

Adventures in Cooking by Henna Garrison

TODDLER Class [8 aged 3+ children]



Introduction

From 2013 to 2014 I spent time as a toddler teacher to 8 rowdy students at the Peabody Terrace Children's Center of Harvard University. As part of a Reggio based curriculum, I was asked to engage in project with my class. This meant engaging in a consistent theme on a weekly basis and sharing documentation of our time together. I chose to explore food, tastes and cooking. The children were given the choice to participate and I was aided gracefully by one of my two other co-teachers. It was a fulfilling project that left me curious and excited to view the world of food through smaller eyes. Below you will find my written exploration of our time followed by an anthology of recipes adapted for kids in the kitchen. The documentation was often used as a prompt to open the conversation to parents and fellow educators.

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Cooking Zucchini Chips

Henna: What ingredients do you see on the table?

AR: Oil! Salt!

PH: This (points to cut zucchini)

AR: Grind up pepper!

Henna: What about all of these? (Pointing to zucchini slices)

PH: I think this is cucumber.

EV: I think, I think it's pickle.

AR: It's zucchini.

EV: No, no. Zucchini is not green.

Henna: Would you like to try it?

PH, EV and AR each take a slice. AR bites it, EV licks his, and PH takes one, eats it, then another. JU decides not to try.

As more friends join us, they help coat the zucchini in oil, then make a mix of breadcrumbs, parmesan, salt, pepper, and spice mix. Everyone has a chance to try or smell the ingredients individually and guess what they are. **AR** thinks the spice mix is "grind up rice" and **PH** guesses that the bread crumbs are "poppa corn." Only **PH** enjoys tasting the parmesan, and all of the friends agree the pepper smells "yuck!" All of the friends are excited to press the coins into mixture and spread them on the baking tray.

What fun! I hoped that this would be an exciting snack, but when the "chips" emerged from the oven smelling yummy and were presented on the table, not a single friend seemed interested. AR took a tentative bite, but promptly spit it out. PH grabbed a to-go bag, and was the **ONLY** friend to enjoy the creation they all worked so hard to make!

I enjoyed watching friends' reactions to tasting or smelling the various ingredients. I was surprised at the variety of answers in what they believed the ingredients to be. Everyone seemed especially interested in the bread crumbs, and how crunchy they were. And they were intrigued by the different taste and texture of the grated parmesan, since the bread crumbs and parmesan both looked similar sitting in their bowls. In the future I'd like to have friends suggest ingredients to use in our cooking. I'm also curious how to inspire them to try our creations, since they take such joy in making them. I'm looking to **PH'** adventurous eating to set an example in the class, and also to encourage a philosophy that his family has at home, "Don't yuck another person's yum!"

What ingredients (especially in the vegetable realm) do you enjoy at home? Do you come up with silly names for your food? I'm wondering if we start by creating a name for a recipe and then deciding what to put in it, how that will affect the interest in tasting it.

Henna 5.12.14

Candied Sweet Potatoes and Baby Egg Muffins

Cooking in the class has been a wonderful insight to child logic versus my own thinking. I'm so intrigued by how eager everyone is to participate in the actual cooking and making of our Tuesday snacks, but how easily they dismiss the finished product, often deciding it's a "yuck" before they try.

We attempted what I called **Candied Sweet Potatoes**, small strips of sweet potatoes mixed with a little oil and some maple syrup and rosemary. I was surprised to see so many friends take an interest in the Grapeseed Oil. **AR** pointed out the grapes on the bottle, and **EV** chimed in "It's grape juice!" I suggested maybe we each try a little, and see what it tastes like. To be honest, it's a very neutral oil, so I had to laugh when the class consensus was it tasted like grapes. Pulling off rosemary leaves from the springs was a favorite activity, and tasting the maple syrup was exciting too. *I struggled my first week on how to entice them to eat our homemade snack, so this week I tried placing toothpicks at each place setting.* It was a special treat to be able to serve themselves the sweet potato from the plate with the toothpick, then use this new eating implement. The general consensus was YUM! but no one except PH really dug in for seconds.

Last week we made small, muffin size quiche. I called them **Baby Egg Muffins** because *I worry sometimes the language will scare friends too easily away from the food*. There is always plenty of talk and consensus about liking muffins, so I wondered if we called these egg muffins they would receive a more positive welcome. My other *seemingly logical plot was to bring in a bunch of different fillings for the muffin quiche, so each friend could design their own*. **PH, AR, EL, EV and AD** joined me for cooking after nap. The first step was cracking eggs. **EL** was very vocal that "Mom doesn't let me crack eggs at home so I can't." I offered each friend a chance to crack an egg, and there was true team camaraderie, with other friends cheering as each egg got cracked. I added some milk and we all took turns mixing the big bowl of egg and milk. I divided out the mixture into smaller bowls, so each friend could have their own bowl to put fillings in. There was spinach (which most friends wanted to believe was lettuce), feta cheese, parmesan cheese, grape tomatoes, broccoli, onions and mushrooms that I sautéed in butter. I offered everyone to try the ingredients on their own first, but only **PH and AD** showed excitement at trying some of the more exotic options, like the sautéed mushrooms and onions.

After we filled our muffin tins, I noticed that *one of the most exciting parts was putting the tin into the oven, and going back and checking on it*. The whole classroom would parade back and forth to the kitchen. *When the time came for snack, the friends (PH, AD, EL and AR) who had made their very own concoctions were thrilled to see the final product. I had wondered if taking ownership, or knowing they had made a specific piece, would increase their interest*. **EL** promptly let us know she didn't like the things (mushrooms, tomatoes) that she had chosen to put in her muffin. **AD** was skeptical, and picked his apart before eating a fair amount, and **PH**, as usual, didn't hesitate before digging in. The friends who had not participated in the cooking showed less interest, but **NV** still enjoyed the snack while **JU** was rather apathetic.

