

Balancing Priorities: Mealtimes in Childcare

Carrie Melsom

It seems as if there is an epidemic of plenty in Canada. We are repeatedly reminded that we are eating too much of this food, too little of that nutrient. News shows feast on the message that food kills. One food kills slowly, silent and deadly; another kills quickly by closing airways or bearing food borne pathogens. We hear warnings of childhood obesity at the same time as advertisers and cooking shows seduce us with images of beautiful dishes, happy families and the easy conveniences of the modern world. In the face of all of this how can childcare programs bring children and themselves back to the simple pleasures of nourishing our bodies and enjoying food together?

It helps to think about what we want for children and staff. Creating time to relax together and enjoy safe and healthy choices is a good place to start. As always, the key to making this happen in our busy childcare environments is intention followed by planning and organization. In the book *Season by Season the Year Unfolds* Ann Pelo shares an example of a document

created by the staff of Hilltop Children's Center. It is called *Values We Hold About Food and Mealtimes* and it highlights classroom practices during mealtimes.

The points they include relate to how the teachers view mealtime routines and the sharing of

food, what they want for children and choices they make about the kinds of interactions they want to have with children about the food they eat. Each age group also includes a daily

routine that sets the stage for each part of the day and describes for parents what children and teachers are doing at that time of day. These descriptive para-



graphs outline the tone of interactions and the intention of the teachers. They link this information to healthy child

development and wellbeing as a way to inform and educate parents.

In addition to supporting the Food and Nutrition Standards for the province

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A Message from the Director

Dear Colleagues

During the course of my career there has been new research, ideas, events, and people that have impacted my practice both as an ECE and as an adult educator. I had one of those key experiences last week when Dr. Kristen McLeod was a guest speaker in one of our 3rd semester courses.

Dr. McLeod is a clinical psychologist, with a keen interest in working with children, adolescents, and young adults who have experienced trauma, abuse and neglect. Much of her focus is on understanding the neurodevelopmental impact of trauma and neglect, and the challenges this impact creates for traditional methods of intervention and caregiving. In other words she is talking about those children who baffle us

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Inside this issue:

A publication informing the early childhood education community of events, services and professional development opportunities offered by the Nova Scotia College of Early Childhood Education.

- *Mealtimes in Child Care*
- *New in the Resource Centre*
- *Easy-to-like Foods*

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this newsletter!**

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to be added to our e-mail list or
visit our website at
www.nscece.ca**

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of Nova Scotia crafting this kind of document helps all staff to recognize the importance of these daily routines in the lives of children. Ultimately it is the accumulation of these daily lived experiences that create our attitudes toward food.

Taking time as a staff to think through the process of eating together in group care is good practice for another reason. It provides an opportunity to uncover unhelpful scripts and ideas teachers may carry about food based on their own childhood experiences. Food is a common battleground in childhood and our individual assumptions about what should happen and how children should behave need to be explored and discussed. Watching a colleague play out her childhood experiences of being forced to eat is incredibly difficult if staff have not explicitly discussed acceptable and unacceptable practices and how to support each other when food anxiety rears its ugly head. We need to give each other permission to intervene when it is clear that we need help and we need to know that our interventions in these instances are expected, required and our ethical responsibility.

While the first step to pleasant and successful mealtime routines is knowing what you want it to look like, sound like and feel like; the next is step planning it with military style precision. These are the items and tools I need on my tray; this is how we will cue and transition the children; this is your role; this is my role; this is how we will teach and support the children. None of this is accidental and if routines are not working they need to be broken down and looked at again.

Mealtimes deserve an adequate amount of time in order to be enjoyable and relaxed. That may mean looking at staffing patterns and how programs transition into naptime and staff breaks. The payoff in wellbeing for children and staff alike will make these tough conversations well worth your while. The part that is truly amazing is how much time can be saved when you are not rushing and forcing children and staff through a stress filled and dreaded routine.

There are many resources easily available

to centres interested in thinking about how to implement good mealtime practices. The *Nova Scotia Manual for Food and Nutrition in Regulated Child Care Settings* provides clear rationale, required standards and suggested guidelines based on evidence based practices.

