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De aquí y de allá: Changing Perceptions of Literacy through Food Pedagogy, Asset-Based Narratives, and Hybrid Spaces

Lucía Durá, Consuelo Salas, William Medina-Jerez, and Virginia Hill

In this article we describe La Escuelita Afterschool Program, an interdisciplinary, inter-institutional, after-school literacy partnership on the U.S.–Mexico border. The Escuelita Program used food pedagogy to tap into funds of knowledge, bridging home and school literacies. In doing so, the program challenged deficit thinking and enhanced K-6 students' curiosity and engagement around traditional subjects: science, math, reading, and writing. Through a process of experimental curriculum design and a variety of qualitative data collection methods, we discuss how food pedagogy can help to change deficit-based narratives and how it helps expand the scope of literacy acquisition.

Antes de venir a la escuelita sí sabía mucho de maíz pero no se me ocurrió platicarle a mis hijas. Cuando ya vinimos a la Escuelita y que ya era el tema de ese año, y mis hijas me preguntaron “Mami tu sabías de esa planta?” Sí, y por qué no nos habías dicho? Y sabías de esto y esto? Pues sí pero estamos esperando que fuéramos al rancho. Ya ellas empezaron a conocer todo sobre del maíz y que consumimos y que no sabíamos, no sabían que es tan importante sobre el maíz.

Before coming to the Escuelita I did know a great deal about corn but I did not think to share that with my daughters. When we began coming to the Escuelita I discovered that was the subject of the year, and my daughters asked me “Mami you knew of this plant?” [I responded] Yes, and [my daughters asked] why didn't you tell us? And [they asked] you knew about this and this? [I responded] Well yes, but I was waiting to go to the ranch. They began learning all about the corn we eat, things we didn't know and why it is so important.

—“Alicia,” La Escuelita Afterschool Program Parent

Our city, situated on the U.S.–Mexico border, ranks consistently low in well-known studies of literacy (Miller). These studies focus on traditional definitions and markers of literacy such as number of bookstores, average educational attainment, and availability

of periodical publishing resources. Yet, as we know, literacy is highly complex and involves the intersection of countless internal and external factors. Studies like Miller's decide whose culture has capital, and, in doing so, fuel public perception of literacy deficiencies (Yosso). They exclude more nuanced markers of literacy like bilingualism and biculturalism as proposed in *Generaciones' Narratives* by John Scenters-Zápico. Even when speaking more than one language and being fluent in more than one culture are common, necessary, and valued, as is the case in our location, conversations about literacy focus largely on deficits (Sepúlveda). This is problematic because *global* perceptions of literacy feed into *local* classroom practices, and these classroom practices, in turn, reinforce a learning culture—one that influences what we think we are capable of or destined to accomplish (Engberg and Allen), i.e., the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves (Geertz).

As educator Luis Moll argues, “existing classroom practices underestimate and constrain what Latino and other children are able to display intellectually” (179). Through his concept of Funds of Knowledge, Moll advocates turning to asset-based learning, especially in communities where such assets might be hidden from plain view. “Alicia’s” quote at the beginning of this article, originally in Spanish and translated into English, is illustrative of the types of food and literacy connections the Escuelita Program facilitated. In this article we propose food pedagogy as an effective medium to tap into Funds of Knowledge. We describe “La Escuelita Afterschool Program,” (Escuelita Program) an interdisciplinary, inter-institutional, after-school literacy partnership in El Paso, Texas.¹ The Escuelita Program used a food pedagogy-based curriculum to challenge deficit thinking and boost K-6 students’ curiosity and engagement around traditional subjects: science, math, reading, and writing.

In the sections that follow we explain our theoretical and conceptual perspectives, contextualize our project and study, and answer the following research questions: (1) How does food pedagogy tap into funds of knowledge? (2) How does making connections between “home” and “school” knowledge challenge deficit-based perceptions of literacies? We conclude with a brief discussion of implications and areas for future research.

