

Bringing Educational Thought to Public School Lunch:

Alice Waters and the Edible Schoolyard

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... if the business of preparing meals is the job of women, servants, slaves (and of course women are in all those categories), then food, the sense of taste, and gustatory appetites reside in the wrong social place to merit much notice ...

—Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste*

Food is the one central thing about human experience that can open up both our senses and our conscience to our place in the world.

—Alice Waters¹

Inspired and led by restaurant owner Alice Waters, the Edible Schoolyard (henceforth ESY) has been rethinking public school lunch over the past seventeen years at Berkeley's Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School. With explicitly acknowledged precedents in "Waldorf schools and Montessori schools, among others" (Waters, 2005), this project came about through King School principal Neil Smith's plea for Waters' partnership in 1995—and through their subsequent adventurous collaborations with a gardener, a cook, teachers, students, and parents as well, with innovative leadership from the Chez Panisse Foundation. A former school-teacher, Waters formulated its starting premise:

Right there, in the middle of every school day, lies time and energy already devoted to the feeding of children. We have the power to turn that daily school lunch from an afterthought into a joyous education, a way of caring for our health, our environment, and our community. (Waters, 2008, pp. 50-51)

Having begun thus at King School, ESY has spawned the Berkeley School Lunch Initiative, whose administrative story *Lunch Matters* details (Chez Panisse Foundation, 2008). Other educational institutions are now also participating variously in ESY, at 2,131 locations in the U.S. and around the world, including 2,033 garden classrooms, 411 academic classrooms, 330 kitchen classrooms, and 211 school cafeterias.² This well-documented, still-developing work of educational imagination has captured Michelle Obama's attention, and Robert Lee Grant has documented its influence on New Orleans' Green Charter School in his award-winning film *Nourishing the Kids of Katrina* (Grant, 2009). Besides that film, some short online videos, and a guided tour of ESY in April 2013, my main primary sources for this case study are Waters' photographically illustrated book *Edible Schoolyard* (2008), Chez Panisse Foundation's *Ten Years of Education* (2005), and ESY's own website. Thomas McNamee's hefty 2007 biography, *Alice Waters and Chez Panisse*, documents Waters' profound indebtedness to canonical educational wisdom seldom included in contemporary teacher or principal education and other cultural sources of inspiration. Rather than construct from this case a new grand narrative of educational theory to reform public schooling through commercial partnership, I want simply to suggest a variety of possible ways philosophers of education might approach and think about school lunch as a consequence of studying ESY. As climate change challenges this entire planet, could such study renew educational thought about public childrearing and coeducation that theorizes education as nourishment?

1. Around the Philosophical Block to the Edible Schoolyard

My epigraph by Alice Waters comes from Frances Moore Lappé's *Hope's Edge* (2003). Reading that book a decade ago piqued my first curiosity about King School's reconfiguration of its playground, lunch, and academic curriculum as The Edible Schoolyard, which Lappé (quoting Waters) had titled "the delicious revolution" (Lappé, 2003, pp. 37-62). This grassroots *locavore* initiative—now an international educational reform movement inspired by the Slow Food movement, aiming "to turn the public schools into Slow Schools" (Waters, 2005, p. 6)—came to interest me philosophically as a consequence of thinking I began about three decades ago. I wondered if this creative educational experiment that Lappé had described might pose philosophical questions about education—just as teachers' experimentation at the University of Chicago's Laboratory School had deepened John Dewey's thought about education and democracy while also enabling women's collaborative

construction of home economics as a new field integral to coeducation's curricular development for sex equality (Laird, 1988). "Eco-gastronomy" is the new subject matter that ESY's "edible education" teaches, bringing together food, aesthetics, and an ethic of sustainability to celebrate "diversity, tradition, character, and what its founder, Carlo Petrini, calls 'quiet material pleasure'" (Waters, 2005, p. 6). If you have read the rich documentary account of the Chicago Lab School authored by teachers Katherine Camp Mayhew and Anna Camp Edwards, who had joined Ellen Swallow Richards and others in founding home economics at the Lake Placid Conference,³ you may remember that the Lab School's children kept a garden, experimented in a kitchen, and hosted a hospitable lunch table, studying geography, history, science, and arts all the while (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936). In the wake of U.S. education's dis-investment in home economics specifically for girls and women, coeducational eco-gastronomy reconfigures such pragmatist school-foodways for the present climate-change era.

