

Let's have lunch! Teachers eating with their students provides nutrition education opportunities

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Much attention has focused on school meals, both in the United States and across the globe. Researchers at Uppsala University, Sweden, evaluated teachers eating lunch with the school children. In Sweden, this practice is referred to as "pedagogic meals" because it offers the opportunity of having children learn by modeling adults. The researchers wanted to observe how the teachers interacted with the children during meals in order to better understand how to interpret results of this practice. The study is published in the September/October issue of the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*.

"Our research shows that children are educated in various ways during mealtimes. If the potential of [nutrition education](#) during lunch time is to be realized, teachers must become aware of the effects of their actions. This article could help to achieve this goal", says Christine Persson Osowski.

Data were collected from three schools in Sweden for children 6 through 12 years. Observations of the meals (25 hours total) were combined with observation of the cafeteria itself, interviews with kitchen staff, and focus groups with children. Three types of teacher were found: the sociable teacher, the educating teacher, and the evasive teacher. There were two types of sociable teacher, namely, one that had adult interests to discuss and another that was more oriented towards the children. Similarly, the educating teacher could be more adult-oriented and

authoritarian or more child-oriented and dialogue-directed. Teachers seemed more involved with the younger children than the older children.

This research provides a useful tool for researchers and practitioners to clarify best practices for teacher-student interactions during mealtimes, and moves beyond what should be done to how it should be done. Being able to provide feedback to teachers on how to interact informally but constructively with students will help improve the [school nutrition](#) environment. This research may have implications for parental reflection during mealtimes as well.

More information: "Teachers' Interaction with Children in the School Meal Situation: The Example of Pedagogic Meals in Sweden," by Christine Persson Osowski, PhD, RD, Helen Göransson, PhD, and Christina Fjellström, PhD, appears in the *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, Volume 45, Issue 5 (September/October 2013)

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