

21st International Conference on

Food & Nutrition

July 25-26, 2018 | Vancouver, Canada

The Sprout Wagon: Improving children's health through interdisciplinary hands on food activity by Learn4Health

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In the globalized food systems consumers, especially children, are increasingly disconnected from the understanding of how and where their food is produced. This has an impact on eating habits and food choices that might affect health, the environment and other ethical dilemmas such as animal welfare and fair trade (Dyg, 2014). In this optic, some activities, i.e. gardening, may connect children closer to nature by teaching them to take care of our environment and creating understanding of the connection between nature and food. Research show that by 'getting your hands dirty' and growing food you enjoy the way vegetables taste and form emotional connections with the garden. The physical and social qualities of garden participation awaken the senses and stimulate a range of responses that influence interpersonal processes - learning, affirming, expressive experiences - and social relationships that are supportive of positive health-related behaviors (Hale et al., 2011). Hence, small gardens in a school context are strategic ways to facilitate and support interactive learning to improve children's food literacy and health. With point of departure in the lack of children's knowledge of the origin of food, the paper provides an overview of the development and implementation process of an interdisciplinary gardening project at Arden Elementary School in Aalborg, Denmark. A project initiated by Learn4Health, a European Union Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership including twelve partners in total, representing 6 European countries (DK, ES, SI, NL, UK and LT). Focusing on design, functionality and applicability, and in close collaboration with designers, engineers, teachers and children, we are creating the Sprout Wagon; a hands-on food activity tool allowing teachers to combine disciplines, curricula and subjects in interdisciplinary learning, and children to improve their food literacy and health whilst having fun growing their own food in a school context.

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