I was feeling so confident that if each friend choose and constructed their own item, they would take more pride in it and eat more. I'm not sure this had the same effect I was hoping for. I did notice that even small incentives, like the toothpicks, bring more wonder and curiosity to eating. I'm looking forward to when some of our garden items sprout and we can start discovering the farm to table aspect of food. I'm still hoping to explore food on the more

adventurous side, but also want to continue conversations with friends about what recipes or ideas they might have of their own.

Another aspect of this adventure that arose in conversation with a parent at potluck was the *messiness and inaccuracy of cooking with kids*. She had mentioned that she finds it hard to let go of the control and preciseness often required in cooking with recipes. I realized at home I am an extremely precise person, and when I cook will typically prep all the materials before I even turn on the stove. At school, I'm able to let a lot of this go. My expectations for our cooking is that we have fun, and hopefully more friends become interested in what we're making. I have a lovely sous-chef (Anna) who often scurries around me picking up fallen utensils or helping avoid near disaster. I haven't been cooking things that require real precision, because when it's 8 friends and me, there's not much hope for real accuracy in our cooking. *I've really enjoyed be able to make such big messes, and also have much lowered expectations from what I'd want to put on my dinner table. That being said, we have a real eager group of contributors, and I notice a lot of pride in having specific jobs at the cooking table. I'm thankful to have these experiences to remind me to let some of those insecurities about what food/cooking SHOULD be, vs. what it is.*

I'm wondering what new things we can explore? And what questions I can ask to help our friends take more ownership of this project. I'd love to hear more of their voice in the cooking projects we take on, and I wonder how we can make that happen. I'm still interested in how naming a recipe or product affects their initial reaction? I noticed that the friends called the spinach "lettuce", and I wonder how else using their imaginations can help entice our group to eat more/different foods?

Henna 5.27.14

Playing with Pasta

Cooking days always seem to be the days when we have handfuls of late sleepers, with friends still on their mats well into the 3:00 - 3:30 time frame. It's tricky to try to prepare snack for 4:00 pm when we aren't even moving from our afternoon snooze until a half hour before. Luckily, once the rumor starts that we'll be doing some cooking, there's a little more pep in their steps, and friends seem to move off mats more quickly as to not miss the fun.

The table was set up simply, with just salt, eggs and flour, along with measuring cups and some bowls. "Pasta, pasta, pasta!" was the general exclamation. We began the conversation about different shapes of pasta: long, thin spaghetti, princess shaped pasta that **NV's** mom brought back from Italy, the big fat pasta that **AD** often has, and of course the usual macaroni and shells from mac'n'cheese. *How was our pasta going to look?*

I was prepared for a mess when we dug in. Each friend had an implement or ingredient they could hold: a whisk, a bowl, a measuring cup or either the flour, salt or an egg. **PH** scooped the first big cup of flour and we plopped it in the bowl. **NV** shook in some salt. I talked about making a "nest" of flour for the egg, and while **AR** and **JU** held the bowl, **AD** used his whisk to create a little indent in the flour. I helped **EL** crack an egg into a small bowl, and then we slid it into its nest. **ML** used her whisk to slowly incorporate the egg and flour together. This is the trickiest part, and I guided ML to ensure that we formed a solid dough.

After giving the dough a couple quick kneads and whisks of my own, I explained *how to manipulate the dough into a log*. I reminded them of times we'd worked with plastilina or clay, and how to use both your hands and the surface to make the dough into specific shapes. I handed out plastic knives, and showed them how to thinly slice little disks off the log, and press them into small circles. This is an actual technique to make orechiette ("little ears"), but our interpretation was much more fluid and open. I noticed **AR, JU and EL** took the most pleasure in just having the dough in their hands—kneading and forming it as a unit. **AD, PH and NV** were more intent on using the knife to manipulate and make pieces

In the center I laid down a large tray for finished pasta pieces to lie on as friends completed. I made a last batch of dough and used a big rolling pin to roll it out kind of flat (but not nearly as thin as typical pasta should be). I cut off pieces for **PH and NV**, who had finished their first chunks and were still engaged, hoping to create more. I demonstrated how to roll up the flat piece and then cut slices, unrolling long ribbons of pasta. But both **NV and PH** were more fascinated by cutting irregular shapes from their sheets.

When we had a tray full of pasta, it was already after 4 pm, our usual snack time. In the past, we had supplemented our cooking endeavors with typical afternoon snacks, but today I decided we pause for a traditional snack, and then I would invite friends to watch and taste as we cooked the pasta in the kitchen. After snack, all of the friends jumped at the opportunity to join me in the kitchen. **PH** asked if I was going to put it in the oven. I pointed to the boiling water pot on the stove, and explained that we put the fresh pasta in little by little, and wait until it rises to the top to signal its doneness. We watched with anticipation as the miscellaneous shapes slowly bubbled in the water, then began floating up top. I scooped the cooked pasta into a bowl with butter, and let each friend grab a fork to try a bite. There were big gobs of pasta, flat pieces, and some long, fat noodles that **NV** enjoyed slurping up. After each friend had tasted a piece, they returned to the class, while I finished cooking up more pasta. I offered more tastes upon my return. **PH and NV** took me up on my offer, and probably would have continued eating had I not stopped them to prevent full bellies for dinner.

