



Cooking: Cooking and Honoring

What if cooking helped students to honor the elderly?

Melissa wanted her students to think of using their cooking skills as a way of showing appreciation of older people, as well as thinking about their own diet and tastes. Too often, grandparents are seen as a source of support, with less time taken to appreciate what elderly relatives have to give.

"We live in a society where youth is elevated over age, and I wanted students to have an opportunity to appreciate their grandparents. I gave students an assignment:

'We are each going to take something to an elderly grandparent (or another elderly relative/neighbor/friend of your family) as an expression of our appreciation and respect. Each person, including me, will prepare and pack a bag or basket to take to him or her, including some food we have prepared. We will need to explain what is in our bags and why we have included it.' My students come from a variety of cultures, so what they put in their bags and baskets varied; but as long as they could justify the items in terms of showing appreciation and respect, it was allowed. (Items had to be appropriate for students to take.)

"We made lists and plans, and I used mine as an example. We did our baking and went on our visits. (Written permission of parents was needed.) We reported back on the visits and how we felt about them. The students wrote about their experiences. I shared what I had learned about my grandmother's cooking during World War II, and how creative cooks had to be with very little. Many students said they had found the visit difficult, but no one had given up! Everyone wrote about sitting and talking with their elderly relative or friend. Some had done jobs for their grandparents, like washing dishes. They all identified the talking, listening, and sharing news as the most important thing that they had done."

What's going on here?

Melissa saw cooking as a way of expressing gratitude and helping students show respect.

She **engaged** students in approaching cooking in a relational context and in serving the wider world (the elderly in the community).

Melissa considered the purpose of the skills she taught, **reshaping her practice**, by considering how to bring about the interactions she wanted to happen (informal conversation, listening, visiting, serving) and by modeling them through taking part in the task herself.

What does this have to do with faith, hope, and love?

These students were expressing **love** in action by giving time and effort in baking for others and giving time to sit, listen, and talk. The students were demonstrating love and respect as they honored the older generation. Expressing appreciation and being thankful raises awareness not only of our own situation, but also brings to mind the situation of others. Gratitude involves a reorientation of life, with thankfulness as the default setting. Gratitude toward God and others is a response to life as a gift from God.

What difference does it make?

This lesson gave students a different reason for developing cooking skills; their skills were used for the good of the community. By highlighting gratitude, Melissa helped students experience their relationship with their grandparents with a different mind-set.

Where could we go from here?

The concept of using food technology for the good of the community could be extended to other uses. In the wider community it could be used in local groups such as Meals on Wheels. Care needs to be taken in such instances that there are chances to learn from others and not look down on them on the basis of their need. Ways can also be explored of practicing other skills in the curriculum in relational contexts where someone outside the classroom is served by the skill.

Digging deeper

The word for respect in biblical Hebrew also means “to bow down.” Respect and honor were shown by a physical position. We do not have the elaborate formal courtesies of some other cultures, but we can still explore with students how we show respect today. Respect is showing that we consider others valuable and is a form of love. Scripture includes a clear focus on respect for the elderly (Leviticus 19:32).

Thankfulness can be expressed toward God (Psalms 92:1) and others (1 Timothy 2:1). Martin Luther saw gratitude as the basic attitude; it is like a mold that shapes life. When someone does something for you, there is a sense of thanks that are due, hence Luther’s saying that “unthankfulness is theft.” Too easily a rights-culture can slip into ingratitude.

If the only prayer you said in your whole life was “thank you,” that would suffice. Meister Eckhart

A sense of gratitude has been identified as good for our health, something the Bible said many years before (Proverbs 15:30). Thanks focuses us on what we already have (Philippians 4:6).

To educate yourself for the feeling of gratitude means to take nothing for granted...Train yourself never to put off the word or action for the expression of gratitude. Albert Schweitzer



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