In the last century home economists brought arts and sciences to bear upon the study of child development, various sorts of design, textile and food sciences, nutrition, and human services. Thus the home economics profession led the nation to see concerns about education, health, and welfare as inextricably intertwined—and therefore to care about school lunch. But the year that I became certified to teach high school, 1979, U.S. Congress reconfigured federal government to disjoin the domain of educational policy from that of health and welfare policy. That move, fraught with philosophical problems for public education scarcely yet considered, set the stage for such administrative tyrannies as "A Nation at Risk" and "No Child Left Behind." My doctoral research responsive to the former tyranny constituted a major prelude to my interest in ESY two decades later, amid the latter tyranny. For I began my dissertation *Maternal Teaching and Maternal Teachings* (Laird, 1988, pp. 33-39) by narrating a clear case of a philosophically neglected concept that I called "*in loco parentis* teaching": a composite autobiographical vignette about my lunchtime cafeteria duty as a high school teacher. Anyone who has taught in a large regional public high school like mine knows that such duty may present challenges such as unhappy students who are rude to cafeteria servers and don't bus their trays; who make unhealthy food choices (despite whatever nutritional instruction health classes might offer) or, worse, have no healthy food choices available at all; who start food fights or waste or play with their food; who become racist, snobbish, heterosexist, prankish, mean, belligerent, or sick, or even have epileptic seizures; who come up to you and want to share a triumph, vent a grievance, tattle, joke, chat, or get advice. My school colleagues found such

pac-ing-back-and-forth duty generally dull and irksome and, like most analytic philosophers of education back then, did not regard it as “real” teaching, which only happened in the classroom or library, of course. Forbidden to sit at table with students, I found this cafeteria duty often irksome too, but mainly because I did regard it as real teaching and felt frustrated by the way my school (like most public schools) framed all such *in loco parentis* duties, required from all teachers, as demands more for *policing* children’s behavior than for *teaching* them to live well—an important conceptual distinction. I perceived school lunch’s educational possibilities for the latter purpose were being squandered foolishly.

By demonstrating that moral childrearing at home has involved teaching often conceptually distinct from teaching in analytic philosophers’ standard sense, I wanted to invite thoughtful mothers’ and teachers’ generally silenced voices into consequential public conversations about education, to invite new critical and imaginative inquiry on childrearing at school and elsewhere beyond the nuclear-family enclosure. My dissertation named such childrearing “maternal teaching,” but later I called it “teaching in a different sense” (Laird, 1994), and eventually I integrated it into my theorizing of “befriending as an educational life-practice” (Laird, 2003; Laird, 2004; Laird, 2010). My primary sources for all this conceptual construction were novels by teachers and mothers who, at a time when women were not yet warmly welcomed into academic philosophy of education, formed their own nonetheless serious educational thought carefully, into fictional art—Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* (1869/2005), Ntozake Shange’s *Betsey Brown* (1985), Sapphire’s *Push* (1996). I found that in all those autobiographically inspired literary narratives of childrearing food figured prominently in learning—offering what in *Making Sense of Taste* Carolyn Korsmeyer has studied philosophically as “narratives of eating” (Korsmeyer, 2002), although some of these were also narratives of gardening, cooking, cleaning up, and fasting. From my reading of those women’s fictions for girls coming of age to womanhood—through the lens of Audre Lorde’s “Man Child: A Black Lesbian Feminist’s Response” (Lorde, 1984)—I mapped a concept of educational achievement that constituted an aim for *children’s growing capacities and responsibility for learning to love and to survive despite their troubles, especially their mothers’ absence* (Laird, 1988). Although interpreted quite differently in practice for vastly different cultural contexts, that educational aim might be considered somehow tacitly normative for moral childrearing practices of variously embodied and situated parents, teachers, and other caregiving adults. My later, post-maternal revision of that initial conceptual formulation grew to encompass an educational achievement of young people’s growing capacities and responsibility for learning to love themselves and diverse