With each week I am continuing to learn about what this experience means for both me and our class. With our fourth week of consistent cooking, *I noticed clear anticipation from all friends*. I continue to be surprised *by their fascination with such simple steps*, and excitement about being able to share a “recipe” for pasta: eggs, salt and flour. I notice *clear ownership* over the roles and contributions to the recipe. I was intrigued that so many friends, even those who seemed to have lose interest during the final stages of creation (the actual manipulation of the dough), were interested in watching the cooking event. *I’m wondering if having a break for traditional snack helped reset and refocus attention on the project. When I look back at my initial thoughts and hopes for this project, I had specific expectations of translating our cooking into mealtime, and now I’m starting to wonder if, by removing that expectation, I can garner more enthusiasm for both creating and eating.*

I’ve noticed that reflection and retrospection from my end makes me much more aware of my own expectations and experience, as well helping me focus on what makes this experience important and unique. *I am hoping that I can also find a time for individual reflection from friends who have been particularly involved in this experience (PH, NV, AR and AD) and see what they might recall about our afternoon creations. I wonder if we could create*

some sort of “in our words” recipe book, or have friends help caption photos from our experience. I’m also curious about how friends retell these events at home. Are they particular about ingredients? Do they recall the steps to our process? How can I help them be more specific in their descriptions of both taste and process? Should we try representing our pasta experience with clay, since it has a similar feel and process? Feel free to weigh in!

Henna 6.9.14

Dumpling Day

On Monday, I was searching for something to create for our Tuesday cooking that would rival or exceed last week’s messy experiment with pasta. I felt like we had such a wonderful experience with the pasta, and really saw friends taking pride in their product and also encouraging team work. *I always try to find recipes that involve enough steps and activities to keep friends’ interested, but that are also malleable since we aren’t so precise in our measurements often.* While I’ve attempted to ask the class what they would like to cook, the answers are mostly along the lines of muffins, pancakes, or pizza, which don’t seem to provide much challenge.

During a conversation with **Abby and PH** at pick-up Monday, Abby threw out the dumpling idea. Aha! I thought back to one of my first dumpling experiences. I was living in an apartment with a bare bones kitchen, not many gadgets or even mixing bowls for that matter. But I had it in my head that I wanted to make this spring pea dumpling soup with yellow lentils. The recipe called for a food processor to mix things together, another item I did not own, so I was a bit hesitant. I’d also had no experience with the actual folding and sealing of dumplings. I remember first trying to mash peas in a bowl with a fork, and when that didn’t work, I got out a hammer and started pounding them through a ziplock bag. This was it! The recipe for Tuesday—a great way to get out some aggression and make tasty, healthy(ish) food.

We had a very late nap, and because I found that last week we flourished when we separated our cooking from our 4 pm snack, I decided to go straight to snack and then offer cooking after, as an alternative activity to outdoor play. **AD, NV, AR, PH and JU** choose to stay in to cook. As always, we looked at the ingredients on the table .What did we see? How did everything smell? Did we recognize all of the ingredients? Salt, oil, and

peas were obvious to all of our friends, and **PH** zeroed right in on the parmesan cheese. The shallot and the ricotta were mysteries. “Yogurt?” guessed **PH** for the ricotta. “Garlic?” guessed **AR** when we looked and smelled the shallot. I talked about how a shallot was like a cousin to garlic and onions, and **PH** promptly told us about his cousins who visit. I explained that ricotta was also similar to yogurt, in that they both came from milk. We decided not to taste ingredients individually, but instead dove into making our filling for the dumplings.

Everyone had a turn using child-sized rolling pins to roll, mash, pound and crush the peas in their ziplock bag. We scooped ricotta into the bowl, added our pre-chopped shallots and grated parmesan. I poured a drizzle of olive oil then each friend had a turn helping zest a lemon. We talked about how the zest is another name for the skin of a lemon, and how when we shave off the zest, the lemon is no longer yellow, and a white part appears. It was fun to use new instruments, and when we looked looked at all of our ingredients in the bowl we saw a rainbow of yellow oil and zest, white cheese, green peas and bright purple shallot.

After we mixed our ingredients together, I showed friends how to take our dumpling wrappers (which were square), add a tiny amount of filling, then fold them into triangles, sealing them with water. The one aspect that friends paid particular attention to was the filling. They used baby sized spoons, and checked in constantly, “Is this enough?” “This much?” “Is this too much?” **AR** was a natural at folding dumplings. She had the same look of concentration on her face as when she’s completing a puzzle or building a block pattern. The table was mostly quiet when we began folding dumplings. **PH** kept looking up, checking on his friends’ progress, then back down to his own. After I helped him attach the corners to make a triangle and seal the dumpling, he was able to repeat the process quite well. **NV** made one perfect dumpling, then sat back to watch other friends. **AD** preferred more of a roll and fold method, taking very little interest in the typical dumpling shape, but none-the-less enthusiastic about his individual approach. **JU** basked in the tactile experience, enjoying the feeling of squeezing and molding a single ball of dumpling wrapper and filling in his hand. Because dumplings can be fickle when cooking, I worked to crank out a handful of intact dumplings so we’d have enough that didn’t fall apart during cooking.

Again, we watched and waited as a group for dumplings to boil and rise to the top. **AR** explained to Miwako that we made dumplings with “lemon, onion, crème fraiche and peas.” With a sprinkle of salt and dab of olive oil, each friend was given a dumpling to try. **JU** opted out of the taste test, but the rest of the friends slurped them down, **AR** even tilting the bowl to her mouth to get the last vestiges of salt and oil. After one, impatience with the project set in, and as the rest of the group trickled in from outdoors, NV, AR, AD, JU and PH choose to join them in the class, rather than stay on to watch the rest of the dumplings cook.

