



Garden To Café at a special education school in Brooklyn on 4/10/2018 - Letters to the Chefs

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Executive Summary

- 1) A curriculum activity, "Letters to the Chef", was developed which enabled nine special education students to express their experience with and opinions about a Garden To Café (GTC) event.
- 2) The students assisted the chefs with food preparation, and tasted the GTC food at the event.
- 3) The student letters generated more text feedback than would be obtained from a typical survey.
- 4) Qualitative analysis of the letters confirmed that the students enjoyed the food preparation and the food. They also developed positive personal relationships with the chefs.
- 5) While the letters yielded much useful information that opened a window into how the students experienced the GTC event (i.e., *what* they liked), the letters included little feedback on *why* the students liked the food preparation, food or event. Given that the students wrote as much as could have been expected, compared to their other recent writing, this is less a problem of the results than an opportunity for future curriculum and methodology development.
- 6) As a next step, the "Letters to the Chef" curriculum could be expanded to explicitly ask students to explain why they liked certain food preparation actions and foods, such as by using "because" statements. For students equivalent to the students showcased in this report, the time devoted to letter writing may need to be expanded from three to four class periods. This slight modification would hopefully help us obtain feedback GTC and SchoolFood need to improve.

Introduction

We have been trying to find effective ways of collecting qualitative feedback from students about Garden To Café (GTC) events and food. One approach we have tried involves asking students to write "Letters to the Chef" after a GTC event. Ms. Negrelli at a special education school in Brooklyn came up with the same idea independently, and took the time to help her students write letters. The school is a District 75 school (Special Education) and runs from Kindergarten to 12th grade. The letters are in the last section; we encourage you to read the letters first, and then read the rest of the report.

Nine students who participate in a culinary arts and gardening program assisted Chefs George Edwards and Holly Howitt with the preparation of apple dishes, helped serve the dishes to about 100 of their fellow students and teachers, and also tasted the dishes they helped make. All nine students wrote letters to the chefs. The prep was held on April 9, 2018. The tasting event was held on April 10, 2018.

This report contains the actual student letters (the final drafts), in the students' own handwriting, so a wider audience can hear what students thought about Garden To Café in the students' own words. This report also contains an event report by Chef Edwards, a section by Ms. Negrelli that puts the students' work in context, an analysis by Dr. Abrams of the text of the letters to reveal patterns of students' responses to GTC, and the recipes used.

Event report - George Edwards

Two recipes were served. The first dish was kale and spinach salad with oregano dressing. The second dish was baked apples with either mint, brown sugar, or cinnamon. The students mixed these separately.

Nine students participated in the food preparation (prep). Approximately another 90 to 100 people were present for the tasting event. The school has about 85 students and about 35 staff. The exact student attendance on the day of the event is not known at this time, but all students who were present had an opportunity to try the GTC dishes. Of the students who were present, about half tried at least one sample of the fruit, and about 25-30 tried at least one sample of the salad. Adults sampled both.

The students who helped with prep cut and seasoned the apples, but Holly and I baked them the next day, so I can understand why they viewed them as raw. The nine students would refer to them as raw, while the ones who did not prep would view them as baked. The nine students would have also tried the baked apple dish the next day during the event itself. It is also possible that this is why the nine students distinguished between red and green apples, while the students only present for the tasting event would likely have seen the apples as one dish.

Teacher report - Margaret Negrelli

The students participating in the food preparation ranged in age from 13 to 20 years old. They were in two 6:1+1 classes and had classifications of Autism and/or Intellectual Disability.

Along with teaching the English Language Arts (ELA) aspect of sentence structure, I try to have the students understand proper etiquette. Letter writing is a good way to incorporate both. It is also a great way to encourage my students to verbalize their thoughts and feelings.

The handwriting seen in the letters is the students'.

For assistance in writing the letters, the students were given a "story starter" - that's why the first line is the same for all of them. I asked them what they liked the most, what was fun, what tasted the best - sometimes having to ask questions in multiple ways to draw a response. Paras were directed NOT to correct the students' spelling so that they could learn from their drafts. I would correct each draft (some students only had one while a couple had two). The final draft had color photos taken from the visit. Each letter was written in the students' voice: correcting grammar, not opinions. I usually create story starters for "first", "next", "then" and "finally". It all depends on the type of letter and the activity for which we are sending thanks.

I might have the students first discuss the trip or event and brainstorm on the board about what we remembered, what we liked, what was interesting, what was fun, and so on. Sometimes recall isn't automatic and needs a jump-start. My students are prone to write other people's thoughts as their own, so I erase the board before they can start their first draft. I want them to give valid personal information rather than that of others.

