Food education: health and social cohesion

Educación alimentaria: salud y cohesión social

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ABSTRACT Using a theoretical-reflexive approach, this article connects the results of various qualitative studies in social conflict and medical anthropology, in order to investigate how food can be a tool for social transformation in terms of health but also in terms of the dialogue, respect and coexistence among people, groups and communities. In this sense the article presents a first approximation to a new theoretical and methodological approach to food education. In this approach, food adopts a political, sociocultural and participatory perspective that brings us closer to an innovative understanding of the phenomenon of food: not only as an analytic and diagnostic tool, but also as an instrument for health education interventions toward conflict resolution and the promotion of healthier societies overall – nutritionally, but also in terms of equality and social cohesion.
KEY WORDS Food Education; Medical Anthropology; Social Participation; Food Policy; Cultural Factors; Social Change.

RESUMEN Desde un abordaje teórico-reflexivo, este artículo interconecta los resultados de diversas investigaciones cualitativas con teorías del conflicto social y de la antropología médica, para investigar cómo la alimentación puede ser una herramienta de transformación social, en términos de salud, pero también de diálogo, respeto y convivencia de personas, grupos y comunidades. En este sentido, se presenta una primera aproximación a un nuevo enfoque teórico-metodológico sobre educación alimentaria. En este enfoque, la alimentación incorpora una perspectiva política, sociocultural y participativa que nos acerca a una comprensión innovadora del fenómeno: la alimentación como herramienta de análisis y diagnóstico de realidades socioalimentarias, pero también como instrumento de intervención educativo-sanitaria en la resolución de conflictos y en el fomento de sociedades más saludables en términos globales: nutricionales y también de igualdad y cohesión social.
PALABRAS CLAVES Educación Alimentaria; Antropología Médica; Participación Social; Política Alimentaria; Factores Culturales; Cambio Social.

INTRODUCTION

The growing interest in the food education of children and adolescents has been represented in the design of several policy strategies. Among these strategies, we can find the *Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health* developed by the World Health Organization[1]; the White Paper *A Strategy for Europe on Nutrition, Overweight and Obesity-related Health Issues*[2]; the *Strategy for Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity Prevention*[3], and the Program "Cuídate+2012" [Take Care of Yourself][4] implemented in Spain. In addition, the Generalitat de Catalunya (the Autonomous Government of Catalonia) releases, quite frequently, pedagogical materials targeted at schools and families in order to promote healthy eating.

Nevertheless, most of these policies on food education do not take into account the sociocultural context in which food is immersed, or the fact that what children eventually eat or do not eat (their actual intake) is strongly influenced by factors such as: gender; ethnicity; ideology; the educational, normative, organizational and dynamic context of the family, school or community space where food is eaten; the decisive role of pleasure, comfort and health; perceptions and attitudes relating to eating and the body; and, finally, the way of thinking and rationalizing eating.[5,6,7,8,9,10,11] In overlooking most of the sociocultural factors that determine our eating behavior, the diagnoses established by health and education policies lose merit, thus reducing the probability of their effectiveness.

Eating is more than nutrition. By eating food, we receive nutrients – but we also communicate, express ourselves and relate with one another. We do not eat everything that is biologically edible and this means that economic, political, social and ideological factors condition our food choices, as do the possibilities connected to food access and availability.[12] In the same way, we can better understand the lifestyles of the general population by studying their eating behavior.[13]

Marcel Mauss describes eating as a "complete social fact"[14] which, as a result, is loaded with the same diversity and complexity found in any other social phenomenon, and should be studied as such. This article will pay special attention to how to approach precisely such diversity and complexity, since one of the main characteristics of our present-day society is the existence of multiple ways of thinking about, feeling toward and making food (functional, therapeutic, ecological, local, sustainable, responsible, hedonist, restrictive, autonomous, charitable) which, in turn, represent the great variety of ways of thinking and making the world that, in their multiple manners and levels of interaction, often lead to controversies and conflicts that are not always easy to settle.

In this respect, Francesc Muñoz[15] highlights that when complexity is added to diversity, conflict will inevitably arise; in terms of food, such conflict is emerging in different ways in our present-day society. On the one hand, we have conflicts and controversies relating to our food choices within a context of unprecedented abundance. In this sense, today more than ever, it seems that eating according to one's tastes, preferences, pleasure, esthetics, or economic resources, without these criteria coming into contradiction with one another, is not easy; the everyday eater is put into a difficult frame of mind[12] which should be studied in order to be able to *educate*.