Building Mealtimes Environments and Relationships Inventory is

available at (www.cals.uidaho.edu/feeding/pdfs/BMER.pdf). It is a rating scale structured in the familiar ECERS format. This tool offers three clusters of indicators: mealtime setting, children's development and guiding individuals and groups at mealtimes. As is typical in rating scales it is easy to identify prac-



tices that will move a program from minimal to more effective practices. Programs can use these indicators to spark conversations and problem solving around specific issues in their mealtime

routines. For example a program struggling with family style dining could look at indicators under equipment to learn more

about what types of serving dishes best meet the needs of young children.

Happy Mealtimes for Healthy Kids is another good resource. This PD package can be downloaded (www.nfsmi.org/ResourceOverview.aspx?ID=83).

A Message From the Director

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because no matter what appropriate and positive guidance strategies we try – nothing seems to work.

Research shows that trauma can damage a child's ability to learn, form relationships and function in society. Children who have been traumatized may experience depression, anxiety, withdrawal, difficulty eating and sleeping, emotional upset and behavioural changes. They often have difficulties at school, and may be fearful or aggressive when dealing with adults or other children. (Engel, D. KidsLink. The Early Edition. Summer 2012. Retrieved from <http://kidslinkcares.com/newsletter>.)

- *Preschoolers with complex trauma may lack a trusting, secure, and regulating adult relationship*
- *Lack of safe, secure adults increases stress in system that can be toxic to neural development*
- *Elevated stress combined with lack of safe adult interferes with development of good regulatory system*

Behaviours are evidence of developmental

delay/disability in regulation NOT necessarily a behavioural disorder (McLeod, 2013)

After sharing with us the strong connection between trauma and brain development in children Dr. McLeod went on to discuss the components of "Creating the Trauma-Informed Classroom". She provided insight into the development of classrooms that promote safe and calming settings for the most challenging, aggressive and vulnerable children.

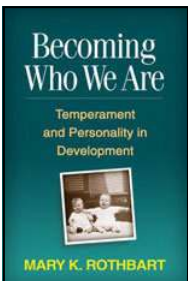
At the end of the two hour presentation I was left with a burning desire to learn more and to create opportunities to share this fascinating and compelling research with the ECE community. Content will be added to the two Behaviour Guidance courses at the College to reflect this research. Also, we are arranging a workshop for the spring semester – will keep you posted.

Have a safe and happy holiday,

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In the Resource Centre

The Resource Centre has many new learning materials and books available to support you in your work. You can look for membership information and check out our on-line toy inventory at www.nscece.ca. This year we focused on updating our collection with user-friendly books focusing on some of the key thinkers in our field.



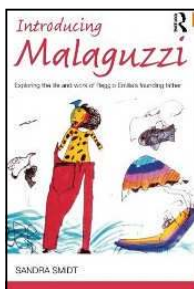
Becoming Who We Are: Temperament and Personality in Development (155.4 Rot)

The interplay between temperament and the environment in child development is a key area of interest especially as we learn more about brain develop-

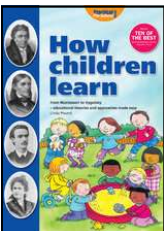
ment and epigenetics. This book offers a comprehensive overview of the psychology of temperament with reference to past and current research studies.

Introducing Malaguzzi (370.1 Smi)

This book serves as an introduction to the philosophy and thinking of Loris Malaguzzi who was a founder of the famous preschools of Reggio Emilia. The book specifically draws links to the connections between the work of Vygotsky and Bruner and their influence on Malaguzzi. We also purchased *Introducing Vygotsky* and *Introducing Piaget*.

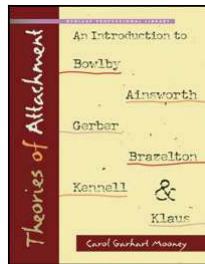


How Children Learn: From Montessori to Vygotsky (370.1 Pou)



A simple overview to some of the pioneer thinkers in the field with implications for practice. A great resource for students it also offers a quick reminder for early childhood

educators who are interested in refreshing their memory of key theories in the field.



Theories of Attachment (155.4 Moo)

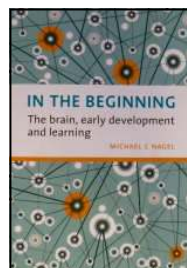
Theories of attachment is a must read overview for anyone working with infants and young children. The author introduces major theorists and explores at the impact of

attachment theory on key aspects of infant caregiving. We also have *Theories of Childhood* (370.1 Moo) which is written by the same author.