We later discuss the choices for a closing: "Yours truly", "Sincerely," and when it is appropriate to use "Love,".

There is a lot of use of questioning techniques to try to draw out answers from my autistic students. Sometimes one needs to be very creative and also observant AT the event to know what truly was engaging for the student. Sometimes it can get stressful, because I might know what they liked, but I can't tell them because then it wouldn't be authentic.

It is important to discuss the "because" aspect of our letter writing. For our particular students, expressing inferences is extremely difficult. Their minds are very concrete - what they see, feel, taste and so on. "Why" and "how" are concepts we are working on, but for many of our students, the concepts will not be understood. Something might taste good - because it does. Something might have been fun to do - because it was. Often, it is difficult to elicit why and how responses without guiding our students to their answers, thus skewing the results.

Examples of graphic organizers similar to those used in the letters to the chef assignment are included below. I am always modifying how I approach this, but these templates are a basis for how I start.

In terms of how much time the students worked on their letters, we worked for over a month, mostly due to other mandated obligations and time constraints. I would estimate that three class periods is all that is needed, depending on student abilities: first day for organizing thoughts and ideas, including using graphic organizers, second day for draft, third day for editing, rewrite and final draft.

These letters are similar in quantity and quality compared to other letters they have written this year. The students have a minimum they must write, but we encourage them to write more, especially if they have more to say. I made copies of the final drafts and displayed the writing process (drafts and final) on our bulletin board. When the board is changed, the work either goes in their binders or is sent home for the parents to see.

The event date was April 9th for prep and April 10th for tasting.

Nine students participated in the prep. (One student was absent from the class during food preparation.) These nine students and the student body and staff participated in the tasting (approximately 100 over two lunch periods). The building has about 120 people, about 85 of whom are students. Exact student attendance on the day of the event is not known at this time. The school, with the school's off sites, has 254 students, but students at the off sites weren't present for the event.

Qualitative analysis of the student letters to the chefs - Robert Abrams

Categories were developed to describe responses in the letters. All of the letters were read five times. This repeated reading also ensured that after the categories were developed, the counts of responses that fit each category were accurate and that the categories were consistently applied.

A first set of categories counted each student once if s/he wrote a statement, or statements, in his/her letter that fit the category. A second set of categories counted all statements across all letters, so, for example, if a student had mentioned three preparation steps, that letter would count three times.

Results are shown in the tables below.

Table 1: Category	Number of students who wrote a statement that fit the category	Percent of students (out of 9 letter writers)
<i>Food related responses</i>		
Tasted a GTC food	1	11%
Enjoyed or liked a GTC food (3)	6	67%
Explained why a food was liked (1, 3)	1	11%
Compared foods or cited a favorite (3)	3	33%
Disliked a GTC food (2)	0	0%
Named foods precisely with proper names of apples	2	22%
<i>Food preparation enjoyment, and procedural knowledge</i>		
Enjoyed, liked or had fun doing a food preparation action	8	89%
Explained why a food preparation action was liked	0	0%
Described food preparation procedural knowledge, or learning about procedural knowledge ("Enjoyed prep" doesn't count for this category, so these students either wrote they enjoyed prep and described one other step, or only described steps)	4	44%
Described procedural knowledge, or enjoyed prep that included a description of procedural knowledge	9	100%
Described procedural knowledge without saying s/he enjoyed it	1	11%
<i>Positive personal relationships</i>		
Expressed a positive personal relationship with the chefs, such as "I enjoyed working with you" or "I hope to work with you again"	6	67%

Notes:

- (1) "I liked the Green Crispin apples because it tastes so sweet."
- (2) There were two statements about food that were neutral. One was the student who just said s/he tasted the apple, and another said s/he thought one kind of apple tasted better than another kind, but it is impossible to know whether the less liked apple was disliked, neutral or liked but liked less than the other kind, and it is also impossible to know whether the more liked apple was disliked, neutral or liked, just that one apple was liked more than another.
- (3) Students can be in more than one of these categories.

Table 2: Category	Number of statements that fit the category (can include multiple statements from each student)
Total liked food preparation actions (4)	8
Total liked foods	10
Total food preparation actions described	15

Note:

- (4) All liked food preparation actions referred to cutting or slicing apples, except one that was not specific.

Discussion of qualitative analysis

The letter writing students clearly liked their participation in GTC. A majority of students liked a GTC food. Almost all of the students wrote they liked the food preparation. A majority had a positive personal relationship with the chefs.