Our Theoretical and Conceptual Perspectives

Funds of Knowledge

Some areas of academia are beginning to move away from the ideology that knowledge is only created within the classroom space. This transition allows what is generally regarded as untraditional or “home knowledge” to hold as much cultural capital as school knowledge. Moll and other scholars refer to this as Funds of Knowledge (FoK), “knowledge of strategic importance to households” (Moll and Greenberg 323). FoK includes knowledge about farming, medicinal remedies, and home or auto repair, but also institutional access, school programs, and occupational opportunities. FoK “[contrasts] sharply with prevailing and accepted perceptions of working class families

as somehow disorganized socially and deficient intellectually” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez, 134). Re-examining what counts as knowledge opens a space where minority students are seen not as deficient in traditional conceptions of knowledge or literacy, but instead rich in other FoK and literate in other contexts. As argued by Moll et al., “by capitalizing on household and other community resources, we can organize classroom instruction that far exceeds in quality the rote-like instruction these children commonly encounter in schools” (132). Several studies hold FoK at their core for re-examining teacher preparation; they advocate for teachers to recognize, examine, acknowledge, and leverage the FoK with which their students enter the classroom (See Licona; Calabrese Barton, and Tan; Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg; Moll and Greenberg; Moll, Amanti, Neff, González).

Asset-Based Community Work and Hybrid Spaces

The concept of FoK dovetails well with asset-based thinking in community work in rhetoric and composition (RC). Asset-based thinking “begins with assets instead of deficits” (Grabill 96). It encourages an ideological stance that gives people agency and credit for their current expertise; positions community members as co-constructors of knowledge, not merely as “clients” in need of a service provided by outsiders (Grabill 96); and encourages active participation instead of passive reception (See Cushman; Grabill; Mathieu; Simmons; Flower; and Long). Although FoK focus on assets and are seen as a desirable pedagogical practice, it is also important to note that enacting such pedagogy in a traditional classroom may be difficult, even more so in an environment of high stakes standardized testing. Science education scholar Miguel Licona argues that a “FoK approach requires teachers to become ethnographers” (869). The extra time educators must take to visit their students’ homes and learn their FoK may be asking too much of our teachers.

Several scholars, however, have studied how “hybrid spaces,” such as community centers, can be ideal places to reveal and capitalize on students’ FoK (See Buxton; Seiler). In their study merging FoK, discourses, and hybrid space in science education, Angela Calabrese Barton and Edna Tan explain the value of hybridity:

We are interested in notions of hybridity because we have observed how youth take up knowledges, resources, and identities that often go unsanctioned in school. In so doing, they author new identities, drawing from nontraditional funds and Discourses [sic] to renegotiate the boundaries of their participation in class in ways that allow them to build their social identities while establishing epistemic authority. (52, 53)

Hybrid spaces facilitate “meeting halfway” and certain neutrality that allows for non-threatening conversation and shared decision-making. Yet, in addition to finding the right physical space, rhetorical framing is crucial for setting a tone of invitation and co-ownership. Otherwise, how does an “outsider” get an invitation to “help”? In our particular project, we anchored engagement in food.

Food Pedagogy

When we discuss, “food pedagogy” we speak of it from a Food Studies perspective. According to food scholar Warren Belasco,

[...] “food extends far beyond nutrients, calories, and minerals.” A meal is much more than the sum of its parts, for it encompasses what Barthes calls “a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behavior.” [...] People use food to “speak” with each other, to establish rules of behavior (“protocols”), and to reveal as Brillat-Savarin said, “what you are.” (15)

Food studies is a multidisciplinary, multifaceted discipline that examines the diverse aspects of *food*, from gender, race, class, to psychology, philosophy, consumption, production and distribution (See Counihan and van Esterik). In our use of “food pedagogy,” food is an “object, site, target and ‘technology’ of education and learning” and is a “*vehicle* for learning” (emphasis in the original, Flowers and Swan 419, 423). “Food pedagogy” is “a congeries of education, teaching and learning about how to grow shop for, prepare, cook display, taste, eat and dispose of food by a range of agencies, actors and media; and aimed [at] a spectrum of ‘learners’ ... ” (426). All of these activities are packed with tacit knowledge, and by making such everyday knowledge explicit, we have the opportunity to make explicit both traditional literacies, typically learned in books or school, and FoK. We propose that food pedagogy has great rhetorical weight as an entry point to engaging community literacies. Scholars and practitioners in the field of education have found creative ways to elicit FoK, and we believe that by putting the work that is being done in education, RC, food studies and food pedagogy in conversation will allow more fruitful harvests of information about the groups we work with.

