

FOOD AND COOKING SKILLS EDUCATION

WHY TEACH PEOPLE how to COOK?



ANITA TULL

“This should be essential reading for anyone involved in food education. Engaging and accessible, it explores and maps the terrain of food education, providing historical context as well as comparative perspectives and insights with other countries. Based on thorough research as well as detailed analysis of discourse conducted over a period of ten years, this is an incredibly important piece of work that concludes with clear recommendations regarding where food education in the UK should go from here.”

– Rick Jackman, *Publisher of textbooks on food and cookery for UK schools and colleges*

“One of the most important questions a country can ask of itself is how does it teach its people to cook. That is the theme of this book which explores the role of formal culinary education in a supposedly informal era.”

– Tim Lang, *Professor of Food Policy, City, University of London, UK*



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Food and Cooking Skills Education

Food and Cooking Skills Education (FCSE) is a complex mix of policy and practicality, educational theory and pedagogy, classroom and government policy. This book shows how FCSE has been at the centre of a tussle between education and policy for decades.

It reviews how FCSE has grappled with various significant issues of concern that threaten to marginalise it and pose problems for educational practicalities, as expectations are increased, but resources are squeezed. It assesses the debate about the significance and importance of acquiring practical food and cooking skills in a society where the purchase of ready-made food has become commonplace, and public knowledge of where our food comes from is noticeably lacking. This has contributed to the escalating incidence of diet-related diseases and the attendant cost to society, and threatened environmental sustainability. In turn, governments have reacted with proposals to make practical cooking skills a statutory National Curriculum subject as part of the armoury for tackling such costs.

Based on detailed research conducted across England and Wales, as well as comparisons with thirty-five other countries or states, the author makes recommendations for policy to manage this challenge facing contemporary society.

Anita Tull is a freelance Food and Nutrition Educational author and consultant, based in the UK. She has written several school textbooks on home economics, food and nutrition. She has worked in food and cooking skills education for forty years and has taught primary and secondary pupils and adults in a range of schools, colleges and community initiatives. She has a PhD from the Centre for Food Policy at City, University of London, UK, on which the work covered in this book is based.

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Food and Cooking Skills Education

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Anita Tull

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Foreword

The central question addressed in this book – why teach people to cook? – might seem simple to answer. ‘Of course one must!’ goes the most common reply. OK, but quite why? ‘It is to learn to survive, to facilitate everyday life.’ Hmm, wait. Let us unpick the question. Who is the implied teacher? What is cooking? Who is asking the question? And why is it being asked now? Considering these questions opens a wealth of avenues to explore about the contemporary and past role of cooking. In a world where vast amounts of food are consumed in pre-processed form, what has happened to the skills base? Cooking does not mean the same thing everywhere. It is changing, at different paces and in different forms globally. Ready-made ingredients, whole meals, and even illusory pre-chosen just-cook packages are on offer almost everywhere, and often seen as indicators of economic advance. Actually, when many low income countries have rich street-food cultures, in many countries, ready-made foods and meals are marketed as saving time, reducing stress, helping. At its starkest, ‘cooking’ can become the act of popping something into a microwave. More subtly, it is assembling pre-made ingredients. With the rise of TV chefs, cooking is also being redefined as what those wizards do. They are altering haute cuisine. They are thought-leaders but also entertainment.

In all human history, cooking has rarely been formally taught. Note the word ‘formal’, implying a classroom perhaps, with expected outcomes, pass/fail life-skills. But cooking has also been highly gender-allocated. Teaching cooking was offered in some countries primarily to socialise young women. Less so today, when we read and watch the wizardry of (mostly male) mass selling cooks on TV. It was not always thus. And many culinary cultures today wouldn’t dream of formalising the teaching of cooking. It is something one learns in the home, usually (but not always) from mothers and grandmothers. It was and often remains regionalised rather than a national format. In the modern world even that is both fragmenting and homogenising. In what for me is one of the most intriguing chapters of this book, Dr Tull offers an overview of official positions on how and whether different affluent states teach young people to cook. This adds to the evolving discussion which our Centre for Food Policy and others started in the late 1990s when we asked whether there might be a culinary cultural transition underway if societies have to formalise their teaching?^{1,2} And

is this to replace the loss or dislocation of skills? Or is it expanding them? An earlier doctoral researcher at the Centre for Food Policy, Frances Short, had argued persuasively, latterly in a book, that people in the UK did actually have skills.³ What is cooking if not the application of fairly simple tasks, she said; one can amplify them but the core techniques are there. Don't imply deskilling. And another doctoral project here by Dr Andy Gatley showed how even the supposedly rocklike cooking culture of France was shifting.⁴ Why are we surprised? Cooking is no different to other social processes in that it changes form with shifts in circumstances and signals from the market, time pressures and role reallocation.