I noticed a number of patterns emerging during our cooking experience. **AR** is extremely verbal during the entire experience, pointing out ingredients and often reminding friends of techniques she finds successful, like holding the bowl with one hand, or keeping an eye on how much filling others put in their dumplings. **JU** has joined us eagerly each week, and is enthusiastic about following through with whatever job he is assigned, but often revels in the companionship of the group rather than being concerned about the actual outcome of the project. **PH** is intent on cooking. Normally a very vocal presence in the class, during cooking, he listens carefully and often steps back to observe. He is meticulous about following the proper steps. **NV** too, always anticipates our cooking experiences, but will sometimes take a step back and only join in when she feels comfortable. She is, however, an excellent taste tester. **AD** is always brings his own methods and ideas to our cooking, working diligently to create his interpretation of our project

I’ve also noticed friends show little interest in the names of particular ingredients, and are quick to judge them “yuck” or “yum” as they smell or taste them individually. *I am working toward expanding our vocabulary away from just yuck and yum, and being able to define and include tastes like spicy, sweet, sour, bitter and salty, something we worked on in studio Thursday.* However, the yuck vs. yum doesn’t seem to play a big role in trying the finished product, as most are eager to taste what we’ve created from our cooking. *I’m hoping to create a sort of anthology of ingredients, so we can work on recognizing different tastes and different ingredients. What is salty? What is spicy? What ingredients do we find in their lunch boxes and their snacks? How can we get more specific in our ingredients (talking about bread or hummus as an ingredient, vs. wheat and chickpeas and oil etc.) I’m hoping an*

anthology of ingredients might help us steer the conversation towards recipe creation, and maybe even come up with some T2N original recipes.

Again, if you ever have a chance to collect any thoughts that our cooking friends share with you at home, I'm very curious to see how they retell our experience outside of the classroom. I continue to try to find a way to record our experiences through the words of our friends.

Henna 6.15.14

Granola Tuesday

After two messy, labor intensive weeks of pasta and dumplings, I was looking for something that would be fun, delicious and also a little more flexible in recipe. After our studio tasting with **NV, PH, AD and AR** I was inspired to delve into basic recipe creation with our group. I figured with granola, I could present various options for ingredients, and we could employ a somewhat democratic process to come up with a T2N original creation. It was a small group on Tuesday, and **AR, PH and NV** chose to join me in cooking while other friends opted for outdoor time. I called them over and said, "C'mon team!" and **PH** said, "Ya, Team Granola!"

They looked at the spread on the table and we revisited our conversations from studio. What did we try? "Spicy!" yelled **NV**. "Sweet, sweet, sweet!" yelled **AR**. I offered that I have various different ingredients for our granola, some sweet raisins, craisins and dried cherries, some salty/savory seeds and nuts, and then of course olive oil, salt and both honey and maple syrup. We started by trying the nuts, and received overwhelming thumbs up from **PH and NV** for both cashews and pecans, but were rather unexcited by the raw almonds. **AR** abstained from those two, but everyone was enamored with both sunflower seeds and sesame seeds. We then tried craisins, raisins and cherries, deciding that the raisins were the sweetest, then the craisins and that the cherries were yummy but sour.

After tasting these, **AR** helped me dump the oats into a big bowl then we back through the nuts and seeds, giving a thumbs up to the ingredients we wanted to add, and a thumbs down if not. Through this process we agreed on cashews, pecans, sunflower seeds and sesame seeds, each friend putting in a handful. I gave them the option of

honey or maple syrup to sweeten things up, and all three cried for honey. I proposed a taste test, and after that the vote swung to maple syrup. We added the oil, the maple syrup, a fair amount of salt shakes (maybe too many) and finally a little taste of vanilla. The vanilla was intriguing, because as we smelled it the consensus was, “Yum! Sweet!” but when I suggested a taste, I warned them it does NOT taste good. I dipped popsicle sticks in the vanilla and then had them touch it to their tongue. **AR** smiled and yelled “Yum!” **NV** made a confused face, expecting the sweetness of the smell but tasting the bitter alcohol. **PH** agreed with **AR’s** “yum”, although his face registered clear confusion at the taste/smell contradiction.

One of the most exciting processes for all was buttering the tray. They took turns smearing the butter on the baking sheets, and pointing out spots they had missed. After I had distributed the granola on the two trays, it was a long, suspenseful walk to the kitchen, to see if we could make it without spilling. **AR and NV** jumped and clapped after they had successfully deposited the tray onto the pre-school one counter—they were so proud!

I didn’t get to hear **PH and AR’s** reactions to the final product, but when I tried the granola with **NV** the next day she took a couple bites and said, “Too salty!” What a discerning palate! (It was QUITE salty). I laughed at how influenced the three of them are not only by other’s reactions (like **AR’s** yum to the vanilla), but also by their initial gut reaction. I’ve noticed when cooking, they will often frown upon individual ingredients saying “yuck” or making a face, and so when the final product comes around, they might refuse to try. However, with the dumplings, most friends enjoyed the final outcome (maybe because they couldn’t tell the separate ingredients as they were covered by the dumpling wrapper). I appreciated **NV** being able to try the granola on her own, and was impressed that she noticed the distinct salty taste. At lunch and snack I am trying to continue our categorization of foods, asking what they have that is sweet, or salty, or “even (rarely) spicy. I do think that in order to achieve some ideas, like an ingredient anthology or a simplified recipe book, I will have to work one-on-one with friends to give them time to formulate their own ideas and records of our experiences.

