



Cooking with kids: inclusive and creative fun at after school care

No activity in an after school care program can benefit all developmental areas of a school-age child more than cookery.

School-age children absolutely adore organised sport and games, where they have the opportunity to practise and perfect their physical skill levels. School-age children also love to quietly participate in a craft activity after an intellectually and socially rigorous day at school. However, an emphasis on craft and sport at after school care, limits the potential for programs to cater for the majority of attending children.

Cooking is the poor cousin to sport and craft in after school care, yet it has the same potential benefits.



School-age children will, because of their willingness to participate and be involved, naturally initiate sports and games *with or without* a staff member's presence. Sport should – and does – occur every afternoon at after school care programs in Australia, through the children's intrinsic motivation levels, not an adult's prompting.

At the same time, craft allows school-age children to be creative and to discover new talents and abilities. However, craft has been emphasised and promoted for far too long in the majority of after school care programs; and from my experience in Victorian after school care, can directly compete with a school's art curriculum. Craft is also always in danger of becoming adult-centred and not child-centred when the creative ideas emanate from the program's staff and not the children. That is, when the activity is required to follow an adult's instruction, or a prescriptive template, which should remain the domain of the classroom.

music, homework, self-directed play, self-initiated games, projects, drama, clubs and *cooking*.

Cooking is the poor cousin to sport and craft in after school care, yet it has the same potential benefits. Most children love to cook at after school care, or help to cook; and most children love to eat the end product.



Moderation is required in any after school care framework when implementing a program. A strong emphasis on sport and craft limits the time and energy children have for other beneficial activities including



(This does not include my experience at an after school care program with *Lizzie*, who spent an hour helping me make asparagus soup, but then refused to eat it, because she said it looked like 'vomit soup').

Cooking has the potential to concretely exhibit the integration of the social, emotional, physical, cognitive and language development of school-age children. It also has an educational aspect imbued within every component of its implementation. Cooking may complement the classroom's educational outcomes, without ever being a threat to them.

Cooking produces food at the end of the afternoon to proudly show parents (if it lasts that long), if staff are concerned about the need to display an end-product. Cookery is also a very effective tool to subtly increase children's self-confidence levels. The smallest input into a cooking activity has the potential to make each child feel (quite rightly) that they have contributed effectively to the end-product. Better than this, the end-product never has any pre-

determined design: *as long as it tastes good, it has been produced correctly.*

An activity involving the preparation of food educates in the science, mathematics, nutrition and language it initiates. Cooking does not require an initial highly evolved skill, only

ingredients has the positive by-product of healthy food.

Good out-of-school care activities do not always require specific skills and training. What they do require is skill in nurturing children and knowledge of the school-age child's development. These are far greater skills to grasp than those relating to rules of a game or how to make a plait out of wool.

After school care programs need to remain dynamic to cater for the needs of all children over time. Programs that remain steadfastly loyal to sport and craft as staple activities are determined to remain below the *high quality marker*.



enthusiasm and the ability to follow a recipe. If the creation does not work out, blame the recipe!

Cooking has a homely quality and surrounds centres with the aroma of freshly baked and/or prepared food, instead of the pungent smell of glue, paints, socks and school bags. Furthermore, any cooking activity with the use of wholesome

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