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Educating Preschoolers about Color, Texture, and Taste: Child Care Providers’ Perceptions for Engaging Children’s Senses

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Evaluating Preschoolers about Color, Texture, and Taste: Child Care Providers’ Perceptions for Engaging Children’s Senses

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BACKGROUND

Recommendation: Child care providers help children learn about food by engaging their senses (smell, touch, taste) such as touching and smelling new food is encouraged as a step towards tasting

• Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

Why engage children’s senses?

• Encourages children to try new foods (Academy, 2011)

• Educate and expose children to different tastes, smells, textures (Academy, 2011)

Knowledge gap: Providers’ perceptions

• No studies identified child care providers’ perceptions for meeting this benchmark

This information is necessary for the development of and successful implementation of interventions.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

1. To identify child care providers’ motivators, facilitators, and barriers for engaging children’s senses to educate them about the color, texture, and taste of foods.

2. To provide child care providers with feasible solutions or strategies to the barriers they face for engaging children’s senses.

3. To translate the research to practice by developing programming for child care providers.

METHODS

Design and Population

• Maximum variation purposive sampling

• Providers from Head Start programs and licensed child-care centers in Nebraska

Data Collection

• Semi-structured interview lasting approx. one hour (Mean 43.15, SD 12.54).

• Saturation reached after 18 interviews

Data Analysis

• Interviews digitally recorded, transcribed, and analyzed

• NVivo

• Theoretical thematic analysis

• Constant comparison method to systematically generate initial codes, and then to develop themes

• Two authors independently coded data and third author reviewed coding changes in a debriefing session

RESULTS

Table 1. Child care providers’ motivators to engaging children’s senses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MOBILITORS</th>
<th>REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encourages children to try new foods</td>
<td>Because I think that’s where the children learn to try new things. You know, if they’re able to kind of touch it and pick it up and look at it and then try it, they’re more likely to try it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increases exposure to different tastes, textures and smells</td>
<td>I think it’s important because… it just raises awareness about how things may smell, touch and taste when they’re at school, when they’re at Thanksgiving with their family. They can say, ‘Oh, I remember how that smelled there. It tasted so good.’ And they make the association.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging and fun strategy for encouraging children to taste foods</td>
<td>If it makes fun, yeah, instead of, ‘Hey, try that.’ (say) ‘Oh, well, what does it smell like? What does it look like? Let’s talk about it.’ And then you get them excited and engages them in it, and then you want to taste it. --CACFP provider</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 2. Child care providers’ facilitators to engaging children’s senses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACILITATORS</th>
<th>REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low-cost and feasible hands-on learning activities like:</td>
<td>During the day, we can smell the food cooking in the kitchen, so we play games like, ‘What’s for lunch today?’ and we try to guess what it’s cooking. One of the hardest things for us is to use different things, like broccoli and cauliflower, which one is it, so they’re always excited to see what color it is. It’s green or white. And then, by looking at all of it, you can decide what it is and, … they smell that, and then, they touch it, and then, they can taste it. White Head Start provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit or vegetable trying, tasting different foods</td>
<td>She’s making lemon rice with them (the children), and they’re smelling the ingredients. They’re touching, just to see how it feels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drumming activities</td>
<td>I think that kids learn really hands on - CACFP provider</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Child care providers’ barriers to engaging children’s senses and strategies from other child care providers to overcome barriers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BARRIERS</th>
<th>REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Messy and unhygienic with foods and spills everywhere</td>
<td>It’s hard to do because that’s what kids do anyway. They want to touch it and they want to smell it, and they want to taste it. So it’s very easy for kids to do that --non-CACFP provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard to clean-up</td>
<td>It’s just doing (food tasting) and engaging them in it. Because if you’re enthusiastic about something, they’re going to want to do it. --Head Start provider</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

STRATEGIES

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>REPRESENTATIVE QUOTES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers accepting messes as part of learning</td>
<td>I would tell those teachers that you need to let the children explore, to experience these things and that’s what we need them to learn. They learn by touching, they learn by smelling and feeling. So I would just encourage them to do so. … That’s how they learn – CACFP provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children touch food to explore</td>
<td>We’ve got little dumplings and little buns that are very small, child-sized. You have not seen a mess until you’ve seen my classroom when we put a bag of flour in our sensory table and it is everywhere. But the kids love it. It has so much to do with engaging the senses. You’re capable of playing with this, but you’re also capable of cleaning up. A mess is just part of what we do. --CACFP provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited resources (money) to conduct activities</td>
<td>Sometimes we take our messy stuff outside. We have ample opportunity with the outdoor kids to be able to do outside and informal. And I know that other centers don’t always have that. --non-CACFP provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children dislike the smell of food</td>
<td>We wash their (childrens) hands, sometimes it’s what they (children) do. They touch it before they eat. --non-CACFP provider</td>
</tr>
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ADVICE FOR DEALING WITH SMELL

• Doing messy activities outdoors

• Hand washing as a way to allow children to touch food

Policy Discrepancies

• Center policy about outside food

• Policy discrepancies between different accreditations

IMPLEMENTING ACTIVITY IDEAS TO ACCOMMODATE POLICIES

• Allowing children to have the freedom to explore

• Identifying a safe and fun way to explore

• Implementing activity ideas to accommodate policies

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

• Settings and programming should be operationalized by including relevant programming and useful resources

• Policy recommendations should be operationalized by including relevant programming and useful resources

• Implications for research

• Identify effective strategies to engage children’s senses with:

  • Experts (Nutrition, Early Childhood, Developmental Psychology)

  • Practitioners (Extension Educators, Child Care administrators and providers)

• Evaluate programs to determine the impact of strategies

• Recommended activities (outside of mealtimes), provide valuable opportunities for engaging children’s senses.

• Increased exposure may help children try new foods and foster long-term healthy eating behaviors and childhood obesity prevention

CONCLUSION

• A collaborative and bottom-up approach with child care providers is important for effective translation of research to practice.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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• Full references are available upon request from author: didev2@unl.edu