Furthermore, over the last years, another food controversy/conflict has arisen that shakes the democratic foundations and principles of our Welfare State: the increase in food insecurity with respect to access and availability. In this regard, statistics show that one-third of all children in Spain live in risk of social exclusion and 30% are considered to be at nutritional risk.[16] This may be the time for policies toward nutritional education to deal not only with the challenge of teaching how to choose foods, but also with food access and availability. It seems absurd to expect anyone to teach how to make choices without taking into account the inequalities that make it difficult to have access to foods.

All this complexity surrounding food raises a number of issues: What are the sociocultural factors and inequalities that right now determine food choices and access on the part of our children? What difficulties or conflicts are arising in this regard? And, consequently, should educational messages refer to nutrients or foods and their types of production, distribution, commercialization and consumption? How can we make food education effective and responsible in a society with these characteristics and what criteria should we use to assess such education?

In addition, there is another problem: most policies and actions in nutrition education often overlook that learning about foods is not a process that consists of or solely depends upon the nutritional information that may be acquired by an individual; rather, such learning is framed within a process of child education and socialization in the broadest sense.[17] Education is more than just providing information or training, it is about shaping and developing people's abilities – in accordance with their culture and society – so that they may become capable of living together in the most autonomous and responsible way possible.

For all these reasons, by connecting theories of social conflict with medical anthropology and the findings of several studies conducted by our research team (the Food Observatory at the University of Barcelona), this article intends to reflect on how food can be a tool for education as well as for food and social transformation. In this sense, we propose a new theoretical and methodological approach to food education which goes beyond the nutritional and individualistic perspective, introducing a political, economic, sociocultural and participatory perspective that will bring us closer to an innovative understanding of the phenomenon: food as a tool for the analysis and diagnosis of social and food-based realities, but also as a tool for socio-educational intervention and change. To that effect, our aim is a food education in which adequate eating is the end (educating to learn how to eat), but also a means help children to be able to solve conflicts (whether personal or collective) and to integrate themselves into their social and food contexts in the most autonomous, critical and responsible way possible. We think that, by so doing, we can promote healthier societies globally speaking, that is, not only from a nutritional point of view, but also from a social perspective: taking into account dialogue, respect, equality and social cohesion.

Some of the findings presented in this article are compiled from several research studies, including: "Eating and its circumstances: pleasure, coexistence and health [*La alimentación y sus circunstancias: placer, conveniencia y salud*] (2004-2006),"[18] financed by the Fifth International Forum on Food; "Learning how to eat: processes of socialization and eating behavior disorders" [*Aprender a comer: procesos de socialización y trastornos del comportamiento alimentario*];[19] and "Eating at school and its circumstances: learning, culture and health [*Comer en la escuela y sus circunstancias: aprendizaje, cultura y salud*] (2009-2012)," financed by Spain's Ministry of Science and Innovation (CSO2009-08741).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The article is the result of several research projects conducted since 2004 at the Food Observatory (University of Barcelona) and financed, as noted in the previous paragraph, by several prestigious entities at the national and international levels.

These research studies used a qualitative approach, applying ethnographic and comparative techniques. They were based on field work carried out in eight educational institutions located in Catalonia (Tarragona and Barcelona), which have different sociocultural characteristics according to the school's sociodemographic situation (located in the center of the city or in peripheral neighborhoods), ideological characteristics (religious or secular), and the presence of the State (fully state-owned or partially state-owned).

In addition to consulting documentary and bibliographic sources, we conducted nonparticipant observation in the different settings associated with the children's eating behavior within educational institutions (corridors, playgrounds, school entrances and exits, and school dining halls), as well as semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews and discussion groups. We held 117 semi-structured interviews with children aged 6-16 years regarding their eating attitudes and habits. We carried out more than twenty in-depth interviews with children aged 6-16 years aimed at exploring the causes[20] of their eating practices and attitudes. We also organized five discussion groups with different agents participating in children's food education: three discussion groups with monitors and staff in charge of school dining halls, a discussion group with teachers and a discussion group with parents.

In the case of underage participants, the relevant parental informed consent was obtained through the authorities in each educational institution, and the teachers informed parents of the goals and scope of the information. The adult study participants were informed about the goals and research methods and each of them signed the pertinent informed consent. All participants were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality regarding the data they provided throughout all the different stages of the process.