others (including the non-human natural world), to survive and to thrive despite their troubles, especially their mothers' absence. In Lappé's very brief early account, ESY impressed me as a possible non-fictional clear case of *public* childrearing practice toward such a basic, but complex co-educational end. For example, one teacher quoted by Lappé explains that "Emotionally, many of these kids have shut down so much," but he says, "Out here they can be themselves. They can make noise. You should hear one of the girls—she just perfected a haunting dove's call." (Lappé, 2003, p. 44)

Mary Wollstonecraft had theorized in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* that public-financed universal day-schooling should be something like ESY's, neither sedentary nor loveless, and should "confound the sex distinction" by offering girls education through freely active physical life in the natural world and mutual friendship with boys no less than through intellectual studies (Laird, 2008). Photographs and videos documenting ESY's life all seem to suggest a deliberately egalitarian sensitivity to gender that its narratives never mention explicitly, although this anecdote from Waters might imply it:

David gave two girls a box containing parts for a new wheelbarrow. He just handed them a wrench and a screwdriver and left them alone to assemble the thing. The girls did a fine job and David didn't think much of it, but at the end of the term, the two girls told him it was a highlight of their year. They said that nobody had ever trusted them to do something like that. (Waters, 2008, p. 29)

Having interpreted Wollstonecraft's normative conception of "republican coeducation" as a constructive critical response to "monarchist miseducation" (Laird, 2008), I argued that Alcott's post-Revolutionary *Little Men* (1870/2005) and *Jo's Boys* (1888/2005) had imparted vivid fictional-narrative form to Wollstonecraftian coeducation. For example, Alcott's narrator Jo March Bhaer says, "Dear me, if men and women would only trust, understand, and help one another as my children do, what a capital place the world would be!" (Alcott, 1870/2005, p. 798) Waters' stories of ESY reflect an educational disposition akin to Alcott's, as she tells Lappé, "This project has proven to me children are the leaders. The only thing holding them back is adult preconceptions about what they can and will do." (Lappé, 2003, p. 45) Reading even this brief account of ESY through Wollstonecraft's and Alcott's lenses, I saw the possibility of rethinking the thin, misleading contemporary concept of coeducation and its childrearing practices in response to global-corporatist miseducation, specifically for this era of climate change.

Embarking upon that inquiry, I noted that deeply gendered foodways

had figured prominently in coeducational learning at Plumfield, the “home-like school” whose life Alcott’s novels depicted. Global-corporatist interests that Lappé critiques dominate such foodways now, whereas ESY educates children, their parents and teachers about the value of locally grown foods like those Alcott took for granted. I also noted that before U.S. Congress enacted *Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972*, home economics (still significant in African and African American educational cultures) had figured prominently in U.S. coeducation’s curricular development, sex-segregated as ESY is not. Therefore I began my new effort by surveying specifically the new multidisciplinary critical scholarship on food that informs much of ESY’s revolutionary work; I examined early and late modern philosophers’ thought on food, education, and gender as well as contemporary popular works of food-cultural politics; I argued that we should reclaim foodways as objects of philosophical-educational study and thus rethink coeducation. Toward those ends, in “Food for Coeducational Thought” I recommended future study of ESY in particular (Laird, 2008).

