

Kindergartners Climb The Tree of Life

Suffield, Connecticut kindergartners begin their climb on the tree of life by learning about good foods. With the help of school foodservice personnel and teachers, these young students make and sample their own snacks.

ANISA is a Persian word meaning "tree of life". From this word comes an educational concept that states that every child has an unlimited amount of human potential. Becoming a competent learner, the concept goes on, will release this potential. Proper nutrition and good health are essential to the ability to learn.

Beginning with their kindergarten classes, Suffield, Connecticut public schools adopted the ANISA concept of learning. "Because of ANISA", says Alice Welch, R.D., Suffield school lunch director, "Those of us in school lunch have had a special year."

To learn the ANISA approach to teaching school children, Suffield kindergarten teachers, aides and school specialists such as Mrs. Welch attended a six-week ANISA workshop at the University of Massachusetts during the summer of 1973. "For the first time," says Mrs. Welch, "I was exposed to classroom food experiences that were included in the curriculum. The morning snack was prepared by the children under the direction of a teacher."

After the summer class, attendees went back to Suffield to introduce the ANISA concept in their kindergartens. Mrs. Welch explains that Suffield had had food experiences in the kindergartens before, but school foodservice people had not participated out-



Suffield kindergartner learns to grate carrot as teacher looks on.

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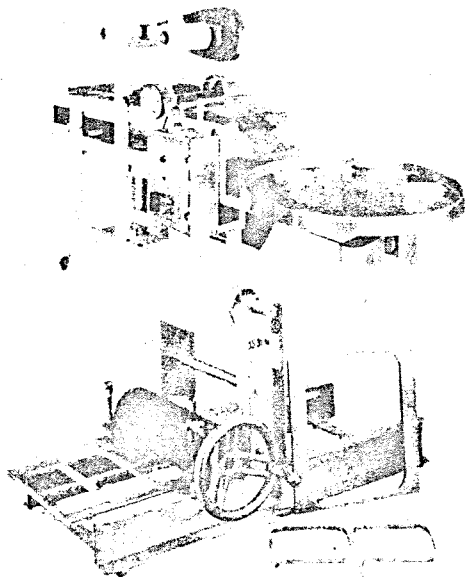
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Tree of Life

side of providing milk, store-bought cookies or crackers and juice for the students. Now school lunch personnel were asked to join with teachers to make snack time an opportunity for pupils to learn about nutrition.

Before the school year started, teachers, parents and school foodservice personnel met to discuss the goals of the program and outline limitations on food and labor costs, physical equipment and time. Program ground rules were established:

- Snacks would provide a variety of foods to establish the foundation of a balanced diet.
- Special emphasis would be placed on the nutrients most often lacking in a child's diet—protein, vitamins A and C and iron.
- Each child would pay 10 cents

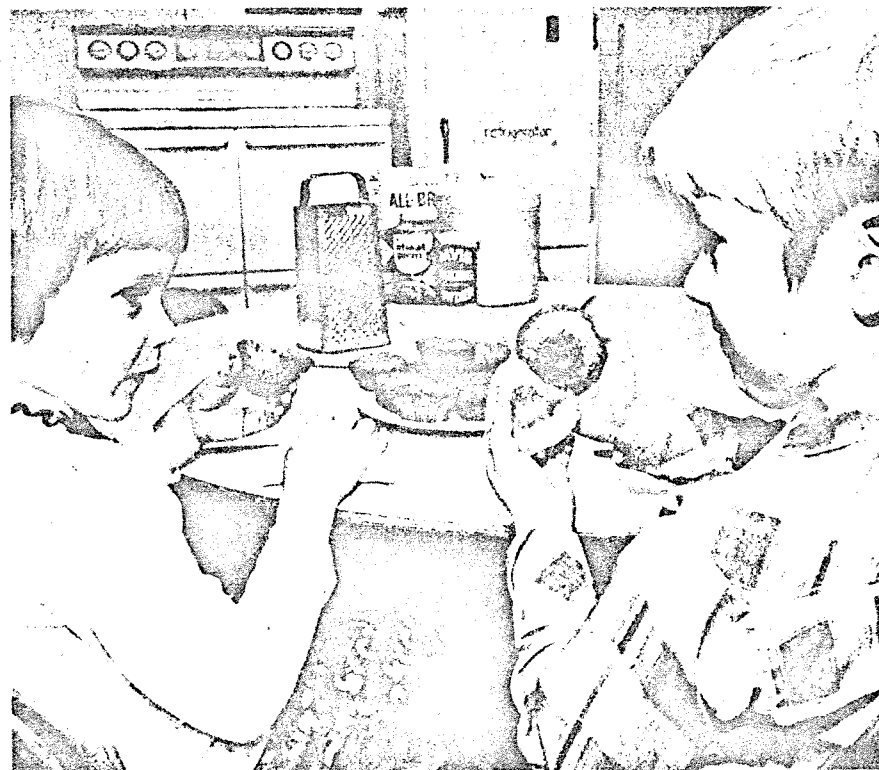
a day to cover the cost of food, paper supplies, plastic ware and labor.

