



## **Between Pleasures and Risks: The Circulation of Knowledge about Food in French Primary Schools**

SIMONA DE IULIO AND SUSAN KOVACS

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**Abstract.** Pleasures and risks associated with food are not stable entities but are constantly negotiated as elements of a network of social interactions. Educational, medical, commercial and political discourses play a determining role not only in the perception, but also in the configuration and circulation of the categories of pleasures and risks. Few studies have investigated the circulation of knowledge and values related to food from a communicational and informational perspective. This article aims at exploring how the tension between pleasure and risk characterizes discourses on food produced for school children by different actors: food companies, textbook editors, educators. Our considerations are based on an exploratory and qualitative study of information and communication devices related to food made available to teachers and pupils in the French region Nord-Pas de Calais. The messages in these devices correspond to often divergent trends and discursive positions. We will consider the presence of sensualist and responsibilizing discourses on food as they place children at the centre of a constellation of interacting voices promoting a range of concerns, types of engagement and forms of knowing.

### **Introduction**

Food has an ambivalent status: it can offer pleasurable experiences but also it can be a potential source of dangers and diseases. This ambivalence appears even more strongly when food is associated with children. For youngsters, eating can be a delight for the senses, a moment of socializing with peers, a way to feel affection or to experience new emotions and sensations. At the same time, adults often see eating as a risk-taking activity for children. Under-eating or overeating, consuming food and drinks, which are high in fat, salt or sugar, are considered a threat; in particular for the bodies and health of children, who are assumed to be subjects at risk because of their biological instability.

Even if children's feeding has always given rise to ambiguous feelings situated between the desire to satisfy their expectations and the necessity to protect them from dangers, pleasures and risks associated with food are not stable entities. Rather, they

Simona De Iulio is Professor of Information-Communication Science, Département Culture, Université Lille 3, Domaine Universitaire du Pont de Bois; Rue du Barreau BP 60149; 59653 Villeneuve d'ascq Cedex, France; email: <simona.deiulio@univ-lille3.fr>. Susan Kovacs is Senior Lecturer in Information-Communication Science, Département des Sciences de l'information et du document, Université Lille 3, Villeneuve d'ascq, France.

are shifting phenomena that are modified constantly as elements of a network of social interactions. Educational, medical, commercial and political discourses, such as rhetorical processes at work in the public sphere, play a determining role not only in the perception, but also in the configuration and circulation of the categories of pleasures and risks. We will focus in this article upon the ways in which pleasures and risks associated with food are presented in the informational and pedagogical resources used in primary schools. Our concern is not to measure the direct impact of these devices upon children's actual food practices, but rather to characterize the messages that circulate in the school arena and that seek to shape the meanings children associate with food and food practices. We hypothesize that within these info-pedagogical devices, popular and scientific knowledge and values about the pleasures and risks related to food are rewritten, 'translated' and transposed. This process of 'trivialization' of information and beliefs (Jeanneret, 2008) participates in the shaping of pupils' and teachers' perspectives and attitudes about food.

In recent decades social scientists have given growing attention to children's food and eating practices in different contexts and to the ways in which childhood identities are constructed and mediated through food (Ludvigsen and Scott, 2009; James et al., 2010; Brougère and de la Ville, 2012). At the same time, food has been considered more and more as a communicational phenomenon (Cramer et al., 2011). Semiotic analysis of food and taste has shown how cooking, table manners, recipes and food presentation function symbolically as communicative practices (Boutaud, 2006; Manetti et al., 2006; Marrone and Giannitrapani, 2012). French studies in communication have opened up new areas of investigation by considering the presence of food rituals and practices in different media (Boutaud and Madelon, 2010; De Iulio, 2013; Lardellier, 2013).

Surprisingly, aside from a small body of recent research (Diasio, 2009; Maurice, 2010; Dupuy, 2013), little attention has been given to the circulation of knowledge about food in educational institutions. From preschool to the secondary school levels, schools are nevertheless crucial sites of mediation and individual and collective appropriation of knowledge about food and food behaviours. Schools are a key site for learning and practising forms of sociability and food consumption: the sharing and eating of snacks with fellow classmates, participation in festive meals and, of course, the daily lunch meal at the school canteen. Within schools, inside and outside the classroom, French pupils are also exposed to a variety of discourses on food, which we find inscribed within a wide range of documentary forms and educational practices.<sup>1</sup>

This article focuses on the tension between pleasures and risks present in discourses on food that circulate in French primary schools. Our considerations are based on an exploratory and qualitative study of a sample of informational and pedagogical devices intended for teachers, pupils (and sometimes parents) and produced by different categories of actors: non-profit organizations and institutes, non-fiction book editors, food service companies and foundations.<sup>2</sup>

The aim of our contribution is twofold. First, we analyse the importance given to food pleasures in these pedagogical devices. Which sources of pleasure are singled out and highlighted in these documents? Which kinds of pleasure does food arouse? How is the pleasurable dimension of food characterized? Second, our contribution focuses on the status and importance given to risks. We aim to identify the sources and types of risk, and those forms of behaviour considered as risky or as risk-free in the discourses on food that circulate in French primary schools. We analyse as well

what kinds of arguments are used to support the claims concerning risks associated with food and eating habits. Our objective through this analysis is to consider the discourses on food as they place children at the centre of a constellation of interacting voices promoting a range of concerns and forms of knowing, from consumer choice, individual and family health, to environmental awareness and engagement. To what extent do these discourses seem to confer upon children the choice of how to navigate among the different pleasures and risks related to food?