Our Partnership

How We Came to Be

Our Escuelita Program team is part of an interdisciplinary research group formed in 2011 at The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). The mission of this group has been to develop, implement, and document integrated intervention programs that contribute to health and educational equity among Hispanic populations, particularly through translational research. The Escuelita Program is a spin-off of this group. During initial meetings, which took place at the UTEP library, notions of literacy, STEM, culture, and cooking surfaced, and curiosity solidified around the following questions:

- How is it that in bilingual communities like ours conversations focus so much on deficits?

- What would happen if we re-wrote the script of our literacy story? How might we see traditional literacies (science, math, reading, and writing) through a cultural lens?
- Might we see changes in the ways our students perceive themselves? Might we see changes in the ways students are perceived by others? Might we see changes in students' educational outcomes?

The team grew to include faculty and graduate students in science education, RC, literature, food studies and art; resident relations specialists from the Housing Authority of the City of El Paso (HACEP); teachers and aides from a local school district; and students in grades K-6 and their parents. Our common interdisciplinary and inter-institutional denominator? Food. We decided to use food pedagogy to anchor lessons, hands-on cooking, and conversations about ourselves and our heritage.

Our ultimate goal was to write and test a curriculum specifically for after-school programs that used food as a “hook” for students to engage traditionally challenging concepts or subjects. The pilot project (which we also refer to as Year 1) was titled “The HACEP-UTEP After-school Pilot Project: Promoting Scientific and Literacy Skills through Culture-based Activities.” It came to be known informally as the Escuelita Program (*escuelita* is a diminutive, and endearing, term for school in Spanish). The project in Year 2 was titled “Using Corn to Bridge Home and School Literacies: A Culture-based, After-school Curriculum Merging Science, Math, Geography, History, Reading, and Writing.”

HACEP and The Escuelitas. HACEP manages 6,500 public residential units comprising multi-family, scattered sites, and elderly communities, which represent 40,000 residents whose average annual income is below \$10,000. According to Holly Mata et al., single females with children comprise over fifty percent of HACEP households. Almost half of HACEP residents are under the age of 14. HACEP residents are predominately of Hispanic heritage (98%) and mostly Mexican immigrants and Mexican-Americans.

HACEP hosts four Escuelita sites. Escuelitas are both programs and physical spaces (usually one room with access to the larger community center) contained in the different HACEP community centers throughout the city. A teacher and several tutors or aides from one of the local school districts work with students from that community after school. Among the school district and HACEP communities, Escuelitas are generally perceived as places where students receive tutoring and enrichment activities or do homework.

Educational Partners and Curriculum Overview. The two institutional educational partners for this project were UTEP and a local school district.² Collaborating partners from these institutions included

William Medina-Jerez—PI of the Escuelita Program. He is originally from Colombia and is an Associate Professor in Science Education. He worked with three cohorts of pre-service elementary teachers in science education as part of the project.

Lucía Durá—Co-PI for the project. She is an Assistant Professor in RC with a background in participatory action research, language, food writing, and food pedagogy.

Consuelo Salas—Ph.D. student in RC with a background in Food Studies. She designed and implemented sessions with Dr. FS on food and culture. She conducted ethnographic research using Activity Theory during the project and provided observational feedback for the collaborating team.

Francisco Valente Saéñz—M.A. art student who worked on a separate collaborative, public art project with HA residents. He introduced Drs. Medina-Jerez and Durá.

Meredith Abarca—Associate Professor of English Literature and a Food Studies scholar. She implemented one session in Year 1 and helped to co-design and implement the curriculum in Year 2. She brought a Food Studies and culture lens to the project.

Virginia Hill and Sonia Legarreta—two resident relations specialists from HACEP, who link residents with services that can improve quality of life.

Ms. GB—Escuelita teacher for Year 1. She worked diligently with the students in between formal Escuelita sessions on vocabulary-building and reading and writing.

