

Cognitive Curriculum, Conversations, and Mealtimes

Janice Fletcher, EdD and Laurel Branen, PhD, RD, LD

Relaxed mealtimes and pleasant learning! How can we get there? Mealtime is a natural environment for rich, meaningful times together. Children get their stomachs filled and their brains stimulated by conversation. Try these strategies to help children learn.

Use wait time

Sometimes adults ask questions or make requests of a child, then the adult answers her own question, or takes over too quickly. Children need time to respond or to think of an answer. Wait for a child to respond to your comment or question. This may take 15 seconds or more. Wait, and you will be rewarded with pleasant give and take at the table. Sometimes a child will wait minutes before a coming up with a response. If a child brings a response back to the conversation, be ready to pick up the conversation.

Embellish children's thinking and conversations

Help children embellish their thoughts about food, eating, and other table topics. Add adjectives or adverbs to the words they use. For example, if the child says, "I love soup." You can help embellish that thought by saying, "We have vegetable soup today. It is warm and creamy. Some people love warm soup and some people like cool soup."

Build vocabulary

Vocabulary at age three predicts reading success in later grades. Mealtime is a natural vocabulary-rich environment. Help children expand vocabulary for food, utensils, amounts, temperatures, measuring tools. Provide words as they arise in natural routines of the meal. Use the amazing topics that arise when people gather around a table. Intentionally introduce new vocabulary and frequently repeat the new words.

Clear up the "W" questions

The "w" questions are *who*, *what*, *when*, *where* and the much heard, "WHY?" Mealtimes are natural times for children to learn how to use these five similar sounding question words. Often young children will use "why" for all of the "w" words. Know that when children ask "why?" they may really want to know when something will happen. Or where? Or who? They may need help in knowing when to use the "w" question words. Help them learn to use "where" in relation to space and position as they place foods and bowls and glasses. Help them learn to use "who" as they think about passing bowls to others. Help them learn about "when" as they discuss what happens next and explain sequences of events around mealtime. "What" is a great question word for talking about food that is new to children. Use the words often and functionally.

Provide an environment where children's ideas abound and curiosity lives

Help children know that you do not know all the answers. Food and eating are just right for sensory exploration. Use an attitude and voice that show children they can contribute their ideas to conversation. Model wonderment! You can say, "WOW, I wonder if..." Ask true questions, rather than offering questions for which you already know answers. A true question is one for which you do not know the answer.

Extend conversation, not dominate conversation

When children talk about food or activities at the table, enrich their vocabulary by extending conversations. Ask questions about their comments, or add comments about your experiences. Be careful not to dominate conversation. Draw other children in to enrich child-to-child talking. Get peers talking about how their experiences are alike or different.

Encourage Child to Child Conversation at Mealtimes



Laurel Branen, PhD, RD, LD, Janice Fletcher, EdD

At the table, children are powerful models for each other. Peers are often more powerful models than teachers. Their thoughts about food carry big weight with each other. The teacher role is effective in helping children develop skills for conversation with each other.

Strategies for encouraging child to child discussions

- Help children learn to know and call each others' names.
- Teach children to look at each other as they make requests for food or utensils.
- Help children take turns in conversation, by speaking, then listening to what the other person says. Hint: Help children practice these skills using echo songs during group times. We sing, and then you sing.
- Show children how to wait for each other to answer.
- Sometimes a child will not respond to another child. Repeat the other child's requests for food or utensils to the child. Then tell the child that another child is waiting to hear his/her thoughts.
- If children do not have words to carry out a conversation or make a request, suggest words for them to try.
- If the child to child conversation stalls, pick up the conversation by offering clarifying information, then toss the conversation ball back out to the children.
- Ask true questions for the children to answer and discuss. A true question is one where even you don't know the answer.

Extend child to child conversations

Watch for opportunities to pick up what a child says. Toss the topic back on the table for children to discuss further. For example, Thomas says, "I like green beans. My grandma grew some. We picked them off the bush." You say, "Thomas said he likes beans because he picked some off the bush. What do you think about that?"

Interpret impolite table talk for learning opportunities

Sometimes children bring up words that may be impolite for table talk. Children may delight in talking about blood, vomit, pooh-pooh, and other dramatic topics. Children may be teasing, but they are typically genuinely interested in questions about body functions, including digestion and indigestion! Rarely do young children bring up such topics or words just to be disgusting.

