BOOK REVIEWS

SCHOOLS AND FOOD EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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For those interested in how schools enact food policy with regard to an array of discourses on obesity prevention, nutrition education, welfarism and 'foodieness', this new book by Lexi Earl provides an insightful perspective. In Schools and food education in the 21st century Earl embarks on a journey that accounts for all elements of the school day, and explores the changing foodscapes and possibilities for food education in primary schools.

The purpose of the book is not to disregard or undermine the very valuable work occurring around food education. Rather, it highlights the complex environment in which schools, teachers, children and cooks find themselves when it comes to learning about and teaching food. Earl's book is based on a doctoral study conducted in the 2012/13 school year, with data collected using interviews and observations. The ethnographic research was conducted across three UK-based primary schools with a view to understanding how schools might have a variety of sites of food learning (eg the classroom, the dining hall and the school garden). As a result, exploring the foodscape is a framework for the narrative followed throughout this book. Dolphijn (2004: 8) defines the foodscape as 'how we live our lives with food, according to food, and through food... what

happens between the eating and the eaten. How food moves through structures, how it changes them and is changed by them.' The book has eight chapters, and is split into three parts: 'Before school', 'The school day' and 'After school'.

Part one of the book introduces the various food discourses that shape the school meal. Food discourses generally advise what is acceptable to eat at any given time; they define the rules of eating, which differ across social groups. Food rules are learned through families, through schools and through community life. The definition of 'foodieness' and how it is connected to food education and spread through food media is then introduced and discussed. Earl defines a 'foodie' as 'a person who is very, very, very interested in food' (Barr & Levy 1984: 7) and then draws on a reference to the work of Pike & Kelly (2014) in order to highlight the moral questions around the choices people make about food and how much people should know about what they eat.

In relation to school food education, it is useful to consider notions of 'foodieness', which help build a narrative for schools in the ways food can be interpreted in a multidisciplinary context. In terms of foodieness, four specific notions are introduced. First, anyone can eat well ('well' meaning

fresh, local, seasonal, 'good' food). Second, those who do not eat well do so due to a lack of education and a lack of understanding of its true cost. Third, if people are educated on the joys and pleasures of gardening, cooking and eating, they will come to know food and value it. Fourth, changing food choices is achievable by ensuring more people know about and value food by acknowledging social problems such as obesity and climate change. It is nonetheless noted that, historically, food is a marker of social class and foodies tend to distance themselves from non-foodies. The theme of food and class is dominant throughout the book.

This chapter from the first part of the book continues by outlining further food discourses in highlighting the issue of obesity and nutrition alongside the rise of food media: for instance, the role played by Jamie Oliver's 'Food Revolution' campaign. Whilst this particular campaign was able to shed light on the lack of nutritional value in the school food children were being served, it was more aimed at reaching out to governments to improve food and nutrition policies. This led to further research on food in schools, with a particular focus on food choices at lunchtime and analysing understandings of healthy eating, food and nutrition. The rest of this first part

explores The School Food Plan (SFP) (DfE, 2013), the most notable and recent policy document on school food. Earl recognises the most important development of the SFP as its acknowledgement of hunger as a problem in the UK.

Part two of the book introduces the most important meal of the day: breakfast. It explains how and why this provision is viewed as sociologically different to lunchtime, and highlights the individual philosophies of the different schools in the study. For example, it accounts for how the breakfast club operates as an opportunity for children to socialise and adjust before class and hints at the type of social pressures that occupy the worlds of children that are different to those of adults (p. 80). Emphasis is later placed on the dining hall at lunchtime and the ways in which schools attempt to recreate the experience of a family meal for their children; this is evidence of schools' concerns that pupils do not have access to this setting at home.

Earl accounts for the voices of chefs and cooks in schools and how they feel their voices are portrayed differently compared with those chefs who are regularly seen on TV programmes. The discourse on school cooks is highlighted through how policy is enacted concerning the complexities surrounding nutritional standards, with which schools are required to comply. Various tensions in a school cook's decision-making in relation to meal choices also affect their initial desire to serve 'good food'. This is an example of how schools are said to enact rather than implement policy (p. 110). It was interesting to observe the difference between the school cooks and how they are depicted on TV programmes. Earl points out how the school chefs are 'qualified or have worked their way up the ladder, gaining experience along the way... strict but passionate people... and they worked hard to feed the children under their care' (p. 104).

Part two also highlights how gardening, farming and cooking are experienced by children. In terms of learning about food in the classroom, this concerns policy-makers and educators because food habits are formed in childhood and children take their food education through their life. However, this is not necessarily about 'healthy eating', as bread-making is taught and children design their own food in order to learn about inventing.

Part three, titled 'After school', concludes the book with a single chapter that draws its arguments together to suggest that 'foodieness' is not a universal notion, readily accessible to schools. It argues that whilst foodieness is a complex way of teaching children about food, it is this idea that highlights important issues of social class that are in desperate need of attention in order to enact food policy and draw communities together as opposed to creating further social class divides.

A key point discussed throughout the book is re-emphasised here, which returns to the notion of foodieness. Earl argues that known notions of the common idea of eating healthily go beyond this by stating how foodieness has the ability to widen school food experiences beyond eating fruits and vegetables, or mere food choices (p. 183). Eating well is said to be much more complex and has the power to educate children far beyond the obesity agenda as it also raises questions of social class inequalities. Essentially, this book may be described as an 'ethnography of eating' based on a scientific account of food, cooking and eating, as it offers an insightful and creative lens into highlighting issues of power and social class. This book is useful for teacher educators in thinking about ways to integrate food across the school curriculum and is also a useful text for school leaders to influence future policy reform so that adequate attention is given to school meals and how they can help foster the health and well-being of future citizens. ∎

REFERENCES

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For his PhD, Gurpinder carried out an ethnographic case study on the social aspect of the school meal whilst adopting a social constructivist and Foucauldian lens to interpret the data. For this reason, he has since become interested in exploring the social aspect of food.