Ms. IH—an art teacher from Ms. GB's school who documented our work using photography and video and facilitated use of the school's computer lab when needed for art projects.

Ms. ML—Escuelita teacher for Year 2. She was instrumental in helping us design age-appropriate activities. Her daughter was also an Escuelita participant.

Ms. JS—school district Specialist and official partnership liaison.

School district tutors—two to three tutors from the school district supported the work of the Escuelita students and teachers. They did not participate in planning sessions but were present at feedback/research sessions.

Methodology

Curriculum Development as a Design Experiment

Inspired by Calabrese Barton and Tan's science education study on "Funds of Knowledge and Discourses and Hybrid Space," we approached our work of curriculum development as a design experiment. A design experiment in educational research, as explained by Cobb, Confrey, diSessa, Lehrer, Schauble, is meant "to develop a class of theories about both the process of learning and the means that are designed to support that learning" (10). Design experiments are necessarily (1) praxis-based, (2) interventionist, (3) prospective—based on a hypothesis, (4) iterative, and (5) immediately relevant to practitioners, i.e., resulting theories are pragmatic (Cobb et

al. 9-11). In a way similar to Calabrese and Tan, we used our design experiment to address simultaneously problems of practice and develop/test principles of teaching and learning that might be applicable beyond the original research site.

Data Collection and Analysis

Given the speculative and iterative nature of conducting a design experiment, we drew from a variety of data collection methods to reflect on the process and products and feed insights back into project design over the course of each school year. In Year 1, we collected data anchored in food-based lessons. This included artifacts (e.g., drawings, writing, and photographs/video), narratives (oral and written), and observations (several of us kept research journals). We also conducted focus groups with family members and interviewed children participants. In addition to these methods, in Year 2 we added an Activity Theory ethnography, which Consuelo conducted for a methods course in her doctoral program, and asset-based, participatory methods: Appreciative Interviews (AIs) (Lipmanowicz & McCandless), Cultural Memory Banking (CMB) (Handa & Tippins), Participatory Interviews, and Participatory Drawing and Narrations. We analyzed all data continuously as a team using Glaser & Strauss' constant comparative method to extract key themes. We also employed visual discourse analysis to interpret the composition, context, and reception of images (See Christmann and Durá et al.).

Curriculum Design and Implementation

Our first research question asks, how does food pedagogy tap into funds of knowledge? To answer this question, in this section we describe key insights from the recursive curriculum design and implementation process. In the mode of Jessica Seinfeld who writes healthy recipes under the auspices of “yummy” foods, in Year 1 we set out to write a curriculum for the Escuelita Program that used food to “grab” students’ attention so that they may explore science, math, reading, and writing along the way. We also aimed to re-write the script of our literacy story by viewing traditional school literacies through a cultural lens.

We used food to anchor all lessons, invited parents to participate often, incorporated art as much as possible, and coordinated lessons with the seasons or holidays, e.g., planting time, harvest time, Thanksgiving, etc. (González and Moll). Each session contained one or more 90-minute lesson. The curriculum sequence we followed in Years 1 and 2 is in table 1.