The following year Waters published her own book, explaining her own thought and documenting its practical development at Berkeley’s King School. Then, in 2012, Suzanne Rice organized an intergenerational study group on moral dimensions of school lunch—whose topically diverse work this special issue of *Journal of Thought* documents. Rice led also by providing historical context for our group’s studies, engaging our attention to Susan Levine’s *School Lunch Politics*, which narrates how “children’s meals have always served up more than nutrition” by serving also “the priorities of agricultural and commercial food interests, both of which carried more weight in the halls of Congress than did advocates for children’s health” (Levine, 2008, loc. 171). According to Levine, therefore, two sets of major players have made U.S. school lunch politics into a struggle over the competing interests of corporatist agribusiness on one hand and children’s healthy nourishment on the other, with farm-bloc legislators and U.S. Department of Agriculture officials advancing the former and nutrition reformers, mainly women, who were health, education, and welfare professionals leading the latter struggle “to translate nutrition science into public policy” (Levine, 2008, loc. 202). Small wonder that in the wake of home economics’ dissolution and education’s federal divorce from health and welfare, obesity has become a major national concern, counter-intuitively often linked to hunger. Against such national maladies, ESY’s core mission, according to Waters, is “to awaken every American child’s senses toward a new relationship with food, one in which deliciousness comes first and good health and well being are the happy result” (Waters, 2008, p. 38). Does

that mission not reflect the educational aim of childrearing that I theorized as a doctoral candidate? Could philosophical studies of ESY in this corporatist era of climate change and community engagement through commercial partnerships help us to re-imagine the public childrearing and coeducational possibilities of school lunch, and thereby offer some pragmatic wisdom to reconfigure U.S. public schooling as a strategic site of educational nourishment?

2. From Berkeley's King School to the Edible Schoolyard

Waters is not an academic philosopher, and I do not know if her undergraduate studies of French Culture, taken both at University of California-Berkeley and at University of Paris, which led her to pursue her life's work in gastronomy, included the existentialist philosophical writings of Simone Weil, or not. But Waters' account of how she came to work with King School via ESY appears to reflect a deontological ethic of nourishment akin to that which Weil theorized in *The Need for Roots* (1943/1952). In this moral prospectus for French repatriation after the Nazi Occupation, written while Weil herself was starving to death, literally, Weil expresses well the motive avowedly behind Waters' creative collaborations with King School:

Thousands of years ago, the Egyptians believed that no soul could justify itself after death unless it could say: 'I have never let anyone suffer from hunger.' . . . To no matter whom the question may be put in general terms, nobody is of the opinion that any man is innocent if, possessing food himself in abundance and finding someone on his doorstep three parts dead from hunger, he brushes past without giving him anything. (Weil, 1943, p. 6)

Weil's moral theory of "uprootedness" conceives hunger as a demoralized condition that starves both bodies and souls, for whom beauty is one vital food that cultivates "roots," because it addresses "our thirst for good" (Weil, 1952, p. 11). Conceiving "rights" as a notion that enjoins us to honor moral obligations posed by such human hunger and thirst—human needs—she regards collectivity as having no personhood in itself, but as a necessary vehicle for nourishing persons. On her view, a collectivity that devours its own souls or fails to nourish them is dead. (Ergo, an educational collectivity that does not nourish its souls is dead.) As a woman whose own life's work in the restaurant business has been to provide "food in abundance," Waters testifies poignantly concerning her own encounter with the all-too-familiar urban public school that exemplifies precisely this collective condition of uprootedness and soul-starvation:

Every day, when I drive between my restaurant and my home in Berkeley, I pass by a school. The sign on the wall says Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School, and I will never forget how neglected the place looked when I first took notice fifteen years ago. The city of Berkeley has a great university, but its public schools rank among the poorest in the United States. . . . The school looked so poorly tended, I wondered if it might not be abandoned. Then I learned that nearly 1000 middle-school children were enrolled there in grades six, seven, and eight. The school was also a center for teaching English as a Second Language, so it drew recent immigrants from all over the city, and more than twenty languages were spoken on campus, by children of every imaginable background. The state of the school made me wonder how those kids could possibly thrive in such an environment, and what message it sent about our culture's priorities. I began to think about my own teaching years and the faith I'd always had in public schooling, which I consider the last truly democratic institution in American life. . . . The cafeteria had been closed for years because the school's population had doubled and the facility was too small. The only food the children could buy on campus came from a prefabricated building about the size of a shipping container. Parked in the middle of the asphalt, this building sold soda pop to the children during their recess and lunch hour, and it also sold something called a 'walking taco,' which is as perfect a symbol of a broken culture as I can imagine. Opening a plastic bag of mass-produced corn chips, the food workers would simply pour in a kind of beef-and-tomato slurry from a can. The kids would then walk away, eating on their own with no connection to one another. It seemed such a terrible waste—all that time and energy in a child's day, when hunger might be harnessed to open minds. (Waters, 2008, pp. 7, 11)