In the Beginning: The brain, early development and learning (155.4 Nag)

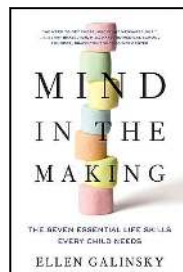
Who knew that neuroscience would come to be such a provocative influence on the field of early childhood. If you haven't taken an psychology course in the last few years do it now.

If you can't do that, read this book. Brains in childhood are under construction and as part of the construction team we need to understand the basics of the process.



Mind in the Making: The Seven Essential Life Skills Every Child Needs (305.2 GA)

This book is based on the premise that there are many simple everyday things that educators and parents can do to help children develop into competent successful adults. The author links back to current research while exploring seven essential life skills: focus and self-control; perspective taking; communicating; making connections; critical thinking; taking on challenges and self-directed, engaged learning.



The Official Canadian Temperature Conversion Chart

50° Fahrenheit (10° C)

- Californians shiver uncontrollably.
- Canadians plant gardens.

35° Fahrenheit (1.6° C)

- Italian Cars won't start.
- Canadians drive with windows down.

32° Fahrenheit (0° C)

- American water freezes
- Canadian water gets thicker.

0° Fahrenheit (-17.9° C)

- New York City landlords finally turn on the heat.
- Canadians have the last cookout of the season.

-60° Fahrenheit (-51° C)

- Santa Claus abandons the North Pole.
- Canadian Girl Guides sell cookies door-to-door.
- Canadians start saying "cold, eh?"

-109.9° Fahrenheit (-78.5° C)

- Carbon dioxide freezes makes dry ice.
- Canadians pull down their earflaps.

-500° Fahrenheit (-295° C)

- Hell freezes over. The Toronto Maple Leafs win the Stanley Cup.

(Source unknown but widely available on-line)

Resource Centre services are offered with support from the Department of Community Services, Early Childhood Education Training Initiative.



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NSCECE student volunteers and staff participate in Quinfest. (Fall 2013)

At the Nova Scotia College of Early Childhood Education, we provide an opportunity for students to study and gain experience in Early Childhood Education through a diverse range of courses and practical settings.

We are proud to lay a foundation for the personal and professional growth and development of our students. It is our hope and goal that NSCECE graduates continue to learn, practice and reflect throughout their years in early childhood education.



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Easy-to-like Foods: Taste Testing in Child Care

Carrie Melsom

Young children are naturally cautious eaters. It makes sense. Foods that they have not experienced or seen others enjoying could be harmful, best not to commit too soon. It is not uncommon to see young children pick up unfamiliar food sniff or mouth it and put it down. In fact, children may need to see and experience a new food many times before they want to try it.

Young children also have distinct preferences in the appearance of food. They tend to like food that is brightly coloured, child sized, easy to pick up, distinct from other food on the plate and has some texture. Their desire for variety and making choices can be helpful to adults who are planning meals for children. Offering small servings of high contrast foods will help ensure that children are getting a good variety of food. Interesting shapes and patterns are also appealing to children and can increase the likelihood that a child will try an unfamiliar food. The variety of foods accepted by children can be in-

creased by relaxed exposure to new foods. Families can be invited to share a child's favorite recipe and that child can introduce it to peers for taste testing. Knowing some-



A green food taste test from B-inspired Mama.com

one else likes it and having an opportunity to try it in a relaxed way can be an effective way for programs to test new foods for the menu. Imagine Mandy's bean salad or Amir's hummus being added to your menu rotation. Preschool children can also be invited to taste test potential new menu items and rate them a personal score sheet. We can't expect children to like every-

thing. Everyone has preferences but we can offer new foods with a relaxed attitude, share our enjoyment of the food and use puree's and other strategies to boost the nutrient content of old favourites when children get stuck in a food jag.

Of course finding nutritious recipes can be a challenge. The National Food Service Management site houses many resources including *USDA Recipes for Child Care*. The recipes provide for 25 or 50 child size portions and offer dietary and purchasing information. Another good source of recipes is (<http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/recipes/recipes-all-child-nutrition-professionals>). This site also includes information helpful to the home cook who finds herself cooking in child care centre. Those interested in finding out more about the benefits of Family Style Dining might also be interested in (www.doe.k12.de.us/ddoe/files/pdf/FamilyStyleMealService.pdf)