### Method and Corpus

In order to examine the ways in which knowledge, values and beliefs related to food pleasures and risks are portrayed in selected info-pedagogical devices, we used the tools of semio-pragmatic analysis in an exploratory qualitative approach (Meunier, 2004). Our ambition was not to produce a quantitative mapping of content through coding, but rather to highlight the lexical, thematic and rhetorical characteristics of each device as they reveal different strategies for engaging young readers. Taking into account both the visual and the verbal features of each device, we considered elements such as typography, illustrations and page layout, as well as vocabulary, informational domains covered or omitted, thematic organization, attitudes or subjectivity, enunciative features such as narrative voice and dialogue with intended readers, and narrative structuring. This integrated approach allowed us not only to identify the sources and types of pleasure and risk associated with food practices as presented in our corpus, but the relative importance assigned to each and the roles given to children, parents and other actors in pleasure-seeking, risk-taking or risk avoidance with relation to food.

Our corpus is composed of documents and kits, created and/or selected, on the one hand, by institutional actors for school children (non-profit and/or educational organizations, non-fiction book editors, national health agencies) and, on the other hand, by businesses or business foundations in the food-service sector who seek to become legitimate actors within the educational sphere.

#### *Institutional Tools and Documents from the Educational Sphere*

The corpus of pedagogical or instructional documents is composed of:

- a 33-page booklet for pupils, *Léo and the Earth (Léo et la terre)*, with its accompanying teacher's guide, created by the French National Agency for Prevention Health Education (INPES, 2005) as a tool to disseminate the principles and guidelines of the French National Nutrition and Health Program;
- a selection of published non-fiction works for children from the collections of the Lille public library;
- an educational loan kit on the theme of food and the environment, 'From My Plate to Our Planet' (MRES and Réseau IDée, 2010), comprising 45 documents;<sup>3</sup>
- a selection of works written for children on the theme of food, recommended in bibliographical resources produced by French national and regional educational resource centres or associations.

This 'institutional' corpus can be considered a representative sampling of the pedagogical tools and publications available to teachers or other professionals (nurses,

dieticians, mealtime and recess staff) at the primary school level in France, and which are intended for use during class time, lunchtime or after-school activities. The loan kit 'From My Plate to Our Planet' itself comprises a wide variety of documents selected by information professionals in Lille and Brussels to highlight the principles of sustainability in eating practices and food production, but in its variety this educational tool addresses a number of issues relating to nutrition, health, agriculture, biodiversity and cultural and historical eating practices. Authors and sources include both French and Belgian organizations or institutions specialized in health, nutrition and environmental issues and the major editors of non-fiction children's books. The majority of the selected publications are resources conceived on a national level rather than for a specific local population of school children, although some of the journals and brochures in the loan kit reflect local agricultural practices or concerns (Belgium, Northern France).

The selected works from the Lille public library were chosen by teachers and are kept in a special reserve room at the library in order to facilitate borrowing. As with the loan kit, we find in these non-fiction works, produced by French editors for teachers and young readers, a variety of approaches to food that remain unrelated to the specific region of Northern France: the history of food production techniques, profiles of specific foods and their production, cookbooks, poetry collections, picture books, guides to nutrition, taste and digestion. For this study we were able to borrow and analyse 10 of these works.

#### *Pedagogical and Informational Devices of the Corporate Food Sector*

Our corpus is also composed of:

- 10 pedagogical kits intended for children, parents and teachers produced by the Louis Bonduelle Foundation;
- 'Come to the Table', a 63-page kit for primary school teachers about French food culture, proposed by the Nestlé France Foundation (Fondation Nestlé France, 2014);
- a selection of pedagogical activity booklets created by the Danone Institute for primary school classes, concerning taste education, written, oral and visual expression about food;
- the quarterly newsletter *De Bouche à oreille*, published since 2010 by the French catering company Scolarest, targeting primary school children and their parents.

The desire to be responsible corporate citizens and to support important societal goals including food education is clearly expressed on the websites of these organizations (where these devices can be downloaded). In particular, the purpose of the Louis Bonduelle Foundation is to contribute 'to creating sustainable change in eating habits by putting vegetables and their benefits at the heart of its action' (Fondation Louis Bonduelle, 2014). The pedagogical engagement of the Danone France Institute reflects its mission 'to link knowledge and experiences in order to give a concrete answer to scientific, economic and societal questions in the field of food, health and wellness' (Institute Danone, 2014). 'Supporting the transmission of French food culture' (Fondation Nestlé France, 2014) is at the heart of the intention of the Nestlé France Foundation and, as suggested in its slogan 'Eating, Learning, Living', the

catering company Scolarest (2014) is committed to ‘sharing its knowledge on food balance’.

