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Increasing fruit and vegetable consumption among kindergarten children - developing taste awareness using the Sapere method

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INTRODUCTION

Overweight and obesity is an increasing problem. Epidemiologists previously dealt with the deficiency diseases, but today society fights lifestyle-related diseases.

When food is so freely available, we let our taste preference, - which either speak for or against certain foods, have an important role in our daily food choices.

That food should have some recognition value for the children, does not mean that it must be trivial and should only cover the most basic food. If the built-in preference for sweet and fatty foods should be nuanced and seeks diverse dietary preferences, this requires positive experiences with precisely balanced meals. When children have a little experience to frame when eating food, one must assume that they deselect a variety of foods and dishes. The availability of healthy food is the cornerstone in the development of healthy dietary preferences.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of the study was to test the Sapere-method as a method to develop taste awareness for fruits and vegetables among kindergarten aged children.

The study aimed at linking consumption of fruit & vegetable to knowledge and awareness of different senses such as taste and texture.

It was also intended to increase the children's courage to taste new types of fruit & vegetable and consumption of fruit & vegetable by putting taste into words through food exposure.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The Sapere-method was developed further and refined based on prior studies among 11-12 year old Swedish school children. A five day taste workshop in a selected kindergarten was developed and 12 children and two pedagogues participated.

The SAPERE principles start from the point that through play, children can learn the cultural community which surrounds cooking and eating food together; in addition they may be more versatile in their food language - and preferences, and feel pride when they have tasted something they may not have dared before.

During the SAPERE workshops children also learn that food comes from nature, not from the supermarket and the refrigerator at home. Giving children food experiences in nature such as picking fruits and berries, baking bread over the fire, making a small vegetable garden where children can see the vegetables sprout and grow and harvest them themselves allow children to feel closer to the nature and to develop a positive attitudes to the environment and to foods.

The workshop activities included specific tastings, sensory-games and baking. The children were encouraged to share and talk about the different taste experiences, and were encouraged to taste the disliked fruit & vegetable again

RESULTS

Results from the baseline study in the Periscope project on habitual dietary intake among 360 children, aged 3-6 years, in 14 different kindergartens showed limited variation in fruit & vegetable intake: Raw carrots were the main vegetable source and apples the main fruit source.

The children responded positively to the taste workshop. The children's uncertainty of the connection between food and the singular tastings in the beginning of the study were turned into awareness of different tastes in the food.

Unfamiliar foods were connected with familiar foods through specific recognized tastes and thereby slowly accepted.

Taste experiences were spontaneously put into words and shared among the children during the meals:

Childs comment after tasting a mix salad with beetroot and white cabbage with a dressing made with oil, lemon and vanilla sugar:

"It tastes like vanilla ice crème".

Another child replied that:

"It taste like koldskål (a danish dish with vanilla sugar)".

The pedagogue, sitting at the table with the children continued talking with all the children about the different tastes in the new food (the salad) using the boys comments as examples for food with similar taste.

5 DAYS TASTE WORKSHOP



Tasteworkshop



Boardgame about food, senses and movement



Treasurehunt with foodquestions



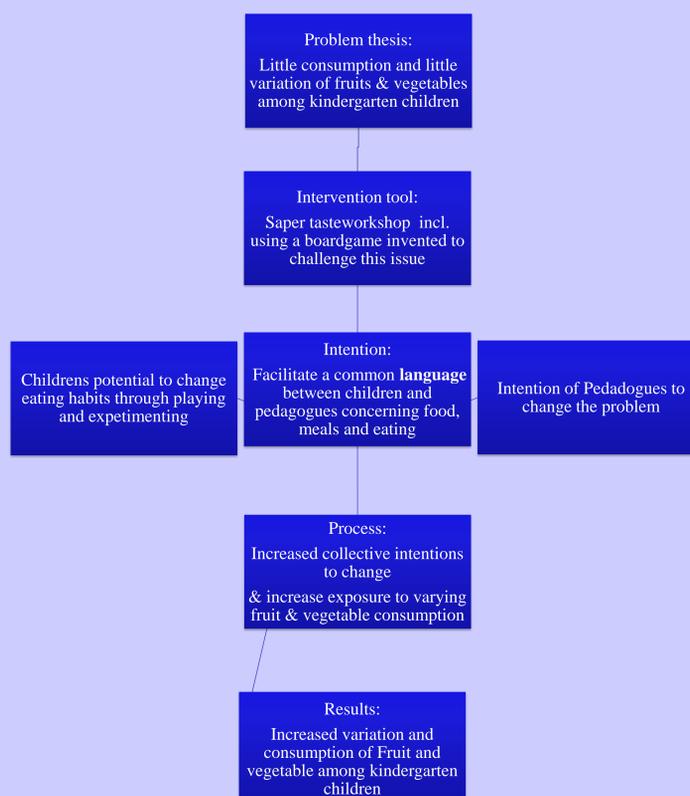
Baking foccacia rolls with tomatos and fresh basil

CONCLUSIONS

The study suggests that by strengthening kindergarten pedagogues knowledge of the Sapere method, it is possible to increase children's awareness of senses related to food, physically and verbally.

The study also suggests that this can be a way to reduce food neophobia and increase food courage.

However, controlled studies among kindergarten aged children are needed to verify the findings.



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