



Twilight Greenaway: You're listening to JUST FOOD, a podcast brought to you by the Berkeley Food Institute at the University of California, Berkeley. I'm Twilight Greenaway.

Edmond Allmond: I'm Edmond Allmond

Twilight: In each episode we'll explore the complex web of people and places that provide us with our food. We'll be talking with those who grow it, prepare it, and work hard to rebuild the broken parts of our food system. This episode, we're diving into a really important issue. So important that we're going to take two episodes to tackle it.

We're looking at how the Oakland Unified School District here in the San Francisco Bay area is in the midst of a huge overhaul of the way it feeds kids and the way it teaches them about the food they eat.

Edmond: There have been a number of studies and numerous findings through these studies that point to the need for robust food education to help children become and stay healthy.

T: So, one of the tricky things is that every school is different. Some have a real kitchen, some have no kitchen anymore. Some have a garden... So, we're really working with different variables.

So in the next episode, we're going to focus on what happens in the kitchens.

In this episode, though, we're really going to look more at what happens when kids become producers of their food. So, when they're working in the gardens and getting their hands dirty.

E: We're going to learn about eco-literacy.

T: What is this term 'eco-literacy'? how do we define that?

E: Eco-literacy is defined as an understanding of the systems in nature that make life possible, how we're sustained within those systems. So, you're teaching kids about everything from earth to table.

Now, we're going to talk to a woman named Moira O'Neill. She's part of a network of people who are taking a broad approach to improving school nutrition.

Moira, how are you?



Moira: I'm great.

E: This is an important topic. We're dealing with -- food! School lunch specifically. Tell me more about this project that you worked on and the people that you worked with.

M: So, I'm an associate research scientist, in the Institute of Urban and Regional Development, and my focus is on law and city and regional planning. And I'm part of a collaboration of researchers and faculty at Berkeley that are across law and public health and planning, and we're looking at the application of the Rethinking School Lunch planning framework that came out of the Center for Eco-literacy to the Oakland Unified School District, specifically, which has emerged as Rethinking School Lunch Oakland, which is an effort to completely reform school meals in Oakland Unified.

Rethinking School Lunch Oakland is built on a planning framework that came from the Center for Eco Literacy, that looks at ten different pathways to school meal reform. And that's why it's a complete system shift.

But the way these different elements interact, in Oakland in particular, has a lot of relationship to both the local context as well as how school meal programs work. There's so much more that goes into it than simply just changing what it is you're offering, in terms of what you're purchasing and what you're putting on the table in front of the students. And that's where the Rethinking School Lunch planning framework really captures the interrelationship between the different elements between the school meal program, that actually also connect the sustainability of the program, the ability to train the people that serve the meals in terms of professional development to engage students to get them excited about the food through engagement and marketing, to increased parent involvement in the school meal program, to contemplate how you're engaging the students through instruction and nutrition education. So, it's comprehensive in its approach, but it also recognizes but it also recognizes the interrelationship between all of these elements plus some.

E: I want to know more about your particular passion for this topic. What got you involved?

M: So, my interest in this particular initiative really connects broadly with my interest in what local public institutions can do to serve the community. And I was attracted to understanding what this initiative was doing in large part because of the community development aspects what this work is... I'm also from Oakland, and I graduated from Oakland Unified, so, there's a little bit of a personal excitement and interest in seeing this school district be able to transform its school meal program, because I deeply understand the local context, because it's my home.



E: Moira, tell me where Cleveland is, physically, in the city.

M: Cleveland Elementary is located in district 2 which is in Central Oakland. so, it's located near Lake Merritt. It's a very diverse school in a very diverse district. So, the demographics of that school site are both diverse in terms of socio-economic background but also race and ethnicity and language... and it brings together parents and families from households of various backgrounds.

I think Cleveland Elementary provides you a wonderful opportunity to see or hear exactly what you can do when you don't have the green space and when you don't have a cooking kitchen.

Cleveland Elementary is a school site that doesn't have a lot of green space to grow food. And yet, they've coopted every little corner of green space to do so. It's an amazing site that has actually also put beautiful illustrations on their asphalt to connect students to food-related systems and to incorporate the nutrition and food system element of this work in terms of a garden program into the over-all stem program and curriculum of the school. It's completely embedded and integrated into the curriculum overall. It's also a wonderful site to see exactly how important it is to have deep parent engagement in this type of work.

Little Red Hen Day brings together parent volunteers to help. There's going to be multiple stations that the students visit to understand the entire cycle of food, in particular with making bread. And then, what's really wonderful about Little Red Hen Day is one of the stations is across the street at a neighbor's home.

So, there's a home there that has a chicken coop, and it has an outdoor oven. And that particular home opens up every year to provide access to all the kindergartners who come, and they get to meet the Little Red Hen, *[Moira & Edmond, chuckle]*, and pick out an egg...

E: We're going to join the kids now for this big day. And we're going to bounce around the different food stations with them. And we're going hear how this really truly is a community event. Let's head over to Cleveland Elementary.

[kids singing song... ending "... do my best, EV-RY DAAAAY!"]