So we are right to consider the purpose and role of teaching cooking. It takes us into fundamental and fascinating territory. What is the point of food? Why pleasure, culture, health, of course. True, but food, or rather diet, is now the major cause of premature death in the world, according to the Global Burden of Disease report.⁵ Food should protect health and wellbeing but now it doesn't, too.

A constant refrain from critics is that cooking can resolve societal ills. If only everyone was taught to cook well and healthily, public health would surely improve. I have argued that myself but it is a moot point, actually. Cooking in the home enables control, skill, preference to be exerted but they can also be used to feed unhealthily too! That takes us back to the starting point: why should any society teach (young) people to cook?

This book reviews much that needs to be considered in answering the question. It provides what one can pompously but accurately call a 'multi-criteria' reply. There are many yardsticks by which we can judge the imparting of cooking skills: health, environment, culture, economy, pleasure, taste, and more. The rationale for formal cooking education is shown to change over time. Using the UK to show this could raise a question: well, this is the British, famous for their poor culinary culture, what do we expect? Be careful! The UK has indeed many peculiar and idiosyncratic features. It was the first industrial nation. It systematically severed its population from the land as a source of food, choosing, from the mid 19th century, to source ever more of its food from abroad, when it did not need to. It also has a richer cooking culture that was buried by industrialisation.⁶ The goal of cheaper food was set in Parliament in the 1846 Repeal of the Corn Laws, which reduced tariffs (taxes) on imported food, intending to provide ever cheaper food for the urban industrial working class.⁷ The policy logic was simple: cheap food restrains demands for higher wages. This policy came unstuck in World Wars 1 and 2, periods which saw massive investment in public standards, public food and school meals. Today the UK has no Empire (though some act as though it does). More importantly, other countries have quietly begun to go down the route hacked out by the British: using others to feed them, eating ever more 'ultra-processed' factory-made foods.⁸ We often note them appealing to traditional cooking skills to stave off the onslaught of Americanised food. When a country has something to protect, fair enough, but what about countries which have de-racinated? One sees around the world

fascinating new growth and exciting culinary experimentation, with some arguing post-modern, post-industrial cuisines and skills thus emerging.

The argument that to constrain factory food, societies need to champion the rebuilding of domestic cooking skills is interesting. Factory = bad. Domestic = good. That dichotomy too deserves scrutiny. Anita Tull rightly explores the case for not cooking. Food manufacturers argue that their scale enables environmental efficiencies to be won: greater throughput reduces each product's individual carbon footprint. There are some, too, who argue that manufacturers could (but often don't) reduce sources of ill-health such as salt, sugar and fat, and quietly 'nudge' populations to prefer smaller portions. It's an argument, but one on which I confess to be a sceptic. The fact is that manufacturers could reduce sources of ill-health, acting below the radar, but often defend the status quo as offering choice. Whether choice is really the great god is a philosophical debating point. Surely, it is better if people are aware of their dietary ingredients and do not simply judge food by taste. Equally, choice can be blinding. Many a TV or recipe chef writer or manufacturer pours in the salt, reinforcing rather than tackling the tastebud 're-set' that affluent societies need if we genuinely put health first.^{9,10}

This is a fascinating and rewarding book. It ranges widely, drawing on the author's own teaching and research experience, but always returning to its core theme. It offers a really useful summary of the potential rationales for cooking education. We are left with a richer understanding of how, at the societal level, policy-makers need to consider whether, how, by whom and when cooking skills are imparted. The answers tell us a lot about a country, a class, a government, an industry and the moment in history. It also salutes the sometimes unsung role of the cooking teacher. As they say of the act of reading 'if you can read this, thank a teacher', so perhaps we should say 'if you enjoy this food, thank not just the cook but the person who taught the cook!' and the generosity of the process.