The interviews were transcribed literally, reviewed and given confidential treatment. Data were then organized into a hermeneutical unit, coded and exploited in a systematic and exhaustive way through the qualitative analysis software MAXQDA. This software permitted performing an analysis of thematic content regarding the empirical material collected by means of an inductive method of re-reading and encoding, useful in generating an explanatory framework with respect to the research goal.

SOME ASSUMPTIONS REGARDING SOCIAL CONFLICT

Diversity and multiculturalism in Europe is an inescapable and continuously increasing reality. Andreas Kaplan[21] describes Europe as a continent embracing maximum cultural diversity at minimal geographical distances. This diversity is found in different spheres of everyday life such as art, culture, religion, education, and food. However, in the presence of this enriching diversity, some (new) ways of discrimination and inequality are also emerging which, in turn, create different types of conflicts.

In this sense, many experts agree that when complexity is added to contexts of diversity, conflict will inevitably occur.[15] Such conflict often occurs as the result of social interactions that trigger disagreements, inequalities, and even situations in which difference is not recognized as a personal or social right.

In this sense, order and social integration have been, and still are, core debates in the history of social theory. Indeed, social conflict has been the central subject of reflection within such disciplines as philosophy, sociology or anthropology, and is taken as the basis of the present work to articulate our final proposal.

On the one hand, we consider the notion of *conflict* from perspectives such as those developed by Simmel,[22] Giner[23] or Tejerina,[24] who understand it as an ever-present phenomenon in any society that both changes and provokes social changes. In this sense, social conflict may be seen as something paradoxically necessary to promote social transformation and to move toward a society with more cohesion. Similarly, it should be understood that every social conflict is part of a larger social reality; therefore, conflict can operate as a mechanism of production of a society and as a form of socialization.[24] Also many contend that the study of social change has developed schemes and theories based, precisely, on social conflict.[23] Both reflections lead to the idea that social changes often involve prior conflicts that promote social

changes because they help to settle disagreements and reach new models of social integration. In this sense, social conflict would be considered an integrating phenomenon, which facilitates cosmopolitanism, respect and coexistence, and not necessarily a factor of social dissolution.

Nevertheless, to reach a resolution, social conflict needs a context of sociocultural dialogue. In this sense, several authors[25,26,27,28] highlight that every conflict necessarily involves a process of verbal, written or bodily communication in which incompatibilities of interests emerge involving two or more people that interact with one another. They further state that in order to negotiate and solve a conflict, both parties have to lose and win something. In this process, the people, groups or communities at stake must relate, interact and dialogue with one another so that they can get to know, understand, respect and negotiate the reasons for which each one is defending their position.

Food conflicts in our present-day society

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO),[29] the right to adequate food is an international human right that has long existed and that many countries have committed to protect – but that is far from being covered. Over the last decades, several countries have developed and implemented constitutional reforms, federal laws, strategies, policies and programs aimed at enforcing the right to adequate food for all. Worldwide, the right to adequate food has been a legally binding human right under international law for more than thirty-five years and, since then, several legal safeguards have been granted to specific groups, like women, children and people with disabilities. In 2004, the FAO Member Nations approved by consensus the "Voluntary Guidelines to Support the Progressive Realization of the Right to Adequate Food in the Context of National Food Security," which offer practical orientation on how to apply the right to adequate food in a wide range of areas of policies and programs. More recently, the "Voluntary Guidelines on the responsible governance of tenure of land, fisheries and forests in the context of national food security," or the United Nations "Zero Hunger Challenge," give priority to the enforcement of the right to food.[29]

However, according to data provided by the organization mentioned above, there are more than 793 million people that go to bed hungry every night. In Spain, one-third of children live at risk of social exclusion, 30% are at nutritional risk and one out of four children does not eat fruit or vegetables on a daily basis.[16] The number of children who do not have lunch before going to school has also increased, as have the social and non-governmental initiatives for distributing food in schools. Nevertheless, given its legally binding nature, the right to adequate food should not be fulfilled through charitable actions or welfare assistance.[29] The right to food is a human right of every woman, man, girl and boy, which has to be fulfilled with suitable actions by governments and non-governmental actors. Notwithstanding, in Spain, the State and several third sector associations and entities have embarked on welfare assistance intervention due to the budget cuts established by the government after the socioeconomic crisis which arose in 2008. This phenomenon has significantly increased inequalities in terms of food access and availability, and has increased the conflicts among families and communities regarding access to social aid (covering school food services, for instance).