[teacher speaks you're excited for Little Red Hen Day! Kids as a group, say "thank you"]



Peter Van Tassel: I'm Peter Van Tassel and I'm the principal at Cleveland Elementary School. Today is Little Red Hen Day. It started with Miss Schriener years ago just 'cause she saw a need for kids to actually engage with their environment at the school...

Mary Schriener: I am Mary Schriener, and I'm actually a special ed teacher here in a kindergarten class. I'm also the eco-literacy garden coordinator.

All right... so station number one is going to be the drawing station there... and...so the kids will do botanical drawings of the wheat plants.

Child: Can I see colors?

Mary: Make sure you write your name on yours!

Shamika Preston, Parent: These are things I wouldn't think to teach as a parent. Like I learned about, you know, what wheat looks like in its raw form today! And I've learned tons of things from the eco-literacy program.

[I'm] Shamika Preston. I just follow the teachers around and make sure I don't get the kids in trouble.

Kids: [*lah, lah, lah, lah, lah - no particular song*]

Teacher, Netha Rahim: Just a little bit of flour!

Mary: so, the students are going to be kneading dough over here...

Netha Rahim: Remember, I was in your class, as I mentioned before, and we made some dough and you took a look at it... and try to remember what it looked like...

I'm going to show you the dough after it's had a chance to eat, and rest, and breathe... ok?

Here's what it looks like now?

Kid's: [*oh my god! Oh my god! Oh my gaaaawd...*]

Netha: My name is Netha Rahim, and I'm a parent of a 5th grader at Cleveland Elementary. [*background noise of children at the food stations*]



Ya, know, my children are no longer kindergartners, and this is a kindergarten project, but I come back every year, because... the kids have so much fun, while they're learning so many aspects, of like, their education they're getting through this program.

Netha: Push and flip, and push and flip... And, we need a song, right?

Mary: Ready guys?

One, Two, Three...

Everyone w/ kids {kids front and center}: Water and yeast, salt and flour. Now we use our muscle power! *[small group of kids cheering lightly]*

Mary: After the kneading station, I'll pick them up and I'll walk them down the street to the outdoor oven

Michael Bowen: Alright.. showtime!

Well, we're just. *[sound of baker thumping bread]* testing the... the ... doneness. *[thumping]*. You want it to be baked all the way through. *[thumping]*

...That's not quite there....

Michael: My name is Michael Bowen, and I've lived in this neighborhood for quite a while... my son went to Cleveland. I built this bread oven in the back yard, mostly for selfish reasons. I wanted to make pizza, but Mary saw way beyond that as usual... it's just such a pleasure to be able to participate in this every year, and watch her run the program... like a mother hen...

[sound of hen vocalizing gently]

Mary: And there happens to be a hen house where the little red hen lives, so they get to have a quick visit to the hen house, and pick an egg, and walk back to the egg scrambling station, right there...and... they scramble the eggs, and after that, they go on and dance to a little live bluegrass music, right there around the straw bales...

[sound of fiddle and mandolin playing up-tempo blue grass music]

Mary: ... and then later in the morning we have the big feast.



[music continues playing, a few kids clapping]

Mary: One of the most important moments of the day is the silence that happens after the singing bowl sounds... there's this potency in that silence. And, it's where that power of community is most loudly spoken...

[brass singing bowl is struck and rings out]

[music picks up again, with kids clapping hands]

[fade out music and kids clapping]

E: This has been fun! I want to know more about how this particular day fits in to this program of Rethinking School Lunch Oakland.

M: Well, the reality is, right now, across the district, programs like the eco-literacy program at Cleveland don't exist at all school sites, and not all school children within Oakland have access to what you just heard. So the goal of Rethinking School Lunch Oakland is to scale up that type of eco-literacy program so that all students across the district get this wonderful opportunity to engage with food, learning about nutrition, learning about the science of food in a way that... engages them and their families.

But I think one of the most important elements about Rethinking School Lunch Oakland is that it deeply understands that what happens in the cafeteria will impact the success of what happens in classroom in terms of nutrition education and garden education, but vice versa... that what you're doing in a program like eco-literacy is going to have to be supported by the food. They're so related. You can't teach kids about health eating and nutrition and then offer them processed, plastic-wrapped food, and think that that's advancing that curriculum.

That's the essence of rethinking school lunch Oakland as an understanding of that deep relationship between these different elements.

E: Moira O'Neill, thank you so much for being with us and discussing this issue on Just Food.

M: Thank you for having me and allowing me to discuss all this work.

[Theme music fades in, plays under voice over]



JUST FOOD | Season 2, #2 - Ecoliteracy: Teaching Children About the Origins of Food

E: I'm Edmond Allmond

T: And I'm Twilight Greenaway. And this has been another episode of the Berkeley Food Institute's JUST FOOD.

E: This podcast is a project of the Berkeley Food Institute and was created in partnership with the Berkeley Advanced Media Institute. Graelyn Brashear was the producer, with editing from Ben Manilla. The music you heard in this episode is by Blue Dot Sessions. You can see photos, and listen to other episodes of JUST FOOD on our website, food.berkeley.edu

[music rises, continues and slowly fades out after 10 seconds.]