Henna 6.23.2014

A Studio Summary

Last week AR, PH, NV, AD and I joined Katie for a taste testing feast in studio. I'd been intrigued by the language our friends use to describe food, and was hoping to find a way to move beyond the general "yuck" or "yum" that dominates our descriptive use. While most friends seem to understand sweet, sour, spicy and salty, I thought it was be fun to try some of these various sensations and also talk about mixing flavors. I showed up with bland pita bread, salt, agave and honey, ancho and cayenne chili powder, a lemon and some cinnamon. I figured this could help initiate a conversation about how various foods taste, and also help us identify flavors during other meals like lunch and snack. I tore up pita bread and sprinkles the various ingredients around in separate bowls. We licked the honey bowls clean, puckered up tasting lemon, and tried to scrape the hotness from the spicy from our tongues. My favorite reaction from NV and PH was this initial "yum, yum, yum!" when trying the Ancho chili powder, and then a delayed "aahhhh!!!!" so spicy. AR enjoyed mixing the cinnamon and the honey flavors together, as well as the salty with the sweet. While our vocabulary for evaluating food hasn't moved too far beyond yuck and yum, the experience helped open the conversation during lunch and snack as to what parts of their meal were salty, sweet or spicy. It also inspired me to cook granola for our next Tuesday creation, something that combines various flavors and ingredients.

Henna 6.23.2014

Showcase Herbed Crackers

I knew we wanted to have something available at showcase to highlight our adventures in cooking over the last weeks. This meant it had to be *something relatively edible, presentable and also easy to eat*. Anna and our friends have done such a wonderful job caring for our indoor garden, I also wanted *to find something that would incorporate our beautiful herbs*. To meet all of these requisites, I came up with the idea of crackers. My foray into cracker making started when I made rosemary gruyere crackers that never even left the baking sheet, I ate them hot from the oven. I've tried no-rise focaccia and doughs as well, peppered with herbs. But after a quick internet search I found *a flatbread recipe that called for five ingredients* plus rosemary. I figured our basil, sage and oregano

would be a perfect substitute, and crackers fit all of my qualifications for something to have available at showcase.

I had planned to do all the baking on Wednesday to avoid any day-of rushing, but there was literal mutiny on the bounty after nap as we put friends into bathing suits right after nap, and then gave them a choice of outdoor sprinkler play or cooking first, and then outdoor play. It was clearly difficult to comprehend that there would be sprinkler play either way, because everyone opted for outdoor time. (I don't blame them! It was a hot day!) While we ate snack, Sammie proposed a compromise: outdoor time until 5 and then cooking. We had a plan.

EL, NV, and PH helped me harvest the herbs right after nap. **PH** was an old pro at plucking basil (and sneaking it straight into his mouth), while **EL** championed the oregano movement by getting scissors to cut off their fibrous stems. We collected some bowls full of herbs, and I took over the final prepping of plucking and slicing our harvest. At 5 pm, five dry friends joined me at the table, along with Alice and Yoda who kindly let **EV** and **NV** stay. We prepped our dough, mixing together the salt, baking powder and flour into two separate batches. That took a about 30 minutes (a little longer than anticipated), with everyone getting a chance to measure and stir at some point. Since I knew parents would be arriving, I made the call to put off the making of the dough and the baking of the flatbread until Thursday morning.

Thursday I held off until around 9:15, and with **EV** still the only one in the class, I invited him to join me making the dough. He helped pour in the oil and the water, and hoarded the container of special Cyprus Sea Salt flakes I had brought in, wanting to know what it was and if he could use it. We plopped parchment paper onto the table and with Sammie's help **EV** pushed with his hands and rolled out the dough. **NV** came running in shortly after we finished rolling out the first dough, and while she had no interest in rolling out the other dough, she helped stir in the water and oil into the second batch, and was adamant about being in charge of spreading the oil and sprinkling salt onto the tops of the flatbread before they went into the oven. When **EV** had completed one flat bread, he moved on to playing in the back. **NV** however, stuck with me over the next half an hour, tip toeing into the kitchen to check on each batch and then coming back to the class to help do the oil and the salt.

I laughed on Wednesday afternoon when there was complete mutiny, thinking, "Go figure, the one time I actually really would like to have a presentable product." But luckily, *through compromise it all ended up coming together*. Even though I did most of the rolling out of the dough (a tricky task to get it the proper thinness), I was proud of **NV** for latching on to a task of her own, and for keeping me company each time we went to check on the bread in the kitchen. But mostly I was thrilled at how well received the crackers were at showcase. I pretty sure between **NV** and **EL** at least a quarter of what was offered was consumed. I continue to realize that *a lot of this experience is about making excitement, entertainment and pride*. As a group, it was clear sprinkler time took precedence over cooking, but once we sat down at the table, everyone was eager to participate in some aspect of the event. Watching **EL, NV and PH** harvest the herbs we planted and cared for was a fantastic experience, and it was quite fun to be able to use them in a recipe where they really took center stage. *I continue to marvel at how such a simple activity can be so rewarding, and also how much more you can get out of a recipe when working with kids*. Typically something like this would take me less than a half hour, start to finish, but with our class *we were able to expand the event into a full afternoon and morning*. *When interest wanes, there's an option to move on to other activities, and I almost think this helps make the experience more valuable for those who choose to stick through it to the end*.

This past endeavor had me thinking about how I can continue to enhance our cooking. In Brooklyn I worked for two different cooking class companies, helping them prep and cleanup for cooking classes. *It made me think of presentation, and how often ingredients were measured out or offered in a more aesthetically pleasing way*, rather than just throwing sacks of flour or bottles of oil on the table. I'm the first to admit that I haven't been extremely diligent about making ingredients accessible and beautiful, as I usually keep them in their regular packaging to avoid further cleanup. However, I noticed that friends struggled to scoop flour out of the bag or baking powder out of the box. *I think moving forward I'd like to make more of an effort to have a set up that is not only more accessible but also more aesthetically pleasing for our bunch*.