Because children are powerful and influential models for each other, such stimulating and interesting talk can spread rapidly among the children. These impolite topics hold their attention! An observant teacher will discern the intent of the talk. Then, the teacher will decide strategies to use to extend the talk or not, or even to stop the talk.



Plan cognocitivo, Conversaciones, y Comidas

Janice Fletcher, EdD and Laurel Branen, PhD, RD, LD

Comidas relajadas y aprendizaje placentero! Còmo conseguirlo? El momento de la comida es un ambiente natural para pasar momentos enriquecedores y significativos juntos. Los niños llenan sus estómagos, y sus cerebros son estimulados por la conversacion. Trate estas estrategias para ayudarlos a aprender.

Permita un tiempo de espera.

A veces los adultos preguntan cosas a los niños y despues se responden solos antes de que el niño haya tenido tiempo de pensar una respuesta. Espere a que el niño responda a su comentario o pregunta. Esto puede tomar 15 segundos o màs. Espere y Ud. Serà recompensado con un placentero intercambio durante la comida. A veces los niños esperan minutos antes de responder. Si un niño trae una respuesta de regreso a la mesa, estè preparado para recoger la conversaciòn donde la dejo anteriormente.

Embellezca el pensamiento y las conversaciones de los niños.

Ayude a los niños a embellecer o expandir sus pensamientos acerca de alimentos, comer, y otros tòpicos de mesa. Haga esto añadiendo algunos adjetivos o adverbios a las palabras que ellos usan. Por ejemplo, si el niño dice, "Me encanta la sopa", Ud. puede ayudarle a expandir ese pensamiento diciendo, "Tenemos sopa de verduras hoy. Esta caliente y cremosa. A algunas personas les encanta la sopa caliente."

Construya vocabulario

El vocabulario es un pronosticador del èxito en la lectura en grados posteriores. El momento de las comidas es un ambiente natural para que los niños expandan su vocabulario acerca de comida, utensilios, cantidades, temperaturas, utensilios de medida, y los muchos tòpicos que surgen cuando grupos de gente se reùnen alrededor de una mesa. Provea la palabras conforme sea propicio en la rutina natural de la comida.

Clarifique las palabras de pregunta

. La palabras de pregunta son quièn, què, cuàndo, dònde, y la muy escuchada: Por què? El momento de las comidas es un momento natural para que los niños aprendan a usar estas cinco palabras tan parecidas. A menudo los niños pequeños confunden el uso de estas palabras de pregunta. Sepa Ud. que cuando los niños dicen Por què? puede que lo que quieren saber es quièn? O cuàndo? O què? Ellos pueden necesitar ayuda para aprender a usar estas palabras de pregunta correctamente. Ayùdelos a aprender "dònde" en relaciòn a espacio y posiciòn mientras colocan recipientes de comida y vasos sobre la mesa. Ayudelos a aprender "quièn" mientras piensan acerca de pasar los recipientes. Ayudelos a aprender "cuàndo" mientras discuten què va a suceder despuès y explique secuencias de eventos alrededor de la comida. "Què" es una gran palabra de pregunta para hablar acerca de comida que es nueva para los niños. Utilice estas palabras a menudo y de manera funcional.

Establezca un ambiente en el que abunden las ideas de los niños.

Permita que los niños se den cuenta que Ud. no sabe todas las respuestas. La actividad de comer y los alimentos so perfectos para exploraciòn sensorial. Utilice una actitud y una voz que muestren a los niños que ellos pueden contribuir con sus ideas a la conversaciòn. Modele curiosidad! Ud. puede decir, "wow! Me pregunto si..."

Extienda la conversaciòn, no la domine

Cuando los niños hablen acerca de comida o de actividades en la mesa, enriquezca su vocabulario extendiendo sus conversaciones. Haga preguntas acerca de sus comentarios, o añada algo de sus experiencias al tòpico. Tenga cuidado de NO dominar la conversaciòn. Incorpore a otros niños en la conversaciòn para enriquecer el intercambio de niño a niño. Hàgales notar como su experiencia es similar a la del niño que iniciò la conversaciòn.

