effortlessly. Food is a lens through which you can educate the whole child. In the process, children come into a new relationship to food and learn to be stewards of the land.

Every class session, whether it’s history or science or math, concludes with a plate of food around the table. The children sit down together to share a delicious seasonal meal, talk about what they’ve done, and learn basic etiquette, such as not eating until everyone has been served, or asking politely for food to be passed. Even the basic human value of civilized communication becomes an essential part of the journey.



All schools can support local sustainable farms too. Every student deserves a free, delicious, sustainable school lunch, and if public schools purchased their food from local organic farmers, it could change agriculture overnight. School lunch represents an enormous opportunity: Right in the middle of every child's school day lies time and energy set aside and devoted to food already. When children gather around the lunch table and enjoy wholesome, delicious food together, in an atmosphere of caring and beauty, they fall in love with its lessons and values.

The Edible Schoolyard Project now has an online network of over 5,500 like-minded kitchen and garden programs around the world. These programs show that no two Edible Schoolyard Projects can be alike—every place has its own climate, its own food traditions, its own crops and community. But these thousands of programs also prove the universality of an edible education. When children receive an edible education, they grow up feeling the soil with their own fingers, harvesting its bounty, and watching their own hands make the kind of beautiful, inexpensive food that can nourish the body and the spirit for their whole lives.



PRINCIPLES OF EDIBLE EDUCATION

FOOD IS A POWERFUL TEACHER

Food can be an academic subject. A kitchen, cafeteria, and school garden should be integral to the academic mission of the school, so that ecology and gastronomy help bring alive every subject, from reading and writing to science and art. Food educates all of the senses.

THE CAFETERIA IS THE HEART OF THE SCHOOL

From preschool through high school, every child deserves a wholesome, delicious, sustainable, free school lunch, every day. Good food is a right, not a privilege. Learning to eat good food, seated together at the table, teaches human values; it builds community and brings children into a positive relationship with their health and the environment.

SCHOOLS SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

When school cafeterias buy seasonal, fresh food directly from local, sustainable farms and ranches—not only for reasons of health—it becomes a way of understanding our interdependency with nature and the world outside the school.

CHILDREN LEARN BY DOING

A hands-on education, in which the children themselves do the work in the vegetable beds and on the cutting boards, awakens their senses and opens their minds—both to their academic subjects and to the world around them.

BEAUTY IS THE LANGUAGE OF CARE

A beautifully prepared environment, where deliberate thought has gone into everything from the garden paths to the plates on the tables, communicates to children that we care about them.