Table 1. Curriculum Sequence for Year 1 and Year 2 Design Experiment

YEAR 1	YEAR 2
<p>Session 1: “<i>The Favorite Plate</i>” Ms. CG, guides students in the design of a colorful plate representing their favorite meal using the 5 Ws as a heuristic.</p>	<p>Preliminary Session with Families: “Appreciative Interviews” (AIs) and “Cultural Memory Bank” (CMB). Escuelita Program team brings home cooked meal to share with parents.</p>
<p>Session 2: “Practicing with Cooking Techniques” Prior to this session Ms. CG prepares a glossary of the terms students practice using. Students perform different cooking techniques, e.g., measuring, mixing, and folding. They prepare <i>calabacitas</i> (Mexican squash side dish), <i>merengues</i> (meringues), and <i>melcochas</i> (Colombian caramels) with guidance and are introduced to food science.</p>	<p>Session 1: “Where does corn come from?” Incorporates history and geography in tracing the historical migration of corn from different areas of the world to the students’ plates. Writing activity: map and corn diagram with various species (i.e., yellow, blue, hominy, Peruvian) and their descriptions.</p>
<p>Session 3: “Cooking with Families.” Students read bilingual books: <i>Adelita and the Veggie Cousins/ Adelita y las primas verduritas</i> and <i>A Day without Sugar/Un día sin azúcar</i>. Each family brings a vegetable and/or a fruit to be used in preparation of a soup and fruit skewers. Students and their parents practice the cooking techniques and write a family recipe (using a template) that uses at least one fruit and/or vegetable.</p>	<p>Session 2: “What food is made with corn?” Incorporates cultural history and nutrition in making direct connections with familiar recipes. Recipe reading and writing activities using visual-to-written templates (See fig. 1).</p>
	<p>Session 3: “Who makes foods made with corn?” Incorporates cultural history in greater depth, including family history. Uses a cultural artifact exhibit as teachers provided a <i>metate</i> (stone grinder), hand <i>molino</i> (mill), tortilla press, and <i>comal</i> (hot plate) to demonstrate culturally significant traditional ways of processing corn in the home. Students interview a family member or neighbor using a template to record responses. They also bring a corn “artifact” and write a short story about it.</p>

YEAR 1**Session 4: “Revising Recipes.”**

Students go through a peer review process of their family recipes and revise with help of tutors. Students write a recipe for cold sandwich wraps using a visual-to-writing template (See fig. 1).

Session 5: “The Ideal/Colorful Plate.” Introduction of the USDA/Harvard/Michelle Obama plate for comparison with the students’ initial plate. Students color the “Obama” plate and work on a third plate: their “improved” favorite plate, which they explain.

Sessions 6 and 7: “The Faces of Food.” In Part I, students use bagels and vegetables to represent a family member’s face. They tell an oral story about the person. In Part II, students use ingredients for Mexican tostadas to create a face that expresses how they feel that day. They describe their face and that particular emotion(s).

Culminating Event with Families: Students and their families received a compilation of the Escuelita recipes, including Escuelita and family recipes.

YEAR 2**Interim Session with Families:**

Videotaped family member interviews and potluck.

Session 4: “What other things are made with corn?” Teachers demonstrate the multiple uses of corn. Demonstration of physical objects that are also made with corn; for example, batteries, etc. Students not only have the opportunity to write, but physically see how science uses food for purposes outside of nutrition.

Session 5: “Why is corn important?” Students reflect on the information they have learned throughout the unit, and considered the various cultural, historical, and scientific implications of corn. In a group writing exercise or through picture books students compose a story of why they believe corn is important.

Culminating Event with Families: Stories are compiled, formatted into an illustrated book/booklet, and presented to the wider housing, school district, and university community.


Year 1 Insights

At the end of Year 1 our team learned four key lessons. First, constant with the process of design experiments as a methodology, the curriculum was under constant revision. For example, we added Sessions 6 as a result of Meredith and Consuelo joining the team. Meredith had done the bagel face activity in a different setting and introduced us to it. We then added the tostada face—Session 7—for cultural relevance as we learned that some students were unfamiliar with bagels. Second, we found that some of the most successful moments involved family members cooking with students and family members sharing recipes. Recipes are a conversation starter, even within family units. For example, students had questions for their parents about the techniques and the origins of the recipes. Third, we learned that positioning students as makers and doers brings out other ways of knowing. This ontological dimension is a valuable aspect of food pedagogy. Making or cooking allows students to work with their hands and learn something about themselves. It also enables them to “know” what they are describing in oral or written form. Students felt that if they lacked the vocabulary for something, “showing” was a valid technique. Art as “doing” worked in a similar way. Using a visual to written template, students draw the steps in a recipe first and then describe the steps in words (See fig. 1 below). This meets students where they are and allows all of them to be active participants, regardless of skill level.

1. **Recipe title** (Título de la receta): Ensalada de maiz

2. **Ingredients**: List the ingredients below (Escribe el nombre de cada ingrediente)

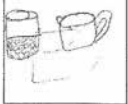
1. <u>maiz</u>	2. <u>tomate</u>	3. <u>cebollin</u>
4. <u>cilantro</u>	5. <u>queso fresco</u>	6. <u>limon</u>
7. <u>aceite</u>	8. <u>chile</u>	9. _____




3. **Steps** (Pasos):

Pay close attention to the instructions for this recipe. Then “draw” the 6 steps in order. Finally, write the instructions in the blanks.