In 1995, Waters did not just continue passing by King School: She responded to the hunger in children's bodies and souls that she discerned in that public middle school's squalid uprootedness, by blurting out to a local journalist her feeling that the King School looked "like nobody cares about it. Everything wrong with our world is bound up in that place and in the way we treat children" (Waters, 2008, p. 10). The newspaper article quoting her prompted King School's principal (its fourth principal in two years) to solicit her help. Her response to Neil Smith's plea was an immense, ongoing collaborative project with and for that school,⁴ which has changed the school's moral and aesthetic culture radically, as abundant photographs document this public school's profuse expression of a core value theorized by Weil as a kind of nourishment, not typically present in public-school *cultures*: "Beauty is not a luxury; it is a means of lifting the human spirit and of giving richness to everyday life" (Waters, 2008, p. 15). For as Waters explains, the students "get to pick a place in the garden to call their own, a place to sit alone to do their required journal writing—a

practice that shows us, again and again, in their own beautiful voices, how porous children are to the natural world” (Waters, 2008, p. 36).

ESY has also posed problems of landscape and kitchen design, in which design professionals solving them have engaged and learned from children’s own imaginations. ESY involves schools and children in environmental studies and environmental relations, but with its explicit aesthetic-educational aims, it is more than an ecological literacy project—even though The Center for Ecoliteracy’s research has assessed it a successful one.⁵ It involves a school garden, but in its moral response to a public school’s squalor, it is not just what Dilafruz Williams and Jonathan Brown have called a “learning garden” for “sustainability education” (Williams and Brown, 2012)—though I doubt they would deny that designation to this garden. It involves a school kitchen, but it is not just a “home-ec” cooking and nutrition classroom—though learning to cook and nourish well do occur there, where it’s posted clearly there’s “NO ROOM FOR HOMOPHOBIA”—for much else occurs there also, including spontaneously joyful piano-playing and singing. It involves the school lunch table, but it is not just your ordinary ascetic public-school cafeteria—even though students do lunch there often—since it is alive with fresh flowers from the garden, adorned with table-cloths, and founded on Waters’ “belief in the power of the table to bring people together and give them a place to commune” (Waters, 2008, p. 33). ESY’s website peddles a book called *Making Mathematics Delicious*, and Waters reports that “The humanities teachers have grown to love using the kitchen to enrich their classes, and they’ve become expert at making connections between food and scholarship” (Waters, 2008, p. 37). Within a public school, ESY has become an institutional structure of community engagement designed to offer what its founding partners have named “edible education,”⁶ a concept for which they have formulated five explicit definitive principles: (1) food is an academic subject, (2) school provides lunch for every child, (3) schools support farms, (4) children learn by doing, and (5) beauty is a language. Edible education has made school lunch into far more than the meal itself: the focus of public-school culture’s deep moral and aesthetic transformation.

Despite Waters’ conceptual and practical ingenuity in her work with the King School collectivity, I am not claiming that either Waters or that collectivity is a “philosopher of education.” However, ESY does evidence creative use of Waters’ deep theoretical understandings of both education and eco-gastronomy; and its generative significance for public education is at once pragmatic, variegated, and complex, worthy of both empirical investigations and philosophical inquiries of various sorts. Meanwhile, the present global context imposes ever more urgent

local challenges upon us—tornadoes, dust storms, droughts, heat-waves, wildfires, hurricanes, floods, lethal leaks of oil and radiation, and famines—whose violence deepens social inequalities. The foundations of earthly life itself, everything we do to feed, shelter, nurture, and heal ourselves and future generations must become open to question—and to learning whose necessity few contemporary education professionals have even acknowledged yet, much less tried to imagine (Laird, 2013, p. 132). Against that perilous professional indifference, ESY is focusing young students and their educators precisely on that necessary thoughtful practical effort of public coeducational childrearing. Could further studies of this “rethinking school lunch” project focus philosophers of education on that effort too?