Incentive la conversaci3n de ni1o a ni1o



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En la mesa, los ni1os son poderosos modelos uno para el otro, posiblemente hasta m1s de lo que lo son las profesoras. Sus pensamientos acerca de comida son muy importantes para los otros ni1os, llevan mucho peso entre ellos. El papel de la profesora es igualmente poderoso en ayudar a los ni1os a desarrollar destrezas para la mutua conversaci3n entre ni1os.

Estrategias para propiciar conversaciones de ni1o a ni1o

- Ayude a los ni1os a aprender los nombres de sus compa1eros y a llamarse uno al otro por sus nombres.
- Ense1e a los ni1os a mirarse uno al otro cuando se piden la comida o los utensilios.
- Ayude a los ni1os a tomar turnos en la conversaci3n, hablando y despu3s escuchando a lo que la otra persona dice. Pauta: Ay1delos a practicar estas destrezas usando canciones eco durante algunos momentos grupales. Nosotros cantamos, y despu3s ustedes cantan.
- Demuestre a los ni1os c3mo esperar mutuamente por sus respuestas.
- Si un ni1o no esta recibiendo respuesta de otro ni1o, repita su requerimiento de comida o utensilios al otro ni1o, luego d1gale que otro ni1o esta esperando para escuchar sus pensamientos.
- Si los ni1os no tienen palabras para sostener una conversaci3n o hacer un pedido, sugiera palabras para que ellos traten de usarlas.

Extienda las conversaciones de ni1o a ni1o

Est3 atento a oportunidades para recoger lo que un ni1o dice y devolverlo a la mesa para que los ni1os contin1en la discusi3n m1s a fondo. Por ejemplo, Tom1s dice: "Me gustan los frejoles porque mi abuela cultiv3 algunos y recogimos algunos juntos". Ud. dice: "Tom1s dice que a 3l le gustan los frijoles porque recog3 algunos. Qu3 piensan ustedes de eso?"

Interprete conversaci3n de mesa inapropiada y descortez

A veces los ni1os mencionan palabras que parecen inapropiadas y descortezes para conversaci3n en la mesa. Los ni1os pueden encontrar gran placer en hablar acerca de sangre, v3mito, caca, y otros t3picos dramaticos. O los ni1os pueden estar genuinamente interesados acerca de funciones corporales, incluyendo digesti3n e indigesti3n! Raramente los ni1os mencionan tales t3picos o palabras s3lo para ser repulsivos.

Debido a que los ni1os son fuertes modelos unos para los otros, tales estimulantes e interesantes conversaciones pueden esparcirse r1pidamente entre los ni1os y a menudo, mantener su atenci3n. Este es un buen momento para que la profesora observe la intenci3n de la conversaci3n y decida que estrategias usar para extender la conversaci3n o no, o inclusive detenerla.



Mealtime Curriculum

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Mealtimes are great natural environments for children to learn. Numbers, amounts, vocabulary, symbols, ideas, information...all of these are right there at the table.

Here are some ways to make intentional opportunities for children to learn:

Literacy Strategies

- Introduce new foods using a food display: include written labels.
- Write daily/weekly menus with children.
- Display menus near the table.
- Hang up pictures near the table with words and pictures of food and people eating.
- Encourage discussions about how the food at the table rhymes with other words and how the letters in the names of the food sound.
- Read books about eating and food and then serve the food mentioned in the books.
- Put written and pictorial signs on the entry door showing “what’s for lunch.”
- Write stories about food, using pictures of your mealtimes for story-starters.
- Make up songs and rhymes about your mealtimes
- Offer child-sized clipboards where children can “write” about the food at the table.
- Make a graphical chart where children sign their names or make a mark indicating their thoughts about the food at the meal.
- Offer dramatic play props:
 - Restaurant props such as menus, order pads, and written and pictorial signs showing the food;
 - Grocery store props such as pads for writing grocery lists, materials for making signs for the name of the store or for advertising groceries, coupons, and boxes and cans for sorting by name or the alphabet;
 - Housekeeping props such a pads for writing menus, groceries to arrange by the letters on the can or box, written recipes in a box with some of the ingredient boxes for play, pads for writing namecards for setting the table.