Presta atención a las instrucciones de esta receta. Vas a “dibujar” cada uno de los 6 pasos de la receta. Después escribe la descripción de cada paso.

A. 


primero pones un
tazon de taza de aceite

B. 


segunda dos cucharadas
de tomate picado

C. 


una cucharada
de cebollin

F. 

finalmente
añades un limon
una cucharada de
aceite y más
en folio

E. 

una cucharada
de queso fresco

D. 

una cucharada
de maiz

Figure 1. Visual to Written Recipe Template

A fourth lesson is leveraging the richness of our linguistic backgrounds, e.g., hybridity. When students had the ability to choose a language for a particular activity, they didn't feel "stuck." And yet, the curricular structure gave them plenty of opportunities to also practice their more challenging language.

Year 2 Insights

Based on what we learned in Year 1, in Year 2 we began the program with a greater emphasis on participatory and asset-based techniques. We decided to focus on an agricultural theme that would be relevant for everyone involved—something that everyone had access to, that was in our daily diets, and that grows in the area. We chose corn. And seeing the value of family narratives in Year 1, we decided to incorporate appreciative interviews and cultural memory banking from the first session. AIs are meant to discover and build on the root causes of success—as opposed to failure or barriers (Lipmanowicz & McCandless). Using AIs, questions are structured for positive discovery and storytelling, e.g., think back to when you were growing up, what was your favorite food? Who would make it? What do you remember about the tastes, ingredients? When would you eat it? Where? We used this question sequence in our first session with families to begin to populate our CMB. We used a CMB to "store" all of our findings from interviews, focus groups, observations, field trips, and lessons. This CMB was displayed on the walls of the Escuelita site and was available for all participants to populate with words, sentences, and images. Field trips during Year 2 included visits to local food factories, grocery stores, and a local corn maze; they were planned to help reinforce lessons within the class time.

At the end of Year 2, in the summer, our team met to compile lessons into a written curriculum for replication. We analyzed the findings from both years, and we structured the curriculum document as a recipe in which we explained these findings as "Essential Ingredients." Our instructions for the users read:

We have framed this thematic unit as a recipe—not one to be followed to the letter, but one to be adapted to your needs. Some ingredients, we have found, are essential. They are what helps create bridges between home and school. Others are more flexible. Their quantities can be tweaked a bit more. In this section we describe the key ingredients for the unit. ¡Buen provecho! Enjoy! (Medina-Jerez, Durá, & López)

The essential ingredients we describe in the curriculum are

- Food pedagogy not only helps to "break the ice" in any group, it also helps to tap into students' "Funds of Knowledge" and empowers students in the "doing." Students are able to learn *about* food as the topic engages a wide variety of people, but they are also able to learn *through* food: "food can be a useful teaching tool to develop an understanding of science and math concepts" (Phillips, Duffrin & Geist 24).

- A hybrid space (after-school) provided opportunities for creativity without the pressure of state assessments (tests and standards). It also provided opportunities for family members to attend and to talk to each other.
- A locally important food theme that lends itself to conversations about heritage and that is infinitely “explorable” serves as a good point of departure for inquiry. We found an agricultural theme to be relevant. Other locations might choose a theme that is relevant for other reasons, i.e., geography, industry, history.
- Family involvement grounds the FoK discovery process in heritage and home practices. It also maximizes the likelihood that ideas children bring home will be adopted/sustained.
- Inquiry structure—framing this as an exploration helps us all learn together instead of the educators as teachers and the participants as learners.
- Art, hands-on activities, field-trips and guest teachers, in ways similar to food, position students as makers and doers, creating a space for physical meaning-making, increased-self awareness, and different perspectives/new narratives.
- Explicit “transfer” language helps participants make connections about knowledge and ways of knowing from one sphere to the other.