Henna 6.30.2014

Rice Paper Spring Rolls

Well I stuck with my goal to add some aesthetics to my next cooking adventure, and I think it partly paid off, but I'm not sure how well received the final product was. As we were sweating through Monday, I was racking my brain to think of something cool that we could make—something that wouldn't require turning on the oven. Anna helped me brainstorm, suggesting a cold soup, like a gazpacho or something, or some sort of rolling/wrapping adventure akin to pigs in a blanket. I loved both ideas, and for some reason the two combined triggered the idea of Vietnamese spring rolls. I knew it was ambitious because rice paper rolls are finicky as is, but I loved the idea of each friend assembling their own roll, and I also felt we would stay within comfort zones if I kept the filling options recognizable: cucumbers, carrots, red bell peppers, some basil from our garden and then bean curd noodles and alfalfa sprouts. I thought that I could potentially sell them on a peanut dipping sauce, because it's sweet and also has a strong familiar taste of peanut butter.

Because the process is tricky, and I figured many friends would need help with the assembling and rolling, I decided to offer the activity right after nap as our snack. I set up the table with individual bowls of ingredients and bright dish towels. I made it so there were only three seats at the table, and then other activities out in the back. It certainly kept the friends not at the table intrigued at what was going on at the snack table and provoked their curiosity.

My first takers were **AR, EL and PH**. I decided to offer them a taste of the peanut sauce first, using wooden popsicle sticks to get just a small sample. I was hoping it would be received well, and offer an incentive to make the roll, which felt a little more risky. Knowing that most friends follow the lead of others, I offered it to **PH** first, hoping I would elicit a "Yum!" And it did! **AR** then tried, and while her face showed ambivalence, she followed suit with **PH** "Yum!" **EL** tried as well, and gave an expressive, "Umm...hmmm....." while making a *yikes-what-the-heck-was-that* face.

EL went first, helping me dip her rice wrap into warm water then laying it the dish towel. I offered each ingredient to her, and she responded with a beautiful "Yes please" to everything but the alfalfa sprouts (not surprisingly). She rolled it up into a loose wrap and

declined the offer for peanut sauce. **AR** and **PH** followed suit, making their wraps and choosing ingredients. **AR** asked for peanut sauce in her bowl and **PH** as well. **EL** and **AR** took hesitant bites, then decided they prefer to only “eat the insides.” **PH** went ahead and shoved the whole thing in his mouth. I noticed he was devouring the peanut sauce, and gave him a separate bowl of only peanut sauce. When he finished, he asked “What are you going to do with this?” pointing at his left over peanut sauce. I offered for him to make another roll, but he just looked confused and said, “Well, what about this?” I told him it was his, and that was all he needed to start slurping it down. I have to say, the sight made me pretty happy!

HR, **AD** and **NV** joined next, **EV** watching from a distance. **HR** chose her ingredients carefully, and I helped her secure her roll. She too declined peanut sauce, but enjoyed most of her roll before declaring “Done!” and walking away (similar to **EL**, **AR** and **AD**’s adventure in eating). **NV** then constructed a very coherent roll, also choosing to forgo the peanut sauce. She ate it as a unit, until it eventually fell apart in her hands, then she diligently slurped up the noodles and cucumbers. **AD** was meticulous in constructing his roll—placing individual pieces of each vegetable delicately down on the wrap. He tried the peanut sauce, but wasn’t as receptive as the others. His face looked similar to when he tried a lemon! His roll was probably the most secure, as he was very cautious in rolling, and delicate when eating. **EV** and **JU** checked in regularly, but were eventually too involved in a duplo game at that point to be coerced into making food.

I was surprised by the outcome of the peanut sauce. *I really thought it would be a selling point to get them interested in making the spring rolls, since it’s (in my opinion) fairly sweet and peanuty.* But by watching their reactions to the taste test, I could tell that some of the other flavors from the sauce probably overpowered the sweetness that I taste. The soy sauce and rice vinegar definitely added a sour/bitter profile (something I considered negligible) and the lime juice was probably a little tart. I went back and tasted it, in attempt to deconstruct everything that friends’ were tasting and it was rather complex.

In fact, I was fascinated by the general look of confusion on friends’ faces during the whole process. It was this sort of, “Hey, I think I know these vegetables and these ingredients, but what is this weird wrapper that starts out hard and gets soft and these funny clear noodles that don’t taste like much and why do we have to wrap it all together.” *I was*

*excited that all of the friends choose to add basil to their wraps that **EL, PH and AR** helped collect. I do think, despite **PH and NV** being the only ones to eat the roll in entirety, that it was the right choice to do it as a small group, and offer it first in place of snack. (We had a later, typical snack around 4:45 because most friends did not eat much.)*

With project such as this, *I still wonder if it wouldn't be more effective in offering them a taste of the actual product first*, and then saying, "Hey, let's make this together!" but then there's always the fear that once they try the finished product, they won't want to be involved in recreating it. I can tell that every single friend is invested in the creation of these foods, but it continues to haunt me that they so rarely will eat the entire finished product. I was fascinated by **EL and AR's** deconstruction of their rolls. I can understand they weren't the most well wrapped, but I also think that rice paper texture is a little funky even for some adventurous adults.