3. From Casa dei Bambini to the Edible Schoolyard

In “Excluding Women from the Educational Realm,” Jane Roland Martin pointed out that Maria Montessori was the only woman whose educational thought Robert Ulich had included in his heavy tome, *Three Thousand Years of Educational Wisdom* (Martin, 1982/1994; Ulich, 1947), and since then, Alice Waters, who studied at the International Montessori Institute in London, has claimed Montessori’s direct influence on her own conception of ESY. Indeed, although Berkeley’s King School is not reducible to its ESY—for it has always been subject to state regulation, recently “No Child Left Behind,” and now “Race to the Top”—*Dr. Montessori’s Own Handbook’s* description of *casa dei bambini* does resemble King School’s ESY as I found it on tour:

The “Children’s House” is the *environment* which is offered to the child that he may be given the opportunity of developing his activities. This kind of school is not of a fixed type, but may vary according to the financial resources at disposal and to the opportunities afforded by the environment. It ought to be . . . a set of rooms with a garden of which the children are the masters. A garden which contains shelters is ideal, because the children can play or sleep under them, and can also bring their tables out to work or dine. In this way they may live almost entirely in the open air, and are protected at the same time from rain and sun. (Montessori, 1914, pp. 11-12)

Montessori conceived her *casa dei bambini* in response to children living in the demoralizing, miseducative squalor of an urban tenement district, Rome’s San Lorenzo Quarter, whose horrors she describes at some length, much as Waters has described those at Berkeley’s King School before its transformation by ESY. The resemblance between Montessori’s motive and Waters’ motive could hardly be clearer; it is evident also in

Grant's 2009 film, *Nourishing the Kids of Katrina*. Waters has read in the subtlety of Montessori's thinking a profound educational foundation for the food revolution she has led here. The project's public documents evidence its indebtedness especially to the notion that teaching should be indirect, chiefly accomplished through design of an environment in which educative sensory encounters may occur, as *Dr. Montessori's Own Handbook* describes what ESY narratives show:

The instructions of the teacher consist then merely in a hint, a touch—even enough to give a start to the child. The rest develops of itself. The children learn from one another and throw themselves into the work with enthusiasm and delight. This atmosphere of quiet activity develops a fellow-feeling, an attitude of mutual aid, and most wonderful of all, an intelligent interest on the part of the older children in the progress of their little companions. It is enough just to set a child in these peaceful surroundings for him to feel perfectly at home. (Montessori, 1914, p. 22)

ESY has involved children's parents and extended families and other community residents integrally from the start. Constructing "the first step toward socialization of the [home]" by deliberately "communizing a 'maternal function'" (Montessori, 1912, pp. 65, 66, loc. 1167, 1183), Montessori conceptualized the early-childhood school, collectively owned by parents, as *casa dei bambini*, often translated as "children's house." But she explains in *The Montessori Method*: "We Italians have elevated our word 'casa' to the almost sacred significance of the English word 'home,' the enclosed temple of domestic affection, accessible only to dear ones" (Montessori, 1912, p. 57, loc. 1017). Montessori's more accurate, insistent translation of *casa dei bambini* as "children's home" inspired Martin to formulate her own ideal of the "schoolhome" as a gender-sensitive coeducational school that is a "moral equivalent of home" (Martin, 1992). With less explicit critical mention of gender than either Montessori or Martin, Waters has applied Montessori's educational principles to a public school and has adapted key features of the infant-education practice that Montessori conceived for *casa dei bambini*, to form her own distinctive idea of middle-school education in Berkeley's ESY. Both Martin and Waters have taken seriously Montessori's theorizing in *The Absorbent Mind*, where she asks, "What is the conception of education that takes life as the centre of its own function?" and then answers, "It is a conception that alters all previous ideas about education. Education must no longer be based upon a syllabus but upon the knowledge of human life" (Montessori, 1949, p. 165). Martin envisioned her schoolhome's curriculum for "learning to live" via theater and newspaper activities (Martin, 1992), but Waters has led the King School to claim rigorous

curricular fidelity to another principle set forth in *The Montessori Method*:

