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Title :

Why Make Such a Meal of Inclusion?

Abstract :

This paper compares the challenges of having an important guest to dinner with the challenges facing a teacher in an inclusive education establishment.

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Why Make Such a Meal of Inclusion?

What makes a good teacher?

Everyone should have a right to a good education and good education demands good teachers. Good teachers value different challenges in order that they are able to maintain their freshness and zest for teaching. A teacher's repertoire of teaching skills can be enhanced and increased when their existing talents are exposed to new challenges. An increased repertoire of teaching skills means that the teacher is in a stronger position to accommodate a greater diversity of students within any learning environment.

When an individual, who may have a particular learning disability, participates within a mainstream setting, they contribute challenges that the good teacher, will attempt to meet by being more creative in their use of strategies and resources.

Creative teaching is more likely to be restricted when students who seek a more creative approach to learning are excluded from the mainstream of education.

Consequently, teachers are denied the challenges that will enhance their teaching talents. As a result of excluding people from the mainstream of education the whole system and all participants within it are diminished because of the lack of creativity demanded.

Why are teaching skills a little like cooking skills?

The narrowness of teaching styles that results from the restricted demands can be compared with the cooking habits of the "average" English household. It has been observed (by us!) that the average repertoire of meals over a given period of time is around six or seven. Not a particularly extensive repertoire. Families can become more familiar with the way in which the meal is cooked and the night of the week it will be served rather than its impact upon the digestive system. Such a menu can be seen as safe and reliable but often reassuringly dull.

Let us consider the consequences of inviting an "outsider" around for an evening meal. Often hasty, but a reasonable amount of planning is completed before the guest is received. Out comes the dusty cook-book, discussions about what the person likes; will they eat meat; do they throw up with the smell of boiled fish; should we have a stodgy dessert or something light to follow a stew (or should we refer to it as casserole when entertaining?).

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After the person has been welcomed and provided with a well-cooked meal, the evening will often evolve into an environment that is comfortably enjoyable. Pleased you made that little extra effort, you feel contented. However, the rewards don't stop there! The benefits to the eating repertoire of your family are often significantly enhanced. The rest of the family may now look at a new menu with renewed vigour and which contains other culinary delights and quite effortlessly you have transformed Thursday's Shepherd's Pie to a Pork Surprise - most of the household will be delighted.

Why everyone should have a cordon bleu chef to their home for a meal

Just when you were feeling rather proud of yourself and contented with the rather novel, but enlightening experience, of some "outsider" coming for a meal, some joker within the household has invited a "Professional Cook" to taste your delights. She/he may well be a cook in the factory canteen or the owner of a corner cafe but, in the state of a panic attack that envelops, you have quickly bestowed upon the prospective visitor the label of "*The Cordon Bleu Chef*". They obviously eat wonderful food every night, how can they possibly be impressed by my meagre attempts to serve them edible food? I don't want to look incompetent in front of the whole family. I don't want to be found out!

The initial reaction is to check the diary to see if there is any possibility of a respectable cancellation, or can one of the kids have German Measles again? Or can we pretend we have an important, long-standing engagement? - who are they trying to kid?

Once the dreaded event has been accepted gracefully, but nevertheless reluctantly, and you have been persuaded to take responsibility for the evening entertainment (including the menu!), a more detailed plan of action is called for.

First stop is Asda, the supermarket for a sophisticated cookbook, or is there one in the bottom cupboard (bought as a Christmas Present by some naive relative)? This cook book provides not only exotic recipes but clearly demonstrates how you set the table, how you serve the meal and what wine goes with what course, how many glasses you might use, making sure you don't sit your visitor at the place with the chipped dinner plate.

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The event arrives, you greet this "Michelin 4 **** visitor". The palms of your hands and your armpits are hot and sweaty, but you maintain a smile on your face and the familiar complimentary platitudes are exchanged about your cuisine.

After the fourth glass of wine when, you realise your invited guest has no meat skewer coming from the head and conversation flows more easily and everyone is feeling comfortable, the menu experience has been relegated to the second division. You realise that few people are going to be critical of the collapsed soufflé, or the ice cube in the red wine or the bullet-like peas, as long as they have a feeling of being welcomed and included in your home. However, the skills we can learn by going through this process can again have many positive "spin offs" for the rest of the family, adding a new dimension to weekday eating habits. Serving soup with croutons is not necessarily better than dunking bread - just different.

If in the first instance, we would have been courageous enough to ask our visitor what do they enjoy eating? Or if it is something really sophisticated they desired, could they themselves make suggestions. They may even let you in on one of their personal recipes and give you some free advice on how to serve it up!

The chances are they can manage the odd dish of junk food like everybody else - the most important feature about eating habits have little to do with a sophisticated menu, but more to do with the act of eating and sitting around the table together!!!