



## Brief

# Children's Participation in Food Activities and Motivation to Taste and Express Themselves about Food Based on Kindergarten Teacher Students' Practical Assignment

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A part of the mandate of Norwegian kindergartens is to emphasize that children develop enjoyment of food and healthy eating habits (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2017). By participating in food-related activities in kindergarten, children can develop knowledge and enjoyment around food. This study provides insight into children's motivation to taste and talk about food during food activities. The research questions were: What characterized the food activities when children: (a) sensed, tasted, or ate food? And (b) used expressions related to food, cooking and sensory experiences?

The study is based on kindergarten student's reflection notes from an internship period in autumn 2017. The students' assignments were to carry out and reflect about the food activities "A tasting plate" and "Cooking with children". The students had to carry out "A tasting plate" twice, and the instructions were: Organize and offer shared taste samples to a small group of children. When choosing the food to be used in the activity, use familiar and novel taste samples in relation to the children. The children do not have to taste or eat the food in the activity. The student should be role models and explore and taste the samples together with the children, and use food-related words while talking about the food and sensory experiences. During the internship, the students also had to cook one meal together with children. The students were encouraged to prepare a meal according to guidelines for food and meals in kindergartens (Helsedirektoratet, 2018).

The data used in this paper were the reflection notes of 73 students. 27 students worked with 1–2-year-olds and 46 students with 3–5-year-olds. Qualitative empirical

analysis resulted in five recurring themes in the reflections notes: (1) Children decided to taste the samples themselves; (2) Children became familiarized with food; (3) Role models encouraged children to explore and taste; (4) Students used names of fresh food in conversations with the children; (5) Children shared their food-related sensory and practical experiences. The result showed that during “A tasting plate”, the students described children tasting familiar food before novel food, children spitting out food they did not like, and children decided when using dipping sauces. The students observed that some children’s use of dipping sauces increased their enjoyment of food. The analysis showed children exploring fresh, boiled and fried cooking variants of certain ingredients in both the food activities. The students’ descriptions showed that they were conscious role models in the activities. The children were encouraged to taste by peers, and that especially occurred when children uttered expressions of enjoyment like “mmm”. The analysis showed that students used food names and talked about novel foods. In the notes there were also descriptions of children using food-related words while exploring taste samples by verbally sharing their taste experiences, as well as while preparing fresh ingredients (e.g., peeling and cutting) by discussing the practical activity of food preparation.

Social food enjoyment in groups may have motivated the children to taste the food during the food activities. The children’s experiences with shared food and practical food-related activities may have motivated the children to use food-related words. In a public health perspective this study can contribute with relevant content for practical pedagogical work with food in both kindergarten and kindergarten teacher education.

**Keywords:** *kindergarten teacher education; food activities; motivation to taste; language*