But if for physical life it is necessary to have the child exposed to the vivifying forces of nature, it is also necessary for his psychical life to place the soul of the child in contact with creation, in order that he may lay up for himself treasure from the directly educating forces of living nature. The method for arriving at this end is to set the child at agricultural labour, guiding him to the cultivation of plants and animals, and so to the intelligent contemplation of nature. (Montessori, 1912, p. 124)

Waters has demonstrated that *Dr. Montessori's Own Handbook's* claims about early childhood education may also apply to middle-school education, for example that “gardening and manual work are a great pleasure to our children. Gardening is already well known as a feature of infant education, and it is recognized by all that plants and animals attract the children’s care and attention” (Montessori, 1914, p. 22). The King School’s young people care for chickens inhabiting a coop at ESY, and collect fresh eggs from them for their cooking in the kitchen—an easy meal that kitchen director Esther Cook taught one “boy who was plainly hungry—truly hungry, as in badly needing food”—how to prepare secretly for himself “everyday before school, without ever asking” (Waters, 2008, 30). Waters explains that King School’s kitchen classroom has become “somehow a part of the life of the school, in just the way a home kitchen can anchor the life of a family” (Waters, 2008, p. 30). There, ESY photographs and videos show what Montessori explained: “In the work of laying the table the children are seen quite by themselves, dividing the work among themselves, carrying the plates, spoons, knives and forks, etc., and finally, sitting down at the tables where the [students] serve the hot soup.” (Montessori, 1914, p. 22)

Besides her deep practical and theoretical understanding of Montessori education, Waters has brought to the King School the cultural wealth of her creative work in the food-service business, which David Kamp chronicled in *The United States of Arugula* (2006), highlighting the Francophile character and transformative influence of her Berkeley restaurant Chez Panisse within American food-cultural history after the educational decline of home economics. In 1971, after Waters worked at a brief school-teaching career, Montessori’s conception of education as encountering the world through the senses mingled with Waters’ deep delight in French food and culture to influence her own revolutionary educational approach to developing a unique restaurant, Chez Panisse, regarded by some as the best in the United States (Waters, 2008: Apple, xi). In that restaurant’s copiously documented history one can see an instructive, preparatory ground for Waters’ subsequent experimental

idea of ESY. She founded Chez Panisse on “the Waters credo—fresh, local, seasonal, and where possible organic ingredients,” as “a restaurant about much more than food” (Waters, 2008: Apple, xiii). Indeed it was a restaurant about public education both in its workplace and at its tables, founded on several other explicit principles: (1) that “How we eat can change the world” (Waters, 2008: Apple, xi), (2) that “the Montessori Way—direct experience, experimentation, optimism, confidence—would be the way of her restaurant” (McNamee, 2007, p. 39), which included application of “the Montessori ideal of learning-by-doing to every activity in the restaurant” (McNamee, 2007, p. 60), and (3), also from Montessori, that “You learn about everything in your environment. You become familiar with it. And you begin to see what its value is” (McNamee, 2007, p. 33). Taking this deliberately educational outlook as she connected with regional farmers and ranchers and developed her restaurant, Waters later also educated the public by authoring cookbooks and founding a farmers’ market in Berkeley before embarking upon the ESY Project and the Yale Sustainable Food Project. Occasioned by her own daughter Fanny’s matriculation at Yale, the latter effort has gathered “people around shared food, shared work, and shared inquiry,” while aiming to foster “a culture that draws meaning and pleasure from the connections among people, land, and food” by managing “an organic farm on campus” and running “diverse educational programs that support exploration and academic inquiry related to food and agriculture.”⁷ These two educational projects resemble both her restaurant and each other in their locavore commitment, morally responsive to social-ecological concerns. But ESY reconfigures public schools’ childrearing as educational nourishment, consonant with Weil’s ethic and with Montessori’s discerning reflection in *The Montessori Method*,