Tim Lang, Professor of Food Policy,
Centre for Food Policy, City, University of London, UK

Notes

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Preface

In 1973 I arrived as a first-year trainee teacher at Battersea College of Education, London; one of the few (and now extinct) teacher training colleges that specialised in Home Economics (HE). Extensive theoretical and practical training was imparted to enable my cohort of newly qualified teachers to pass on a wide variety of practical cooking skills and knowledge about food and nutrition to secondary school pupils, in subject-specific HE lessons. At the time, training and pedagogy in HE were geared towards educating the secondary-school-aged children of contemporary families; the principle being that informed, rational people would act upon information supplied to them by a teacher ('the expert') using appropriate methods and skills, for personal advantage. We were trained to teach young people to be good cooks and consumers, without it being considered necessary to raise awareness or appreciation of the global ramifications of their choices, purchasing decisions and actions. The perceived wisdom was that when young people were taught how to prepare and cook a recipe by viewing a demonstration followed by practical repetition, or the theory about which foods they should eat in order to achieve a healthy balanced diet, they would go away and forevermore put into practice what they had been taught. Therefore, the value of HE and, in particular, practical cooking lessons in that format, was regarded and defended by its practitioners as incontrovertible and its practice continued.

Like many of my contemporaries, my teaching career began in a co-educational comprehensive secondary (high) school. In many such schools in the 1970s, HE lessons were at least a double lesson and sometimes all morning or all afternoon in duration. There was no National Curriculum (NC) to follow. HE teachers and departments worked independently, but were often affiliated to the Needlework department, and many offered Child Development courses. Heads of Department planned their own schemes of learning for the first three year groups and then followed the syllabuses of examination boards offering 'O' level and/or Certificate of Secondary Education courses for 14–16-year-olds, depending on their cohorts of students. With the time available, it was possible to teach a wide range of practical cooking skills and theory.

My subsequent career path led me into delivering food and nutrition and practical cookery courses in adult education, eventually lecturing in professional

cooking and nutrition at a further education college for adults, and finally completing my teaching career in a state secondary school for boys. For several years throughout an earlier career break to raise my family, I undertook regular voluntary work teaching cooking skills to pre-school and primary-school-aged children. I became and continue to be a school textbook author for Food and Nutrition (FN) courses and conducted some research into food provision in schools. Having been involved for so long in the food education terrain, I decided to take up an opportunity offered to me in 2004 to conduct some empirical research at the Centre for Food Policy (CFP) at City University, London, with the financial support of the Worshipful Company of Cooks, and in 2015, was awarded a PhD for a thesis entitled '*Why teach (young) people how to cook? A critical analysis of education and policy in transition*'.

Over the years of my involvement in this field of education, I have always been impressed and gratified by students' enthusiasm (whatever age) for learning about food and how to cook it, and the evident passion for the subject expressed by its practitioners, despite the stresses and strains many have experienced due to resource restrictions, curriculum changes and the relentless exertions of teaching. However, my natural and professional inclination to view traditional cooking skills (i.e. producing meals and food products from largely unprocessed ingredients) as important life skills that everyone should have the opportunity to acquire, has been challenged over the years. The dynamics of change in society, food culture, the food system and education have encouraged me to critically review the significance, educational value, pedagogical style and curriculum content for individuals and society, policy and food culture of promoting food and cooking skills education. My PhD research, which consisted of five qualitative studies: (1) a historical account of food education in England and Wales since the industrial revolution; (2) a study of young people's experience of cooking education in English schools (interviews); (3) a questionnaire survey of United Kingdom (UK) food industry perspectives on food education; (4) an international comparative survey of thirty-five countries' food education policies and pedagogy (including Scotland & Northern Ireland); and (5) elite interviews of policymakers and activists from state-related and civil society sectors, provided the first account of food education's role and purpose, whether taught formally or informally, and gave me the opportunity to seek the opinions of others and to share its results. Its outcomes form the foundation for this book, without presenting all the intricacies of the methodologies and studies involved. The discussion and thoughts about the subject of the book go beyond the research and have been expanded to take account of subsequent developments in food education and society. They include recommendations for policy and suggestions for further research in this intriguing educational and policy terrain.

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I am indebted to my husband, Nicholas Tull, and my three children Louise, Verity and Sebastian, for their unfailing encouragement and support.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the many Food and Cooking Skills Education teachers for all the hard work, passion and dedication they have and continue to devote to their pupils and the subject that is the focus of this book.