Furthermore, food conflicts have another, subtler face which goes beyond the macroeconomic inequalities in food access and availability. We will refer to them as *food microconflicts*, following the micro-macro scheme of sociological theories. Unlike the ones discussed above (which could be called *food macroconflicts),* food microconflicts include those characterized by their lack of homogeneity and the logic of separation and exchange, in which the individual prevails over the group (without losing contact with

the group or the social structure by which the individual is determined), and have to do with the more personal, internal and symbolic dimension of food choices. More precisely, we are referring to the numerous contradictions that place our everyday eater in a difficult and/or conflictive situation when choosing what and how to eat in a social and food environment like ours, characterized by an unprecedented abundance but also commercialized and biopoliticized.[30] With the term *biopoliticized* we refer to the Foulcauldian perspective[30] regarding government control and the power exercised over the bodies of the population through food, including pharmaceutical laboratories and large companies that try to monopolize food production (such as the transgenic industry), as well as the commercialization of our bodies through a large supply of foods with varying purposes: esthetics, health, pleasure, comfort, among others. From a very early age, children are transmitted responsibilities. Later on, personal conflicts may appear regarding demands and/or expectations which they begin to assume or interiorize – received from the socioeducational order in the broadest sense (family, friends, school, the media, among others) – and that have to do, particularly in the case of food, with aspects as diverse as: what foods are considered good or bad for one's health; what foods should be chosen and how they should be eaten to reach an ideal bodily esthetic; and what and how to eat so as to relate to others in different contexts and spheres of personal, working and family life. All in all, *what* and *how to eat* to achieve social success.

In our present-day society we can find foods ranging from ready-to-cook products that are useful for saving time in a society characterized by haste, everyday stress and productivity, to products that serve precisely to palliate the effects of all that and that promote pleasure and comfort. Moreover, along with this homogenizing supply, we have private and social initiatives that seek to give identity and distinction to certain foods and their consumers. In turn, we also have functional foods and ecological initiatives

that are intended to improve our health (Barcelona, for instance, has declared itself to be a v*eg-friendly* city*)*. Nevertheless, this wide range of possibilities often entails contradictions like the promotion of esthetic products that rebut the medical nutritional and health discourse.[12,13] In fact, several of our research studies[18,19] revealed controversies many parents have to face when teaching eating habits to their children:

> *The truth is that the society itself is a contradiction ... You see the ads on TV and they tell you this or that product is good for your child's health, that such and such yoghurt has lactobacillus, and stuff like that, and you don't even know what they mean, but it is supposed to be healthy. But then your doctor tells you not to pay attention to those things. The same happens with chocolate, right? You're told that it is rich in this or that, right? And, also, that a little bit of chocolate is not a bad thing, you have to eat a little bit of everything ... So ... when my son comes with a Kinder Surprise, which supposedly is not very good for his health, but which he really likes, but if he eats just a little nothing bad will happen ... What should I tell him? Do I have to prohibit it or not? Where is the line between the good and bad foods?* (Discussion group, parents).

In short, eating in terms of pleasure, likes and dislikes, health, esthetics or economic resources, without contradictions among these criteria, is not easy and puts the everyday eater in a difficult frame of mind, often creating controversies and conflicts in which, in our view, it is necessary to intervene and provide education.

Food and communication, food and education: food in conflict resolution

It is a unanimous opinion, at least within the disciplines that study food from a social and human perspective, that eating is more

than nutrition. Through eating we obtain nourishment, but, in addition, we also communicate, express ourselves and relate with one another. We do not eat everything that is biologically edible and this means that economic, political, social and ideological factors condition our food choices, as do the possibilities of food access and availability.[12] In the same way, by studying the eating behavior of a population, we get a better understanding of their lifestyles.[13] Mauss[14] defines eating as a "total social fact," and Douglas highlights that the principles of choices that guide a human being into selecting their food resources are not physiological, but cultural.[31]

According to *what we eat* and *how we eat it*, we may be individually or collectively identified, according to whether we are male or female (gender), whether we were born in one place or another (ethnicity), whether we belong to one social class or another, and so forth. That is why we can affirm that eating is a powerful communication system that emits meanings of the society within which it occurs: what we eat depends on what we are (on the ways of living – thinking and doing – of a people or of a culture), but we can also come to discover what we are like by what we eat, since each eating behavior or attitude – either individual or collective – has a specific meaning that only makes sense within the society and the culture in which it takes place.