... if we give children the means of *existence*, the struggle for it disappears, and a vigorous expansion of life takes its place. . . . One might say, indeed, that to judge by appearances, a well-fed people are *better, quieter, and commit less crime* than a nation that is ill-nourished; but whoever draws from that the conclusion that to make men good it is *enough* to feed them, will be making an obvious mistake. It cannot be denied, however, that *nourishment* will be an essential factor in obtaining goodness, in the sense that it will *eliminate* all the *evil acts, and the bitterness* caused by lack of bread. Now, in our case, we are dealing with a far deeper need—the nourishment of man’s inner life, and of his higher functions. The bread that we are dealing with is the bread of the spirit, and we are entering into the difficult subject of the satisfaction of man’s psychic needs. (Montessori, 1914, pp. 89-90, loc. 1116-1132)

Montessori extended her idea of *casa dei bambini* throughout Italy

and then to India, and it has spread around the world. Similarly the Chez Panisse Foundation has renamed itself “The Edible Schoolyard Project,” now works with the Berkeley Unified School District to extend the King School’s approach toward lunch to other local public schools, and also offers a summer Edible Schoolyard Academy that educates people to lead similar school lunch reform efforts throughout the U.S. and around the world. ESY bears abundant witness to the practical value of studying educational theory, toward which too many policy leaders today take a dismissive stance. At the same time, careful philosophical analysis of the kinds and consequences of the various sorts of encounters that produce its educational value and its educational problems could further elaborate the ESY concept constructively. What philosophical consequence for public education’s current reconfiguration could this school-community partnership project claim if educational theorists took its radical rethinking of school lunch seriously? ESY can claim philosophical roots in—and pose new philosophical questions for—now largely neglected traditions of educational thought on childrearing, coeducation, ethics of nourishment, educational aesthetics, ecological education, and schooling of impoverished communities. Waters makes clear that her project of education for nourishment through eco-gastronomy begs for such various kinds of philosophical scrutiny when she explains,

What we are calling for is a revolution in public education – the Delicious Revolution. When the hearts and minds of our children are captured by a school lunch curriculum, enriched with experience in the garden, sustainability will become the lens through which they see the world. (Waters, 2008, p. 40)

Notes

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² Quoted by Frances Moore Lappé, *Hope’s Edge: The Next Diet for a Small*

Planet (New York: Penguin, 2002), p. 37.

² <http://edibleschoolyard.org/network>

³ <http://hearth.library.cornell.edu/h/hearth/browse/title/6060826.html>

⁴ [5 min 4 sec youtube intro: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qApx7O6phWol>
[4 min 43 sec tour led by AW: <http://www.epicurious.com/video/chef-profiles/chef-profiles-alice-waters/1915458812>]

⁵ The Center for Ecoliteracy sponsored an evaluation of the Edible Schoolyard Project that it had funded, finding increases in students' academic achievement, especially math and science; their gains in understanding garden cycles; their improved sense of place and understanding of sustainable agriculture; as well as significant gains in ecoliteracy scores and improvements in students' choices of what to eat (<http://api.ning.com/files/Hd3XFwJhO4NZ2yEroyYpmM9SWd-Hm36dOX6IIm4NE9Lp6P0HI-XhaRvAjvohXmHteHQ7Z-9GxVyILYDN2Y-bgedbWu0IIDyq/EvaluationoftheEdibleSchoolyard.pdf>)

⁶ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gD2OHk7Y_KE.

⁷ Yale Sustainable Food Project, <http://www.yale.edu/sustainablefood/>

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