



1950s refrigerator

Food – a theme for Learning about the past

Sandra Kirkland

A theme that can provide many opportunities for children to develop their understanding of the past is **Food**. This is a popular theme in many **Early Years settings** and **Reception classes**. This theme can be planned at any time of year and can be adapted in many ways.

Curriculum links

Activities can be planned to support children to achieve the Early Learning Goal associate with Understanding the world: People and communities. This requires children to 'talk about past and present events in their own lives and the lives of family members' and to 'know about similarities and differences between themselves and others, and among families, communities and traditions'. (DFE, 2014, p.14).

Birthday cakes

A modern birthday cake could be a starting-point to engage the children. The children could talk about their most recent birthday and the cake they had, or the cake they would like to have had if this is more appropriate to them. Terms such as 'the same' and 'different' could be modelled by adults, and scaffolds used to support the children in understanding and using these terms. The children could be encouraged to talk about their memories of birthday cakes and this would support them in using the terms independently. These activities contribute to children talking about past and present events in their own lives.

With regard to the lives of family members, ask parents/carers to provide photographs of birthday cakes and parties from their childhood. The children

should be encouraged to look carefully at the photographs and questions should be used to support children in identifying things that are the same and those that are different. These photographs could also be used to help children to begin to use phrases such as 'when Mummy was 5 years old' or 'when Grandad was a little boy' or 'when my teacher was at school' and to begin to investigate historical sources. Copies of the photographs could be sorted e.g. 'My fifth birthday' and 'Mummy's fifth birthday' or a collection of photographs could be sorted and placed on a simple timeline, initially with the support of an adult and then independently. Asking the children to count the candles on a cake in a photograph allows them to find out how old someone was – this could help to provide the foundation to an understanding of simple chronology and a simple timeline could be produced using the candles on the cakes to order them.

Favourite food

The children could be asked to find out, or remember, what their favourite food was when they were a baby and then compare this to their favourite foods now.

This contributes to children investigating and talking about change within their lives. A class display could be created in two parts – When we were babies we liked to eat... and Now we like to eat... This could be extended to include foods that their parents and/or grandparents enjoyed when they were children. It may be possible to obtain or make some of these and encourage the children to taste them. This might lead to looking at differences between these foods with

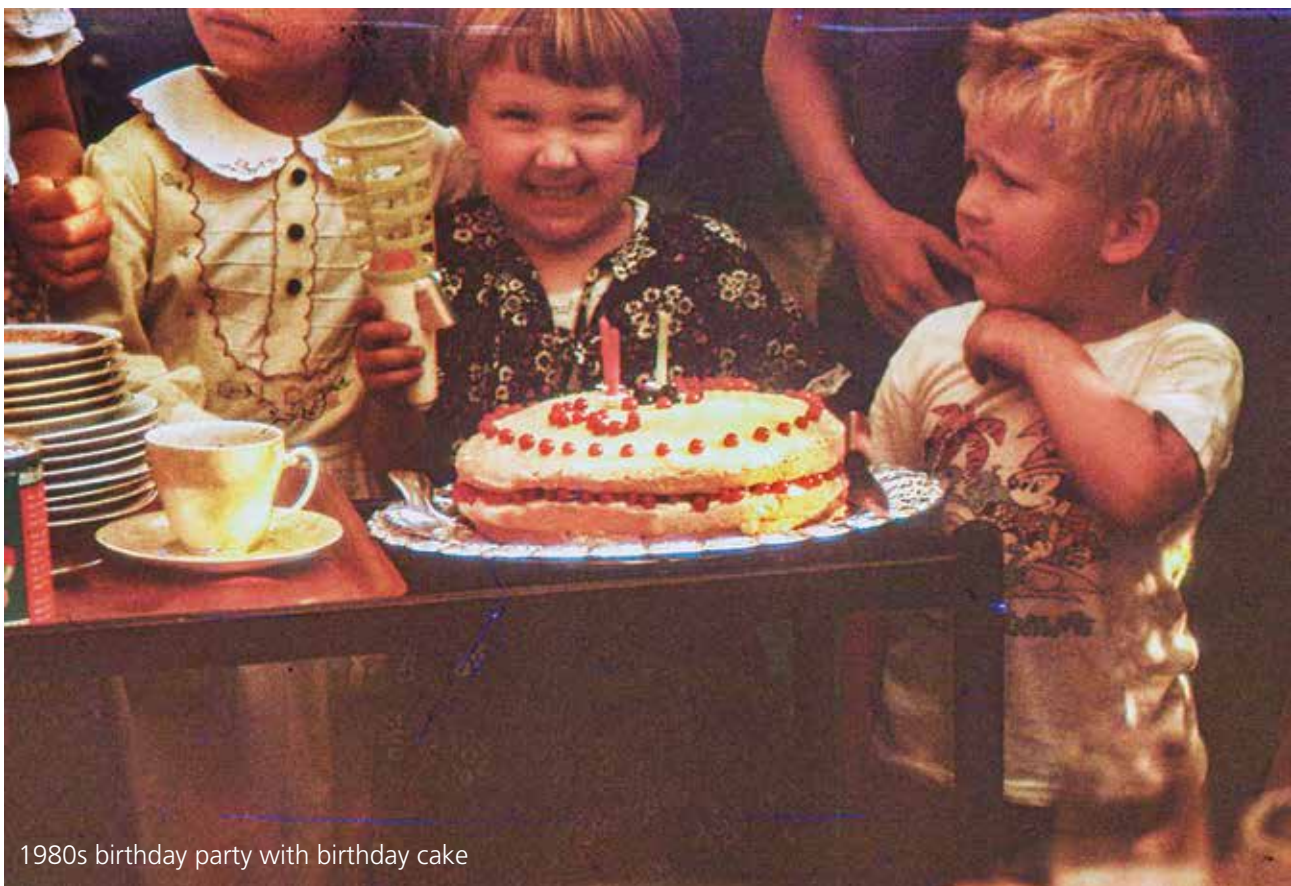
opportunities to sort food eaten in the past and what is eaten by the children today. For example, foods such as pasta may not have been eaten by their grandparents, and other 'convenience' foods such as frozen chips and ready meals may not have been eaten.