No students disliked a GTC food, but they would have been unlikely to express negative opinions in a letter framed as a "thank you" letter. That's okay.

More important, from an evaluation and operational improvement perspective, was the low number of statements explaining why the student liked a food (one student) or a food preparation action (no students). Since the students wrote as much as they could have been expected to write, this lack of explanations, or "because" statements, is less a problem than an opportunity to refine and expand the "Letter to the Chef" curriculum and qualitative feedback methodology. For instance, if we asked for "because" statements about why food or prep was liked, we hopefully would obtain feedback GTC and SchoolFood need to improve. In addition, as noted above in Ms. Negrelli's report, her population of autistic students has difficulty with making and/or expressing inferences. Therefore, for similar autistic populations of students, without making judgements about the students, we can say that we currently have a baseline of one "because" statement out of nine student letters, and if a repetition of the activity and analysis produced two to three "because" statements that would be good progress. It may also be possible to help autistic students reach inferential expression through a series of concrete expressions, but this is a hypothesis for another day, and which would also need preparatory literature review.

For different special needs populations, such as dyslexic students, or for general education students, who do not have barriers to inferential expression, the levels for good and advanced "because" statements will be different.

One ultimate goal is to help all students make informed, internally motivated food choices to live a healthy life. The students' ability to make inferential expression, and our ability to understand and measure that inferential expression, are two elements that can help us reach the goal.

Next steps

As a next step, the "Letters to the Chef" curriculum could be expanded to explicitly ask students to explain why they liked certain food preparation actions and foods, such as by using "because" statements. For students equivalent to the students showcased in this report, the time devoted to letter writing may need to be expanded from three to four class periods. This slight modification would hopefully help us obtain feedback GTC and SchoolFood need to improve.

The "Letters to the Chef" curriculum and analysis could be tried with more students similar to the autistic letter writers showcased in this report, other types of special needs students and general education students.

We could also experiment with other approaches to letter writing, such as using voice to text software, which might enable students for whom handwriting is a challenge to write more, and to enable faster turnaround from the end of the curriculum activity to analysis to completed internal report. A process that resulted in machine readable text would also enable faster data analysis on a larger scale, but at some point the scale would become large enough that qualitative data analysis software would likely be necessary for efficient turnaround.

The recipes

Note: these recipes may vary slightly from the preparation used at the school.



Baked Apples

Yield: 4 servings

Ingredients:

Apples (cored and each cut crosswise into 1/2 inch slices)	3
Orange or Lemon Juice	2/3 Cup
Honey OR Brown Sugar	2 Tbsps.
Cinnamon	1 Tbsp.

Method:

- 1) Slice the apples into comfortable bite-size slices
- 2) Pour the orange juice over the slices for flavor and to prevent discoloration
- 3) Mix apples with honey and cinnamon. Let sit for 15 minutes.
- 4) Place apples on a lightly oiled baking sheet. Place in 425 degree F oven for 20 minutes.



Basic Vinaigrette

Ingredients:

Dijon Mustard	1 Tbsp
Red Wine Vinegar	2-1/2 Tbsp
Apple Cider Vinegar	2-1/2 Tbsp
Extra-Virgin Olive Oil	1/4 Cup
Herbs (Your Choice)	1/4 Cup (2 oz.)*

Method:

- 1) Place the mustard in a mixing bowl;
- 2) Whisk in both vinegars until smooth;
- 3) Add the chopped herbs;
- 4) Slowly whisk in the oil until thick.

* As prepared on 4/9/2018, this recipe featured oregano.



SchoolFood
Feed your mind

Spinach and Kale Salad with Shredded Carrots, Shallots and Herb Vinaigrette *

Ingredients:

Spinach	1 Bunch
Kale	1 Bunch
Carrots	1
Shallots	1
Herb Vinaigrette	3 oz.

Method:

- 1) Tear the spinach into bite-size pieces, wash and dry thoroughly;
- 2) Cut the kale into bite-size pieces, wash and dry thoroughly;
- 3) Using a vegetable peeler, peel the carrot, then shred;
- 4) Cut the shallots into small dice;
- 5) Combine in a mixing bowl; then add the vinaigrette to coat.

Vinaigrette:

Dijon Mustard	1 tbsp.
Extra-Virgin Olive Oil	1/4 cup
Red Wine Vinegar	2-1/2 tbsp.
Apples Cider Vinegar	2-1/2 Tbsp.

