



Family Cooking Night

Creating Community Through Food



Nyob Zoo (that's "hello" in Hmong). I'm Nan. I'm an assistant teacher in a preschool classroom.

For my professional portfolio, I documented a parent participation activity that I worked on for Family Night at my program in May 2010.

Together with a parent in my program I planned and led a cooking activity for the other staff and parents from my classroom.

Here's my story.



Building a Classroom Community



“Without a sense of caring, there can be no sense of community”

Anthony J. D'Angelo





My project started with these Framing Questions:

How do I create a community where each member contributes, is known, and is valued?

Do I think of my childcare classroom as a community?

My first step was to think about what “community” means – especially what it means to me.



Prompts I Chose to Guide My Story

- **These are some of the special attributes, talents, or skills of each member...**
- **I know this because...**
- **Each member's special attributes, talents, or skills are utilized for the benefit of others in the group or the whole group in these ways...**
- **This community-building effort was particularly successful because...**

Here's How I Completed the Prompts

These are some of the special attributes, talents, or skills of each member...

I know this because...

SuGee and I both love to cook. SuGee is one of the moms in my classroom. We both learned to cook foods of our cultures (Hmong) from our mothers and grandmothers. We shared some of our favorite family cooking stories and homemade foods at our program's Family Night. The other parents showed great interest in our presentation and wanted to know more about how to make the dishes.





Each member's special attributes, talents, or skills are utilized for the benefit of others in the group or the whole group in these ways...

The Family Night conversation led to a group-cooking experience. Many of the mothers in our group are also Hmong, but had never tasted the homemade version of foods they eat regularly at home. SuGee and I volunteered to have a cooking experience to which all of the parents would be invited.





This community-building effort was particularly successful because...



This experience came out of the interests and experiences of the parents and the staff. SuGee and I teamed up to share something special of ourselves with others in our community. This gave all of us the chance to be together as friends would be in someone's kitchen, all the while, building a common experience and shared memory.

RECIPE

Fish Sauce and Greens

Ingredients:

4 cloves of garlic

2 green onions

½ bunch of cilantro

3 Thai pepper

½ cup fish

Greens (steamed)



Mix all ingredients together in a bowl. Set aside for 1 hour to let flavors mingle. Add to steamed greens.

RECIPE

Triangle Rice Cake

Ingredients:

1 bag (16 oz) rice flour (Hmoov Nplej Txua)

1 package (¼ oz.) dry yeast

5 cups lukewarm water –temperature 80°

1 ½ cup sugar



In a large bowl, mix dry yeast with lukewarm water. Add rice flour and sugar to yeast mixture and whisk well together. Take 1 cup of the mixture, heat to a boil, stirring often so it doesn't get lumpy. Pour the hot mixture back to the cold mixture, use hands to break any lumps. Cover loosely and let the mixture ferment at room temperature as least 4-5 hours.

Put water into the steamer and bring to boil. Use foil to cover the bottom of the second steamer, and then brush oil onto foil to prevent sticking. Pour the fermented mixture into the steamer and steam for at least 15-20 minutes. Cook until they become firm and spongy. Remove from the steamer; let it set for 5 minutes. Serve warm or cold



My Reflections

Family Cooking Night was a great lesson for me. It helped me see that great ideas can come unexpectedly, and that being open to them when they come can lead to really great benefits for our program. The cooking experience gave all of us a chance to interact as friends would in one of our kitchens at home, all the while, building a common experience and shared memory.

This experience helped me see myself differently too. I can be a generator of ideas and an implementer, even as an assistant teacher. This has made me feel more a part of our classroom team.

And finally, this whole experience — sharing our stories, planning the event, and making a memory — has helped me build a great friendship with SuGee and some of the other parents. This friendship will help us be better partners in the care and education of the children. Parents and staff CAN work together to accomplish great things.



Making Connections to ECE Competencies

Through my project “Parent Cooking Night”, I demonstrated and documented my learning in several Topic areas in the Family and Community Engagement competency:

Knowledge of Families

Gathers information from family members and engages in direct, effective communication to learn about family composition, values, and traditions; does so to support the primary role of families in their children’s care and education and to engages families in the early education setting.

Families as Community Members

Builds a sense of community among the children and families in the group by using a variety of methods.



My Rationale

Family Cooking Night gave us a chance to learn about each other's family composition, values, and traditions, particularly family practices around foods.

For some of the moms, the experience brought back childhood memories of their mothers and grandmothers making rice cake and other foods from scratch in their homes and the realization that they missed the experience because they didn't learn this skill.

They also recognized that they wanted their children to know how to do this as a way of preserving something special from their culture. Some of them brought their older daughters with them. Others felt pride in sharing their favorite family foods and the techniques and recipes for making them.



Staff and parents enjoying the experience together.



Connections to Other Resources

Although we are all Hmong, we saw that we cannot define people by a category. Instead, we can enjoy our similarities and differences and have respectful, reciprocal relationships.

Janis Keyser's book called *Parents as Partners* gave me insights into the value of bringing families together around cultural traditions and how this helps us support the development of children's identities.



Conclusion and New Direction

This project helped families develop a closer bond with each other and with the staff. We all have a better sense of community and see ourselves more as partners than we did before.

It also made me a lot more aware that learning activities can come from the children's interests and from their families. Now I want to think about other ways to involve the children and parents in what we do in the classroom.