Generally speaking, culture establishes certain norms according to each society, thus forming ways of life and organization; in other words, specific ways of thinking and doing. As regards eating behavior, culture establishes norms relative to the composition and structure of intakes, cooking techniques, mealtimes, commensality, places for each meal, the selection of foods and the manner of mixing and manipulating them, the conservation treatment, ways of serving and eating, food distribution, and the suitability or lack of suitability of foods (those that are most or least healthy, good or bad depending on certain aspects). In the same way, culture establishes what eating manners are socially understood as correct: if it is advisable to start

with one or another type of intake, the food calendars according to celebrations, as well as the eating models according to gender, age or social class.[13] In fact, gender is essential to understand and explain the varying conceptions and practices with respect to eating, one's body and health, as well as the different and unequal incidence of certain eating problems – such as eating disorders – in men and women. In one of our studies,[9] we observed that the meaning of eating and not eating acquired by children is as different and unequal as their socializing context, that is to say, the way they interact *with* and *within* the environments of their family, school, and peer groups, among others. In this respect, we could observe that women socialize more in a model where food is used as a tool of bodily control and expression of discomfort, while men often express themselves and control their bodies through physical exercise because they also tend to socialize more through sports and activities involving environment control[19]:

I used to play basketball as a little girl, but I don't play sports anymore, hardly at all. I don't know, my friends have also given it up, I don't think it's something important you have to do in order to be somebody in life... I don't know. Me, if I want lose weight, I stop eating. (Julia, 16 years old)

I'd rather do sports and play soccer and go running until I get exhausted than stop eating! I can't understand how some of the girls in my class don't eat anything in the school patio... I need my sandwich and, if it's necessary, I go running to burn it all off. (John, 16 years old)

On the other hand, there is no free will in all these norms: they are the result of the social, cultural, economic, political and ideological conditionings that are present in every society. In this sense, the whole food chain – from production to consumption – occurs in a series of complex ecological, technological, economic, political and ideological

processes which determine, to a great extent, the dynamics and the logic of eating behaviors. Therefore, when we talk about *food culture* we are referring to a set of activities conditioned by the factors mentioned above, established by a human group and whose purpose is to obtain the necessary foods to survive. This also includes processes like procurement, production, distribution, storage, conservation, preparation and consumption, as well as a set of rules, standards, beliefs, and knowledge that organize and guide the ways of eating of a specific society and of the people and subjects that make up this society.[13]

On the other hand, culture establishes regularity (norms) in eating in every society, and that also confers specificity, insofar as there are no two cultures exactly alike and, therefore, there are no two food cultures (or ways of cooking) exactly alike. However, food cultures are not static, they change in accordance with the various social interactions of the subjects that constitute them. For that reason, and under the umbrella of social constructionism and the social theory of practice, we believe that each subject learns and is socialized *in* and *from* their respective eating culture, taking on and interiorizing the social and food norms and values prevailing in their society. However, we should not understand this socialization process as something static since, despite the fact that our eating choices are determined by gender, age, social class or ethnicity – among many other sociocultural variables – socialization and food education should be also analyzed considering the mechanisms of negotiation and reinterpretation that each subject carries out based on these social standards, (re)producing and/or transforming the social system itself.

Therefore, as noted above, if each food culture is the result of a specific social, political, ideological and historical context, we can also affirm that eating is a powerful system of communication that transmits information about the characteristics of every person, group or community. Through the food that we eat, we transmit what we are. Each dish, each food, each ingredient, the way in which we combine them, the categorizations of

different foods, the principles of exclusion and association among different foods, the traditional or religious prescriptions and prohibitions, the meal practices and cooking rituals (recipes), the different uses of foods, the order in which they are eaten, their composition, the timing and the number of daily intakes, and so forth, are sending information about a society and its population.[13] Moreover, the different manners of eating may constitute a means to identify oneself, to make oneself known or to reaffirm oneself in front of the other, to affirm one's own status, to acquire prestige or not, to promote oneself socially, to express emotions, acceptance or rejection, among others.

In short, eating constitutes one of the cultural characteristics that survives more easily in contact with other cultures and that is hailed strongly as a sign to mark and transmit self-identity.[32,33,34] Therefore, given its charge full of meanings, eating can also be signaled as a powerful tool for dialogue and, consequently, for conflict resolution.