The whole class has been so indulgent of my whims, that I think next we will try for something sweet, especially since anytime I ever ask what they might want to cook, the answers usually run along the lines of "Candy!" (AD) or "Muffins, cupcakes, cake" (the rest of the crew). I'm sure sugar is key, I just wonder if I could get away with something scandalous like black bean brownies or chia seed truffles...

Henna 7.7.2014

Carrot Cookies with Coconut Oil

I left last week's cooking project with thoughts of something sweet. I had tried so many adventurous combinations with our group, that I felt like a sweet treat would be well deserved. Muffins are always a hot topic when I ask what the class wants to cook, but they feel too mundane, and not as exciting. One of my goals in this project was to expand our eating boundaries, to find out what flavors taste good, and find healthy, tasty snacks. Most of the recipes I've worked with have stemmed from my own ideas of what to make, and then an online search of recipes to find something adaptable for our class.

However, for something sweet, I was meeting dead ends with all my initial thoughts. Black bean brownies required overnight refrigeration and a food processor. Tiramisu, an amazing dessert that is so fun to make because of its dipping and layering process, called

for either raw eggs or complicated stove top custard, both too ambitious to take on. Finally I relied on a favorite food blog of mine that boasts healthy combinations and simple recipes. I came across some carrot oatmeal cookies that used natural sweeteners (maple syrup), had vegetables (carrots!) and didn't require sticks of butter. A win all around!

JU, AR, EL, NV and AD joined me in measuring, mixing, scooping and baking our cookies. I expected more enthusiasm on the announcement of cookie baking (it being a treat and all) but there was the same amount of excitement as any other of our endeavors, and friends that weren't interested in cooking still opted out. They knew all the ingredients: oats, flour, salt, carrots, nuts (pecans) and were intrigued by the smell and look of melted coconut oil. I had finally succeeded in having everything I needed to make all the steps accessible and fairly easy to complete. It was a fast process and we had a dough ready in minutes. Because there wasn't a cookie sheet readily available, I used mini muffin tins to bake the first batch. I found it was a great instrument in helping guide friends how much dough should be used for each cookie. It also made the cookies rounder, and a little bit more moist. When we sat down to eat, **EL and AD** devoured theirs, while **AR** picked her way around the nuts but ate most of it. I was so excited that I had found a basic recipe that could be modified according to preferences. I'm sure the carrots could be substituted for zucchini, or even banana, and that the nuts could be omitted or swapped depending of preference. If you wanted it to be more of a sweet treat, chocolate chips would be a great addition.

The next morning I offered the cookies as an option for morning snack. **EL and AD** happily ate theirs. **NV** just sort of bit around it, while most of it ended in the trash. **AR** articulated clearly she didn't like nuts while **EV** wouldn't even try it because it had carrots, while **JU** followed EV's lead in choosing a more traditional snack of goldfish and apples. Despite that, I felt like I had finally "won" with this one. We knew the ingredients, we talked about new tastes and smells (coconut oil) and I found a snack that was accessible to make and modify. Not to mention the process and clean up went smoothly, making it a perfect afternoon activity.

One area that has not been as successful as I had imagined, is helping have the class reflect on our cooking experiences. I've printed pictures, and tried to ask questions of **PH**,

NV, JU, AR and AD (the four that have consistently contributed to this experience) about what they enjoyed and remembered about cooking. The responses ranged from **PH** “We make stuff. Can I go play?” to **ML’s** “We made cookies. I heard there was lots of granola in them.” (ML was there for the cookie making, but was involved in other work while we were cooking.) **AR** listed “granola” and “pasta” as things we had made. **JU** chimed in by saying, “I remember making pizza and I also remember the time we made the cookies but didn’t taste good because you put the carrots.” **NV** abstained from direct comment, but I know she secretly is bursting with stories about our cooking adventures.

The process of reflecting on this entire experience makes me think of a book that I read awhile back called “A Million Little Pieces.” It was initially printed as a memoir and heralded by Oprah as being a chilling reflection on drug addiction, but later its veracity was called into question as some of the events he recalled in the book didn’t seem to match actual fact of the times. Long story short, one person’s recollection of his life was called into question, and the book was later categorized as fiction to avoid any misconceptions. I struggled with this idea— the difficulty in comparing memories and categorizing recollections as true vs. false. I can’t imagine it’s really so black and white, and when looking at our cooking experiences, I’m sure the way I remember the events is quite different from how our small friends remember them. In fact, they probably won’t remember much of it. But in any case, their experiences live inside my memory, and are portrayed here in these reflections according to my documentation. I hope that as they continue to explore food and cooking, the conversation can continue at home and in the classroom, and their ideas and recollections of food and cooking will expand, change and mold over time.

What I’ve taken away from this experience is the resilience, the competence and enthusiasm of each friend who has joined me along the way. The entire experience felt natural: “Of course kids can cook!” but when I look back on this anthology I have created, I realize that what we’ve accomplished together is a lot more than just cooking: we’ve explored our senses, we’ve practiced teamwork and patience, we’ve experimented with cause and effect and most importantly trusted each other. I couldn’t be more thrilled to have tried, succeeded, failed and had fun, all equally, all as a group.

Henna 7.17.14

Recipes

All of these recipes are perfectly suited for cooking with kids. Measurements aren't specific and most of the recipes will still survive if there's a little more or less of anything. Cast any fears of getting dirty, messy or squishy aside, it can all be cleaned. I find it helpful to have the ingredients on display in bowls that are accessible for scooping. Make sure you have all your utensils and ingredients handy, so that as you complete steps, you can just stack dirty dishes for washing later. Have fun!

