Baking English
A project of The Learning Community (2016-17)

A project by Tamar

Introduction

Baking English aims to provide the opportunity for an innovative approach to the study of the English language as well as other integral skills. We aim to provide children with an experience where learning is alive, spontaneous and relevant to what they are directly experiencing through practical, hands-on work. The aim is to take the study of English out of textbooks and worksheets and into real-life situations, providing children with an opportunity to learn from context, with joy, and allowing for content to flow from spontaneous, real-life situations.

Description of project

The Baking English project was initiated in The Learning Community (TLC) five years ago and involves small groups of children (maximum 5 per group) exploring various aspects of the English language (including poetry, short story writing, parts of speech, punctuation, to name but a few) as well as research methodologies, mathematical concepts, computer graphic work, photography and teamwork skills, all through the medium of baking.

This year, the Baking English project began by building a wood-fired mud oven in TLC’s Base Camp. The oven was built together with the children participating in the Baking English project, during the first two weeks of the first term. The classes took place in the newly created outdoor kitchen space. Three weekly classes were offered, involving 14 children aged 9-13.

The older kids (those who have already participated in the project in previous years) worked in a more independent format than in previous years – they were required to bring their own recipes (rotating between each child in the class) and to then work on a project derived from their recipe over the weeks that followed (until it was again their turn to bring a new recipe). The students’ project incorporated 4 elements: creative writing (poetry, short stories inspired by the recipe and/or class), research inspired by the recipe (into ingredients, nutrition, historical context, etc.), pricing of the recipe (incorporating relevant mathematic skills and calculations), and spelling.

The younger group (first time participating in the project) were guided in basic skills such as spelling, grammar and techniques of story writing/poetry.

The whole baking process was photo-documented, and towards the end of the academic year the children began to work on a recipe book, which will include the recipe texts, step-by-step photo illustrations, as well as the written work that they completed throughout the year (poems, stories, research, recipe pricing, etc.). Many other elements have naturally come into the classes such as cooperation and teamwork, hygiene, and time management. The children have opted to continue working on their recipe books over the summer, and to complete them by the beginning of the coming academic year. This choice ties up with TLC’s overriding approach of blurring boundaries between home and school, ‘school time’ and ‘holidays’, etc.

As an extension of the Baking English project, the children’s tea shop (“The Dewdrop Inn”) has been developed, where the produce of the Baking English project is offered to the wider community. The tea shop offers further opportunities to learn through doing, incorporating explorations into business models, cost-profit scenarios, alternative economies, promotional strategies, service skills, and team work.
Outcomes

A methodology has been established whereby the study of the English language can be taken out of the textbooks and into a real-life situation. This real environment can awaken a joy for lifelong learning. The child is supported in keeping the joy of learning which he or she naturally has, allowing him or her to express and explore or her natural curiosity.

Through Baking English the individual needs of the child are nurtured as they emerge out of experiences. Children are increasingly empowered to take responsibility for their own learning process, and they experience the nurturing of the faculties of co-operation, self-discipline and patience.

In addition to the exploration of the basic skills of the English language, children experience the overlap with mathematical concepts (among others) which emerge out of the baking process; this de-compartmentalizes learning and gives a practical example of how the different contexts of life can offer diverse learning opportunities.

Reflections

Over the past five years we have seen how the children have developed their skills in many diverse areas covered by the activities in the class: from basic skills in English, to research methodologies, photographic skills as well as cooperative techniques and teamwork. At the end of each term the students are given the opportunity to invent and bake their own recipes, documenting the recipes in their notebooks. The products are proudly shared with the rest of the community, and they demonstrate much skill and creativity.

Future direction: Independent Learning

Next year we will be adapting the methodology of the class to suit the concept of Independent Learning which we are implementing in depth in TLC. Children will be encouraged to assume more independence in the baking process, and mixed-age groups will enable the older or more experienced learner to guide younger or less experienced learners. Assistance and/or facilitation of the baking process will be offered by adults only when required by the students.

The material for language exploration will be offered through a range of possible activities which will cater to the full spectrum of levels, and learners will be encouraged to take up different areas according to interest. They will be encouraged to work with the materials in an independent way, requesting assistance when reaching a new topic which requires an explanation in order to proceed. This approach will engender ownership of their learning process and develop the faculties of self-regulation, cooperation, independence and responsibility.