Abbreviations and acronyms

A Level	Advanced level
App	Mobile phone application
AS	Advanced Subsidiary
AT(s)	Attainment Target(s)
ATDS	Association of Teachers of Domestic Science
CCEA	Council for the Curriculum, Exams and Assessment
CDT	Craft Design and Technology
CFP	Centre for Food Policy
COMA	Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DATA	Design and Technology Association
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DE	Domestic Economy
DECC	Department of Energy and Climate Change
Defra	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DENI	Department of Education for Northern Ireland
DES	Department of Education and Science
DfE	Department for Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DHSS	Department of Health and Social Security
DoH	Department of Health
DS	Domestic Science
DT	Design and Technology
ERA	Education Reform Act
FCSE	Food and Cooking Skills Education
FFLP	Food for Life Partnership
FN	Food and Nutrition
FSA	Food Standards Agency
FT	Food Technology
FTC	Food Teachers Centre
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education

GHG	Greenhouse Gas Emissions
HE	Home Economics
HERO	Home Economics Related Occupations
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspectorate
ICT	Information and Computer Technology
KS	Key Stage
LCA	Life Cycle Analysis
LEA	Local Education Authority
LSL	Lower Secondary Level
N/S	Not Specified
NACNE	National Advisory Committee on Nutrition Education
NATHE	National Association of Teacher of Home Economics
NC	National Curriculum (England and Wales)
NCC	National Curriculum Council
NCD	Non Communicable (diet-related) Disease
NFA	National Food Alliance
NGO(s)	Non-Governmental Organisation(s)
NHS	National Health Service
NUT	National Union of Teachers
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
Ofqual	Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator
Ofsted (latest title)	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
Ofsted (original title)	Office for Standards in Education
PoS	Programme of Study
PSHE	Personal, Social and Health Education
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
RMT	Resistant Materials Technology
SCAA	School Curriculum Assessment Authority
TV	Television
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USL	Upper Secondary Level
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WHO	World Health Organisation
WW1	World War One
WW2	World War Two



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1 Introduction and overview of the book

In many contemporary societies, it is commonplace for consumers to purchase ready-made meals and meal components from third parties, eliminating the need to prepare and cook meals from raw ingredients. So, if ready-to-eat food is widely available, why is being taught how to cook a topic worthy of discussion and research? Simply put, it is that over recent decades there have been numerous changes within different societies, food culture and the food system, and a range of issues arising from these about food and cooking that have received significant attention; in particular, people's diminished connection between food provenance and consumption; the extent and relevance of 'food literacy' in whole populations (Kolassa et al. 2001, Smith 2009, Kimura 2011, Pendergast et al. 2011, Vidgen, 2010, 2011, 2016); the effects of food choices and eating habits on health and escalating rates of non-communicable diet-related diseases (NCDs); and a general decline in practical skills leading to concerns about a skills deficit. This attention has been accompanied by a burgeoning supply of, and public interest in, celebrity-hosted cookery programmes and other forms of food-centred media entertainment and paraphernalia showcasing cooking and the 'cooking business'. These four issues raise questions concerning the significance and appropriateness of pedagogy and subject content when considering whether people should be taught how to cook.

Whilst primarily focused on teaching young people how to cook while at school, the theme of this book broadens its scope to explore the question of why we teach people of *any* age and life-stage to learn about food and to cook. For this purpose, Britain, and in particular England and Wales, is used as a case study as it provides a rich backdrop for considering the simple question posed by the book's title. This is because Britain was the first nation to experience industrialisation and the permanent separation of large numbers of its population from the provenance of their food as they moved from rural areas into towns for work, thus creating mass dependency on industrialised food production. Secondly, the extraordinary role of Britain as an industrialising and imperial power made it unduly influential in spreading thinking about cooking. Finally, the emergence of Britain in the late twentieth century as a post-industrial and heavily service-based economy means that the recent revival of public interest in cooking has a particular poignancy. Britain is therefore

2 Introduction and overview of the book

interesting terrain, but is not the only nation to have concerns about food and cooking education, as reported later in the book (see Chapter 4). An initial survey of the academic literature revealed that, in relation to the practice of cooking and the policy for teaching it, there was remarkably little research which actually answered, or even addressed in a systematic way, the relevance of the question. Previous food-related research and literature had largely focused on defining the meaning and process of cooking (e.g. Mennell et al. 1992, Mennell 1996), the development of skills from a culinary perspective (e.g. McGee 1986), and the dissemination of knowledge about the links between diet, eating habits and NCD (e.g. Fuhr and Barclay 1998, Liquori et al. 1998, Levy and Auld 2004). The Centre for Food Policy at City University, London had started a now vibrant strand of work on knowledge about cooking skills (Caraher and Lang 1999, Lang et al. 1999, Lang and Caraher 2001, Caraher et al. 1999, 2003, 2004, Short 2003a, 2003b, Wu et al. 2008, Seeley et al. 2009, Caraher et al. 2011, Caraher 2012, Gatley 2012, Caraher et al., 2013). However, very little attention had been given to *why* as a culture we include the teaching of cooking in the education of our young people. It was this gap in knowledge that provided the impetus for mapping the entire policy and pedagogical rationale(s) for including formal practical cooking classes in the education of young people in schools in England and Wales and a range of other countries, and for including informal modes of cooking education in the wider population.