FINAL DISCUSSION

Food education or food as a way of learning: proposals for an inclusive food education

In the previous pages, we have been able to show the great diversity and complexity surrounding food in our present-day society. There are different ways of thinking about, feeling toward and making food which, in turn, represent the diverse ways of thinking and doing all over the world that, in their multiple ways and levels of social interaction, often lead to controversies and conflicts *(food macroconflicts and microconflicts)* which are not always easy to settle. Likewise, we could see that food conflicts and controversies have to do with inequalities in food access and availability, and also with biopolitical[30] and market subtleties that make food choices difficult.

In this sense, addressing emerging food issues using social conflict theories has

allowed us to better grasp and understand them from a social viewpoint, but it has also offered us clues regarding their potential at the time of settling or solving such conflicts (conflict resolution). On the one hand, this analysis has served to understand social conflict as an ever-present phenomenon in any society, which is necessary to promote social transformation and to develop societies with more cohesion.[22,23,24] On the other hand, we saw that when it comes to conflict resolution dialogue and communication are fundamental.[26,27,28] Moreover, we could see that eating is a powerful communication system, full of meanings regarding our individual and collective identities.

As noted above, social (and also food) conflicts are necessary for social (and also socio-alimentary) change and transformation; communication and dialogue are tools for conflict resolution; and eating is a powerful communication system. Therefore, we propose a new approach to food education that makes the most of the dialogue and socioeducational potential found in eating to solve problems and conflicts, and also for social transformation and promotion of social cohesion.

In this sense, our proposal is aimed at two parts of the process of any social intervention, in this case a socioeducational one: (a) the first part is the study and diagnosis of the problems, in this case, social and food issues; and (b) the methodological design that we use to intervene in these problems and to transform them (to eradicate them, to improve them, and so on).

Regarding the first phase, centered on the study-diagnosis of food problems and conflicts, we propose more inclusive socio-alimentary diagnosis models that go beyond the study of nutrition as the only factor leading to health, since eating is more than nutrition and health has to do with a person's physical but also psychosocial well-being. In this regard, we saw that most food education plans, projects or campaigns focus on the nutritional dimension, overlooking or relegating to second place the sociocultural factors – social, political, economic,

historical and ideological – which are precisely those that condition a person's food choices, as well as food access and availability.[12,6,7,11] That is why we need diagnostic research methods that will allow us to go beyond foods and their nutritional elements, in order to also study the teaching-learning processes in which they are found. We are referring to a method of inquiry regarding what children eat, but also about where, when, how, with whom and why they eat what they do. Therefore, it is about delving into the diversity and complexity of eating practices and attitudes for each person, group or community, and in the different socioeducational situations, circumstances and contexts in which they are framed. This also involves thinking about specific data collection and qualitative data analysis techniques, which are less simplifying, able to take into account the nutritional part of foods in relation to the sociocultural context of their production, distribution, elaboration and consumption. Only in this way will we be able to unravel the possible inequalities that are determining the various eating practices and attitudes, as well as the causes of the personal or social conflicts in which they are resulting.

Regarding the second step of sociocultural intervention, centered on the design and elaboration of a methodological proposal of socioeducational intervention, we suggest using food as a tool for education, in this case, to educate in and for social coexistence and cohesion. We are referring to the importance of teaching how to eat, but also, of using food as a socioeducational means. Given the dialogical potential surrounding food, we are considering the possibilities that may be offered through a type of food education which generates spaces for dialogue in which the children themselves can exchange their eating experiences linked to specific personal and collective situations that explain those experiences: economic, historical, political, ideological situations, among others. With different food-related motives (celebrations, birthday parties, school meals, family meals, picnics, excursions, trips, etc.), we can generate

spaces for coexistence and reflection in connection with food production, distribution, elaboration or consumption, so children may develop their critical abilities and, by so doing, become the direct protagonists of their own food learning process, as well as of the changes and transformations that this autonomous learning involves in the broadest framework of their/our society.

All in all, a qualitative analysis of eating will help us study and understand the causes of eating behaviors, as well as the individual and collective experiences that give them meaning. At the same time, food can be used to educate about, based in and in benefit of

the social. Therefore, eating can be a magnificent tool to encourage reflection and critical analysis and, as a result, the individual and social empowerment of people, groups and communities that seek to attain and enforce their social and health rights. In this sense, food allows us to detect and unravel the causes of many inequalities and personal and social conflicts, as well to make socioeducational interventions so as to eradicate them or, in any case, to favor more inclusive food education policies that promote healthier societies in global terms, that is, not merely nutritional but also, socially speaking, based on integration, equality and social cohesion.

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