Aligning the Classroom and Kitchen Spaces: Threads from Participants

In order to answer our second question—how does making connections between “home” and “school” knowledge challenge deficit-based perceptions of literacies?—we first describe the three part process of using “*charlas culinarias*” to make connections. We then present insights, which we have grouped thematically using a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss), from data collected from students, parents, and teachers over the course of Years 1 and 2 of the Escuelita Program.

Making Connections through *Charlas Culinarias*

If indeed our realities are shaped by language—by the stories we tell ourselves—then changing those stories becomes crucial in order to challenge deficit-based perceptions. Abarca explains that *charlas culinarias* “[...] represent spoken personal narratives, testimonial autobiography, and a form of culinary memoir [...]” (166). In the Escuelita Program, we worked to create an environment that asked parents of student participants to speak to their culinary FoK within the hybrid space of a classroom and community center. Eliciting these stories through *charlas* was a first step towards making connections between home and school. We did this in a couple of ways: (1) recipe sharing and cooking together in Year 1, and (2) integrating AIs, Participatory Interviews, and the CMB in Year 2. Through our *charlas* we attempted to move through three steps:

- Step 1: Inviting the parents to share their stories about food, production, and consumption both with their children and with other families and creating a space where those stories are cherished and valued;
- Step 2: Fostering an environment that allowed families to recognize their food production, consumption, and distribution knowledge as a literacy, i.e., knowledge that perhaps they had never before considered to be a literacy but simply a means of providing for their families;
- Step 3: In going through steps 1 and 2 with the parents, we used food to tap into students' funds of knowledge and (1) create a sense that what occurs in the kitchen is a valuable literacy; 2) make explicit connections to multiple subjects, science, geography, reading, writing, history, and using food to expand students' notions of those subjects.

Cooking as a Scientific Process

At the onset of Year 2, we conducted AIs with parents. This *charla* took place with families around a simple question: "What foods do you eat or make that have corn?" We asked parents to speak in pairs, then in fours, and then shared with the whole group stories about their cultural cooking practices as well as who they were, where they were from, and a bit about their family history. The parents explained that never before had they considered that their caloric funds of knowledge or food preparation, could be scientific; however, in the AIs parents described, for example, that they had knowledge of how to start a fire without the use of the stove—using firewood outside. Once the fire was lit, they then had the know how to keep the flame at the right temperature to prepare the foods. Parents, especially mothers, also had knowledge of various recipes involving the *nixtamalización* process (soaking corn in lime and boiling it to facilitate grinding and enhance the *masa's* (corn dough) nutritional value), different types of corn for different uses, and different tools that were used to process the corn such as the *metate* (stone grinder) for grinding and the *comal* (hot plate) for cooking. We "stored" this knowledge in the CMB.

Valuing Food Literacies

Midway through Year 2, we held a potluck to which parents brought their favorite recipes made with corn. The students conducted Participatory Interviews. They followed an interview format and were videotaped asking their parents questions about their favorite dishes and recipes made with corn. It is worth noting that, in large part, parents were not shy in front of the camera. Rather, they were enthusiastic to share more stories, and they asserted that they were very happy to share food with us as we had done with them. Thus the tone for the session was generous and festive.

Through the *charlas*, parents were able to take on an authoritative role in their FoK as preparers of food. One working parent talked about the importance of *sazón*. In her

interview she explained why one should make food taste good: “Es importante tener buena sazón. Si a la gente le gusta la comida le van a preguntar a uno como la hizo y le van a pedir más.” For this parent, good tasting food was a commodity. She said that if food tasted good people would want to know how it was made, and in a financial pinch, one could sell it. She further explained that she felt equipped to sell food if she ever lost her job. Other parents talked about the importance of passing down their heritage through food—mostly to their daughters; although one parent said she would also pass it to her son. At the end of Year 2, we conducted participatory drawing activities with parents, asking them to depict signs of change “before” and “after” engaging in the Escuelita Program. “I had never given importance to where food comes from,” said one parent. “Now when we’re eating, we have these conversations.” Another parent talked about valuing her roots and explained that when they go to the ranch in the future her children want to help warm the tortillas and learn about more things you can do with corn: “El rancho es un vil rancho, de adobe. [Ellos] no quieren salir de la cocina, donde se hacen las tortillas. Pero cuantas cosas se hacían con el maíz? [Y]o, conocía muy poquito.” A parent added that her daughter now wants to discuss similarities and differences with other Latin cultures.