Look who's cooking

Inviting a visitor in to cook or bake with the children gives them an early opportunity to engage with oral history. Ideally the visitor should be of a similar age to either the parents or grandparents of the children and they could cook a significant dish from their childhood. The dish may be something that is familiar to the children or something that is not and this provides an opportunity for children to think and talk about similarities and differences. Children should be provided with opportunities to do their own cooking or baking and encouraged to taste dishes and ingredients. The visitor may bring in an old recipe book.

Recipe books

Having a range of recipe books from different time periods, preferably containing photographs not just of the dish but also of people, provides the children with another opportunity to use these as a historical source. Questions such as 'What can you see?', 'Tell me about the picture', 'How old do you think the book is?', 'What do you like?', 'Why?' can be used to scaffold the child's discussion and also allow you to assess their early understanding. Other resources such as magazines from appropriate times could also be used in this way.



1980s birthday party with birthday cake

Kitchen in the role play/imaginative area

When cooking with the children examples of contemporary and older utensils could be introduced. Demonstrating utensils such as wooden spoons used to cream a cake mix, hand beaters, other wooden utensils along with contemporary utensils and machines provides children with opportunities to identify similarities and differences. When appropriate, children could investigate and use the utensils supporting the development of this concept and by including some in the role/imaginative play area would provide many opportunities to do this.

The inclusion of photographs in the home corner from the particular period of time such as the 1970s, with clothes, crockery, magazines, food packaging and other contemporary artefacts that are suitable for playing with would also enhance this. The utensils can also be matched – e.g. which modern appliances match the older one – and discussed, thus providing an opportunity to think and talk about continuity and change and help children to begin to gain a wider awareness of what life was like when for example Grandma was young. The role of the adult would include interacting in the role/imaginative play area and could include modelling the use of the utensils, use of recipe books, investigating the packing, looking at pictures or adverts provided, thereby allowing the children to develop their historical knowledge, skills and understanding as part of their play.

Using old television adverts could be another useful source, particularly focusing on foods that the children might eat, and this will also enable them to look at other features such as clothes, cars, and homes in the past.

School dinners

With the current situation, most of the children in reception classes are likely to eat school dinners and finding out more about school dinners in the past could be another way of exploring similarities and differences. It may be that there are artefacts available in the school from a time in the past when school dinners were eaten, such as photographs, crockery and cutlery, menus etc. There may even be someone in the locality who was a dinner lady in the past and who could visit and share their memories preferably using the artefacts too. Alternatively, a member of staff could talk about their memories of school dinners. Who would forget: chocolate sponge with chocolate custard, giant chips that turn out to be parsnips, the big boys and girls being 'servers', green ceramic serving dishes, the 'scary' dinner lady and the kind one who let you off eating everything on your plate if you had tried something and not liked it? Again, let the children investigate with recipes, foods and tastes, and let them take school dinners as a theme in their play, in the role play area, the outdoor area and other learning areas.

Rolling out dough in the kitchen



Food also links with shopping and for further information see Karin Doull's article 'Planning for "changes within living memory"' in *Primary History*, 71 which contains many ideas that could be adapted to use with foundation stage children.

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Resources

Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage DfE 2014

Books to use with children

Chen, Shan-Shan (2014), *Mei-Mei's Lucky Birthday Noodles*, North Clarendon, Vermont: Tuttle

Cooper, H. (2005), *Pumpkin Soup*, London: Macmillan

Oxenbury, H. (2010), *It's my birthday*, London: Walker

Polacca, P. (1997), *Thunder Cakes*, London: Puffin

Sturges, P. (2002), *Little Red Hen (Makes a Pizza)*, London: Puffin

HA Resources

Doull, K. (2015) 'Planning for "changes within living memory"', *Primary History*, 71 pp. 14-19