- Food for that day's snack would be ready at 9:00 a.m. for aides to pick up and take to the classrooms.

- Snack menus would be published a week in advance in the local newspapers along with the school lunch menus.

- Cafeteria director would meet weekly with kindergarten teachers to plan the snack. Menus would be developed around the psycho-motor concepts the teachers wished to stress, cost and availability of food, holidays, school schedules and other classroom activities.

An hour's extra labor each morning was needed to get the snacks ready for the kindergartens. "The changes in the school lunch kitchen routine were accepted by the employees in a most cooperative manner," says Mrs.



Two kindergartners get acquainted over bran muffins they have made themselves.

Welch. "Everyone was willing to try the new procedures and to do the best to make them successful. Having grandmothers of kindergarten students as school lunch employees was an added bonus."

At least 100 orders of the day's snack item were prepared each morning. On some days cafeteria workers assembled the ingredients for 50 menu items to be prepared in the classroom by the students. The classroom's snack area was equipped with a stove, refrigerator, sink and storage cupboards. One group of children in each kindergarten session could help prepare the food in the classroom. "One of the hardest tasks for the school lunch employees," according to Mrs. Welch, "was finding small containers for the home-style recipe ingredients that were pre-measured in the school kitchen." Cookie cutters, egg beaters, meat grinders, rolling pins, spoons and bowls that the children could manipulate were donated by teachers and school foodservice personnel since the budget didn't include money for purchasing these items.

The children enjoyed their food, especially if they helped in its preparation. A typical snack might be carrot and raisin salad with orange juice or cheese sticks, French bread and apricot nectar or apple slices with peanut butter. If a beverage was not served with

the snack, the children were encouraged to drink water and realize its importance to good health.

Children were encouraged to try all the foods but none were forced to finish the small portion served to them. "Even if a child says he does not like a certain food," Mrs. Welch explains, "he usually will eat it if he has been involved in its preparation and is surrounded by his peers enjoying it."

The teacher, aide or parent in charge of snacks for the day presents the food in a gracious manner, shows how to eat the food and leads a discussion about it. She may relate the food to a story (such as "Johnny Appleseed" when apple crisp is served), a holiday being celebrated or a geographical location and where the food comes from. Color, texture, shape, size and variety of ways the same food can be used teach children a myriad of concepts. Math and reading are also important skills learned from measuring ingredients and reading recipes.

The classroom atmosphere at snack time is pleasant and conducive to a happy eating experience. The child receives the impression that eating is an important part of his school day and of his life.

Eating new snacks arouses interest and curiosity in the chil-

dren. On trying a vegetable one boy observed, "My father grows this in our garden." And parents notice an improvement in the children's eating habits at home and a willingness to try more foods. Mrs. Welch says, "If a parent says her child will now eat foods that were regularly refused before the snack program was introduced or that he asks for celery and peanut butter instead of candy, we feel growth has taken place and we have contributed."

This fall ANISA will be expanded to the first and second grades. "We are in the process of setting our goals and objectives for the nutrition factor to shift from snacks to lunch," says Mrs. Welch. "We will try to provide all students, whether bringing lunch from home or eating the school lunch, with a pleasant, relaxing atmosphere within a flexible time schedule for enjoying the eating of nutritious food as an integral part of the school day."

ANISA brought good nutrition, through the school foodservice laboratory, into the Suffield classrooms. Says Mrs. Welch, "We in Suffield have been fortunate to be able to cooperate with teachers and contribute our knowledge of foods and their preparation to the ideal of children functioning at their highest level with good nutrition programmed into the child's school day."

About the Source

Alice Welch, who has been with the Suffield, Connecticut school lunch program for 14 years, began her life in the smallest city in the United States—Vergennes, Vermont. She received her B.S. in foods and nutrition from the University of Vermont and did her dietetic internship at the Women's Educational and Industrial Union in Boston.

A member of the American Dietetic Association and Connecticut and American School Food Service Associations, Mrs. Welch hopes to write a book on the art of snacking this summer while vacationing at Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts.