The formal teaching of cooking has over time been subject to various prejudices and barriers, with constraints imposed on its provision and threats to its survival as an educational subject. This has encouraged its supporters, particularly during education reforms that, in England and Wales, led to the introduction of the NC in 1988 and a restructure of cooking education, to raise the profile of teaching cooking in education debates and the media, and to defend and advocate its continuation (e.g. Academy of Culinary Arts 'Adopt a School' campaign 1990, National Food Alliance 1995, Stitt 1995, Stitt et al. 1996, 1997, 'Focus on Food' campaign 1998). Without there being a detailed rationale for teaching cooking, these supporters had merely asserted the value of cooking, or used arguments without a strong evidence base. These might have been good and convincing, but in a world where food policy (like other policy terrains) is required to be 'evidence-based', the lack of such an evidence base was surely a deficit. The process of building an evidence base, which would be needed if the inclusion and retention of cookery lessons in the school curriculum was to be challenged or defended, was essential and has resulted in this first account of food education's role and purpose, whether taught formally or informally.

In some respects, it is surprising that there has not been more attention on food and cooking education as a research area, since the teaching of cooking in schools has long been at the centre of a tussle between education and policy, and, along with other curriculum subjects, food and cooking education has had to grapple with a range of issues of concern that have threatened to marginalise it, and in some cases succeeded. These have included problems associated with the unique resourcing requirements of practical cooking lessons; having to compete

for finite resources and share of curriculum allocation; and the requirement for food education FCSE to cease to be an autonomous subject and embrace a new identity, focus and curriculum content as Food Technology (FT) and adapt to the pedagogical requirements of the Technology curriculum, into which it was situated in the 1980s, during a major reform of the curriculum. These significant issues have posed problems for educational practicalities, as expectations have increased, resources have been squeezed and the number of teachers with expertise and appropriate training in this field has diminished. In the current volatile and uncertain economic climate, the education of young people remains a major fiscal commitment that politicians of all parties and education providers strive to ensure and prove is effective, successful, sustainable and good value for money. However, intellectually and pedagogically, the case for a country developing a food and health policy which takes food and cooking education more seriously and teaches its children to cook, surely goes beyond the conventional market logic of value for money; this is especially true when the consequences of inappropriate food choices and eating habits have contributed to the escalating incidence of NCDs that increasingly place onerous demands on health services for their treatment, and are accompanied by major long-term policy and financial implications for society. In recent years, such concerns have produced promises and pledges as a reaction from British policymakers to make practical cooking skills a statutory NC subject (e.g. labour.org.uk, 2008, Department for Education [DfE] 2013b) as part of the armoury for tackling such costs. The latest initiative in the armoury is the School Food Plan (Dimbleby and Vincent 2013), one of the outcomes of which is the requirement for practical cookery lessons to be compulsory in the NC for school pupils to the end of Key Stage (KS) 3¹ and the development of a new General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) Food Preparation and Nutrition course in KS4, which commenced in September 2016. However, as Caraher (2016) cautions, the assumption that the acquisition of cooking skills can ameliorate the problems associated with unhealthy eating remains unproven and arguable, and has been unfairly used to negatively criticise and blame those who, for various reasons, do not cook.

In budgetary terms, teaching young people to cook at school has to compete for funding with all the other demands on the finite resources of publicly funded institutions. Why then, should schools teach cooking? Is this not the responsibility of parents, the home, anyone but the State? These are plausible arguments, yet cooking and food sit squarely in the middle of some key problems for a society such as the UK, largely dependent on processed foods and exhibiting major diet-related ill health as a result. If food education and cooking is in some intellectual and policy difficulties, is this due to a lack of good champions, or to a fundamentally weak argument? There was (and still is) no lack of food and cooking education champions who work tirelessly to promote and sustain the subject, but there also exists a significant tussle between education and policy that requires exploration and analysis in order to assess the possibilities for a consensus between them about the purpose and future of teaching cooking in schools.