Zucchini Coins

Zucchini sliced into coins

Olive oil

Bread crumbs (panko are my favorite)

Grated parmesan

Salt

I don't have specific ratios for this but it's easy to wing. Drizzle olive oil onto sliced zucchini coins in a bowl. In a separate bowl put the parmesan, bread crumbs, salt and any dried herbs or spices you want to include. Have kids take a zucchini and cover with

bread crumbs then put them on an oiled baking sheet. Cook at 450 for around 30 minutes, flipping half way. Watch closely—depending on how thinly they are sliced, they might cook more quickly.

Maple Syrup Sweet Potatoes

Sweet potato

Maple syrup

Olive oil

Salt

Fresh rosemary, chopped

Slice raw sweet potato into sticks then make sure they are well coated with syrup, oil, salt and rosemary. Put them onto a greased baking sheet and cook at 450 for around 20 minutes. Cooking time depends on thickness.

Baby Egg Muffins (aka. Mini Quiche)

Milk, eggs and fillings of your choice.

Whisk a little milk with some eggs. Add veggies, cheese, fillings of choice and portion into greased muffin tin or muffin tin with liners. Bake at 350 until set (anywhere from 8 to 12 minutes).

Basic Pasta

1 cup of flour

1tsp salt

1 egg

Mix salt and flour and then make a nest to crack the egg into. Using a fork, hands or a whisk, slowly incorporate flour into the egg to form a dough. Knead until only slightly sticky and then roll out.

Mold into your favorite pasta shape (Roll out into a log and cut off super thin slices, or roll out into a flat sheet and cut crazy shapes or long strips). Place on a kitchen towel to keep them from sticking while you make everything. Cook in salted water until they float.

Pea and Ricotta Dumplings (via 101 Cookbooks)

2 cups cups peas (freshly shelled or frozen)

2/3 cup ricotta cheese

2 tablespoons olive oil

1/2 teaspoon fine grain sea salt

1 small shallot, minced

1/3 cup grated Parmesan

zest of one large lemon

1 package of [wonton](#) wrappers, or [round](#) wrappers

Cook the peas in lightly salted water and let cool.

Put them in a ziplock bag and let your kids pound, squish, or squeeze them until mashed. Mix all the ingredients together. Spread the dumpling wrappers out on the table, maybe three at a time and add a small teaspoon to the center of each then seal them into triangles using water to seal. Cook them in salted, oiled, water a couple at a time. They will rise and the wrapper will become translucent when done. Serve with a drizzle of good olive oil and a sprinkle of salt.

Granola

3 cups old-fashioned rolled oats

2 to 2 1/2 cups your choice of nuts and seeds*

1 1/2 teaspoons kosher salt

1/4 teaspoon cinnamon

1/2 cup oil, such as olive oil

1/2 cup + 1 tablespoon liquid sweetener, such as honey or maple syrup or agave

3/4 teaspoon vanilla

3/4 cups dried fruits, chopped

* *Note:* Nuts that are already roasted should go in at the end after the granola is baked so as not to burn.

Here's a good ratio for making granola.

Use your favorite nuts, seeds and dried fruits. I love putting sesame seeds in, it makes for an earthy flavor. Mix together everything but the dried fruits and roast on either buttered or parchment lined baking sheets at 350 for 30-40 minutes, stirring them every 15 minutes or so. Let cool then add fruit. Store in an airtight container for optimal freshness.

Vietnamese Rice Paper Rolls

Rice paper rolls

Veggies of choice cut thinly (Use a peeler to make cucumber and carrot strips. Red peppers can be julienned, sprouts are yummy but tricky to get friends to eat, and of course cooked shrimp are traditional).

Cellophane (bean sprout) Noodles

Fresh basil or mint

Cook the noodles and let cool. Put all the ingredients in separate bowls and lay a clean dish towel on the table with a flat plate of warm water. Soak the rice paper in the warm

water (a couple seconds on each side, until it is soft) then spread the paper onto the dish towel. Choose ingredients and put into center of rice roll. Wrap it up like a baby burrito.

Peanut Sauce

2 tablespoons creamy organic or natural peanut butter (important!)

2 tablespoons rice vinegar

1 tablespoon soy sauce

2 teaspoons sugar

1/2 teaspoon of red pepper flakes or garlic chili hot sauce (optional)

Squeeze of lime juice

Hint of freshly grated ginger

Whisk ingredients together and adjust according to desired taste.

Showcase Herbed Crackers

1 3/4 cups unbleached all-purpose flour

1 tablespoon chopped herbs (fresh basil, oregano, rosemary...whatever you choose)

1 teaspoon baking powder

3/4 teaspoon salt

1/2 cup water

1/3 cup olive oil plus more for brushing

Flaky sea salt such as Maldon

Mix dry ingredients together then add herbs. Add oil and water to the mix to form a dough. Divide dough into three parts. Roll out each dough ball onto parchment paper to desired thickness. (Thinner is crispier, thicker more doughy). Brush olive oil on top and

sprinkle extra salt and herbs. Cook at 450 for about 8 to 10 minutes. Roll out the dough right before cooking for best results.

Carrot Oatmeal Cookies (via 101 Cookbooks)

1 cup whole wheat pastry flour

1 teaspoon baking powder

1/2 teaspoon fine grain sea salt

1 cup rolled oats

2/3 cup chopped walnuts

1 cup shredded carrots

1/2 cup real maple syrup, room temperature

1/2 cup unrefined (fragrant) coconut oil, warmed until just melted

1 teaspoon grated fresh ginger

Combine dry ingredients. Combine wet ingredients separately (oil, syrup and ginger) and whisk. Mix everything together. Bake at 375 for 10 to 12 minutes either in greased mini muffin tins or on a cookie sheet.