Method

- 1) Place the mustard in a mixing bowl;
- 2) Whisk in both vinegars until smooth;

* As prepared on 4/9/2018, the recipe consisted only of kale, spinach and dressing.

Examples of graphic organizers for letter writing

Note: The spacing and number of blank lines for each prompt in these graphic organizers have been modified slightly compared to Ms. Negrelli's originals to accommodate wider margins used in this report than in the originals.

First Draft

Name: _____

Date: _____

Picture
goes here

Dear Officers,

I _____ my trip to learn about our
police department at the Midget Squadron Yacht Club.

I saw...

I really liked...

My favorite part was...

Thank you for...

Second Draft

Picture
goes here

Name: _____

Date: _____

Dear Officers,

I _____ my trip to learn about our
police department at the Midget Squadron Yacht Club.

I saw...

I really liked...

My favorite part was...

Thank you for...

Sincerely,

Picture goes here

"**Final Draft** uses no prompts,
other than picture and lines"

Picture
goes here

"**Final Draft** uses no prompts,
other than picture and lines"

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

The students' letters to the chefs

The School ~ K
Brooklyn, NY

Principal

Assistant Principal

Assistant Principal

Assistant Principal

May 24, 2018

Dear George and Holly,

Thank you so very much for visiting us and allowing us to help prepare the roasted apples for the tastings during our lunch periods.

All the students had a great time and are looking forward to your next visit.

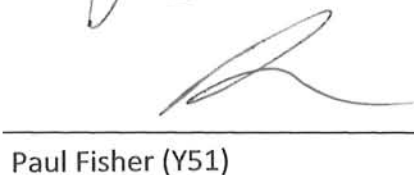
We have enclosed letters that they wrote, with some assistance, to let you know their thoughts.

Again, thanks to you and the Garden-to-Café Program for bringing all the wonderful food to our school. We look forward to seeing you this summer.

Yours in education,



Margaret L. Negrelli (Y50)



Paul Fisher (Y51)



April 11, 2018

Dear Chef George and Chef Holly,

Thank you for visiting our school with the Garden-to-Cafe program. I enjoyed slicing the red Jonagold apples. I liked the Green Crispin apples because it tastes so sweet. I cut green and red apples. Then, we put sugar in the bowl to mix the green and red apples. We put the apples in a tray to cook them.

I hope to see you in July.

Sincerely,
Bryce



Dear Chef George and Chef Holly

Thank you for visiting our School with the Garden to Café program. I enjoy making red apples and green apples. I like the taste of red and green apples. I gave red and green apples to the Students in the Cafeteria. My favorite apples is Red Cinnamon.

Sincerely,
Dennise



April 11, 2018

Dear Chef George and Chef Holly,

Thank you for visiting our School with the Garden-to-Café Program.

I had fun cutting the apples in class. My favorite cooked apple was the one with cinnamon.

Sincerely,

- Amir



April 11, 2018

Dear Chef George and Chef Holly,

Thank you for visiting our School
With the Garden to Cafe Program.
I cut the red and green apples.
Then we put the apples in bowl.
Then we put sugar in the bowl
to mix the red and green apples.
We put the apples in a tray
to cook them and eat them.
I really enjoyed your visit.

Sincerely,
Elijah



Dear Chef George and Chef
Holly Thank you visiting
our School with our Garden-to
Cafe Program. We learned how
to cut apples with a knife.
We mixed the red apples
with brown sugar. I tasted
the baked apples.

I am looking forward to
seeing you July.

yours truly,

Alyssa



May 9, 2018

Dear Chef George and Chef Holly,

Thank You for visiting our School with the Garden-to-cafe-Program. I liked cutting the apple with knife Red apple tasted better then the green one.

Sincerely

Roxana



MAY 4 2018

Dear Chef George and Chef Holly,

Thank you for visiting our school

With the Garden-to-Cafe Program. I liked using the chef's knife to cut the Crispin and Jonagold apples. I liked the way the baked apples tasted. I also enjoyed the salad. I look forward to seeing you again in July.

S

Sincerely,
JUSTIN A



April 11, 2018

Dear Chef George and Chef Holly,

Thank you for visiting our school with the Garden-to-Cafe Program. I liked to help cut the apples. I like to eat the apple cinnamon and apple salad. I wish you can come back and more often.

Sincerely,
Arthur



Dear Chef George and Chef Holly,
Thank you for visiting our
school with the garden to life
program.

I liked when we got to
cut the apples. They
tasted so good.
I hope to get to work
with you again in the
summer.

Sincerely,
Maiden