Students as Makers and Doers

Cooking activities in the Escuelita Program were designed to support the translation of everyday practices into authentic learning opportunities to practice scientific habits of mind that include predicting, calculating, observing, and inferring, among others. While engaged in the cooking activities, students were able to practice reading and writing skills included in the planning, preparation, and presentation of each recipe and activity (e.g., follow directions, summarization, compare and contrast) both in Spanish and in English. A prevalent theme for both years of the Escuelita Program was that student participants stayed active and engaged with the projects both within the Escuelita setting and at home in the kitchen space. In the end-of-year focus groups, students spoke about which activities they remembered most or found to be their favorites. Students from Year 1 (even at the end of Year 2 when we conducted follow-up interviews) remembered the activities that involved cooking: making soup, fruit skewers, and *merengues* and *melcochas*. Students from Year 2 remembered tortillas to make *quesadillas*, visiting the grocery store and reading food labels, making a colorful corn salad, and doing a silk-screen painting of their favorite take-aways from the year with a narration. Similarly, when we asked students about the differences they saw between the work they do at the Escuelita and the work they do in their regular classrooms, students from both years pointed to the “doing.” “Here we are working together,” one student said. “Here we do activities. At school we do more worksheets,” another student said.

In their before/after drawings and narrations parents from Year 1 noted that their children do tasks such as help wash vegetables, chop vegetables, and read the ingredient labels. They also say things like, “I am a chef” or “this ingredient tastes good with this

other one.” In explaining before/after changes at the end of Year 1, Ms. GB said that while most of the Escuelita participants were not in her class at school, they would very proudly say hello to her in the hallway. To her this was significant as she explained that students from lower grades (she teaches 6th grade) do not customarily speak to or reach out to teachers from higher grades, much less publicly.

In the case of students from Year 2, they read food labels and tell their parents when corn is an unexpected ingredient, such as with hamburger buns or ketchup. Students from Year 2 also replicate easy recipes such as the corn salad with their parents. Ms. ML noted the significance of this theme: “Before, students were just observers. They would watch their parents. Now they do things. They can do things that they watched others do, and that’s empowering!” She also added that this curriculum is similar to what students in “Gifted and Talented” classes get, and this population is not typically exposed to such programming. Virginia and Sonia also observed that students stayed excited and were more engaged throughout the year with our involvement; they noted that students transferred some ideas from the cooking sessions to the garden project in their residential community.

Conclusion: *De aquí y de allá*

The saying, “Ni de aquí, ni de allá” in Spanish means “from neither here nor there.” It refers to the immigrant’s conundrum of physical and metaphorical liminality. Our title, *De aquí y de allá*, is a both/and proposition. The work presented in this article challenges deficit-based perceptions by bridging home and school literacies. It encourages a both/and perspective instead of either/or. Through the Escuelita Program we have described how food pedagogy taps into family FoK. Honoring and bearing witness to FoK laid the groundwork for a learning environment that encouraged students to engage in what they were already familiar with, value it, see it as a literacy, and use it to learn other subjects. Food pedagogy, in tapping into funds of knowledge, helps to expand the scope of literacy acquisition by changing the narrative about what people can expect from themselves. And learning by doing builds the confidence and know-how to transfer literacies (broadly speaking) or skills from one space to another. It is through this framework that communities traditionally seen as illiterate can begin to expand and question traditional notions of literacy.

There is great potential in food-literacy partnerships, and this is just the beginning. As food continues to trend, so can explorations and experiments with food pedagogy. Many aspects of this project can be investigated further, e.g., reading and writing artifacts, learning STEM subjects through food, the epistemological and ontological dimensions of food pedagogy, and the relationship between food pedagogy and learning outcomes. We encourage other scholars and practitioners to apply the Escuelita model of community engagement with their local communities in a way that makes sense to their context. And we welcome conversations that further inquiry as we continue to explore the Escuelita Program’s curriculum replication.

Endnotes

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2. In accordance with our confidentiality agreements, we are using pseudonyms for school district partner names.

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