OTHERS:

Make your list:

Mathematics Strategies

- Make sequenced pictures of food preparation.
- Make scrapbooks and bulletin boards of favorite mealtimes.
- Have a fair where children bring foods to explore. Focus attention on the concepts of the whole and parts.
- Label amounts and quantities at the table with words and signing for younger children.
- Routinely have children set the table with you, talking about “how many,” one-to-one correspondence, and what goes with what.
- Offer non-meal times for exploration of pouring, scooping, and using ladles for judging amounts (sand and water play).
- Offer different shapes of food at the table and label them.
- Use “today,” “tomorrow,” for menus.
- Engage children to solve problems of how much food is needed for all children at the table to have some of a particular food.
- Use daily sheets for recording children’s food and drink input and their new eating skills.
- Make graphs of children’s food preferences; post them!

OTHERS:

Make your list:



Connecting School and Home

- Post menus by the children's cubbies so parents can see them at arrival and departure. and send menus home for families to read together.
- Introduce new foods that the children try at school in family letters.
- Invite parents to eat with the children at the center.
- Include news of the topics of children's table talk in newsletters.
- Talk with the children about recipes that are used for meals at the center; send the recipes home.
- Ask parents for family recipes.
- Offer Saturday breakfast for parent-child time and let the children share with their parents how they have meals at school. Then, have a short parent training on how children learn math and literacy at mealtimes, just as well as they learn in other parts of the day.
- Offer handouts for parents about nutrition and children's growth and development.

OTHERS:

Make your list:

Nutrition Education with Young Children

- Help children develop sensory awareness of food, including textures, tastes, smell, touch, sound (chewing and biting), and temperatures. Encourage sensory-related vocabulary such as sweet, salty, oily, warm, cold, tart, bitter, fragrant, crunchy, sticky, and slimy.
- Establish children's understanding of the relationship between food and health.
- Set the environment so children have healthy emotional associations with food.
- Assist children to know and maintain internal cues of hunger, fullness, and enjoyment of food.
- Make opportunities for children to talk about eating and food to help them develop rich vocabularies.
- Intentionally model "food" vocabulary such as seeds, (look in a banana and find the seeds), crunchy, peeling, stem, corn kernels, broth, pea pods, leafy lettuce...the options are endless,

OTHERS:

Make your list:



Mealtimes and the Curriculum Selected Head Start Outcomes

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INDICATORS

Literacy

Print Awareness

1. *Awareness of print in home, classroom, and community.*
2. *Develops growing understanding of the different functions of forms of print such as signs, letters, newspapers, lists, messages, and menus.*

Concepts of Print

3. *Demonstrates increasing awareness of concepts of print such as that reading in English moves from top to bottom, left to right, that speech can be written down, and that print conveys a message.*

Mathematics

4. *Begins to use language to compare numbers of objects with terms such as more, less, greater than, fewer, equal to.*

Social-emotional

5. *Begins to develop and express awareness of self, in terms of specific abilities, characteristics, and preferences.*

ACTIVITY

Think about the partnership triangle of parents, children, and teachers for outcomes and indicators. Write three strategies you might use around mealtimes that will influence one or more of these outcomes.

Write the number of the outcome listed above. Tell the strategy that you might try.

Comidas y el Plan Educativo

Selección de resultados educativos del programa Head Start

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INDICADORES

Lecto- escritura

Percepción consciente del mensaje impreso

1. *Percepción consciente del mensaje impreso en el hogar, la clase, y la comunidad.*
2. *Desarrolla un entendimiento cada vez mayor de las diferentes funciones de formas de mensaje impreso tales como señales, letreros, cartas, periódicos, listas, mensajes y menús.*

Conceptos de mensaje impreso

3. *Demuestra cada vez mayor entendimiento y percepción consciente de conceptos del mensaje impreso tales como que la lectura en Inglés se mueve de arriba hacia abajo y de izquierda a derecha, que el mensaje oral puede ser escrito, y que la escritura transmite un mensaje.*

Matemáticas

4. *Empieza a usar lenguaje para comparar cantidades de objetos con términos tales como más, menos, más que, mayor que, menos que, o igual que.*

Socio-emocional

5. *Empieza a desarrollar y expresar conocimiento consciente de sí mismo en términos de habilidades específicas, características y preferencias.*

ACTIVIDAD

Piense acerca de la sociedad triangular de padres de familia, niños y maestros para encontrar resultados e indicadores. Escriba tres estrategias que Ud. podría usar alrededor de la hora de las comidas y que influenciarán uno o más de estos resultados. Escriba el número del resultado listado arriba. Diga la estrategia que Ud. podría tratar.