Through their offer of informational and pedagogical devices, food companies and foundations try to extend their discourse to the sphere of the public school and to be seen as legitimate actors of children’s food education. These devices propose different playful and pedagogical activities in a clear and simple layout that seems to be inspired by the style of school handbooks and children’s books or by the graphic composition of textbooks and handouts distributed in French school classes. In these resources the marketing aims are therefore dissimulated. The brands and the products of Bonduelle, Nestlé and Danone companies are absent, but they are evoked through the names of the foundations or institute, whose logos are printed on the cover and on the margin of every page.

### **A Variety of Pleasures in a Broad Conception of Food**

Considering these pedagogical devices as a whole, we can say that they are designed to help teachers, and in some cases parents, capture children’s attention about foods not only as substances that provide nutritional support for the body, but also as cultural objects. Eating is presented as a physiological and nutritional process, as a sensory experience and as a set of norms, values and interdictions that are historically situated. Cooking is depicted as a creative activity that mobilizes knowledge and experiences linked to long national and familiar traditions. What these pedagogical devices try to introduce into primary school classes and into the children’s world is therefore a broad and complex conception of food and food-related practices. They reformulate and trivialize ideas and knowledge about nutritional principles, sensory education and sustainable eating practices, adapting selected information and points of view to the particular ambitions of each device. As we will see, varying importance is given to the different dimensions of the pleasures of food, eating and cooking.

#### *The Pleasures of Discovery, Play and Having Fun with Food*

In many of the documents included in the kit ‘From My Plate to Our Planet’, as well as in the National Agency for Prevention and Health Education booklet *Léo and the Earth* and the selected works in the Lille municipal library, we find that the pleasures related to food are, in part, created through the integration of activities and activity sheets, recipes, guessing games, experiments, puzzles, gardening activities, and multiple choice quizzes. These activities belong to a long tradition within popular science publications and pedagogical documents by which the process of learning is reinforced through play or games.

In non-fiction works on the theme of nutrition – for example, games, experiments, and ‘fun facts’ – are offered up to the young reader in order to emphasize or illustrate a nutritional or health message. In *Food, in Small Steps (Les Aliments à petits pas*, Mira Pons, 2008), a popular-science publication on food and nutrition included in the loan kit, we find a recipe for potato pancakes accompanied with salad that ends with the explanatory ‘now here is a balanced meal!’ and an idea for an activity designed to make children more open to trying new foods, followed by the exhortation: ‘and promise yourself to take a taste of an exotic dish that you hated until now’.



Activities and experiments relating to food in these educational documents are conceived not only to highlight nutritional norms but also to promote the process of intellectual discovery. In the cookbook/chemistry book *The Children's Saucepan* (*La casserole des enfants*, This, 1998) published by the French textbook editor Belin in 1998 – on reserve at the Lille library – the pleasures of learning come from experimenting with food in the kitchen. In this work, pleasures derive less from the actual experience of eating, cooking or touching foods, and more from the rewards of learning and discovery. Similarly, in a non-fiction work for children on gardening and cooking included in the loan kit, *The Book of Gardening and Cooking* (*Le livre du jardinage et de la cuisine*, Bloomfield, 2009), translated from a 2008 UK Dorling Kindersley publication, the delights of gardening are associated with the pleasures of 'discovering on one's own what works and what doesn't work.'

Moreover, board games and puzzles are used in certain of the loan kit documents to address serious issues related to food: among the sets of activity sheets and booklets we find crosswords, fill in the blank sheets, and illustrations to rearrange in the correct order, on topics related to organic farming and world hunger. The kit also features a detective game created to prompt youngsters to discover what countries their food comes from, and a board game called the 'Big Fountain Game', in which children are encouraged to use their school water fountain, as they play together to clean up the playground through strategy and cooperation. Here role-playing and games prompt children to act out solutions in ways that differ from traditional classroom approaches to learning, while introducing them to the spheres of sustainability and health education, which teachers often find difficult to integrate into their teaching (Kovacs, 2012).

Exceptionally, we find documents in which food itself becomes an object of play and fantasy: a reissue of Bruno Munari's graphical evocation, *Roses in the Salad* (*Des Roses dans la salade*, Munari, 2008 [1974]) is featured in the loan kit. Munari's graphic experiment consists of using pieces of cut vegetables to create fanciful imprints. The world of vegetables is transformed into an imaginative game in which forms evoke faces, islands, tanks, spaceships, flowers and more. This work remains an exceptional incursion, within this loan kit, into the pleasure of spontaneous discovery derived from the use of food as an artistic object. Unlike this Munari work, the vast majority of educational resources on food borrow ludic forms while remaining centred upon educational content and nutritional messages, thus denaturing the frivolous essence of play (Brougère, 2010). The devices conceived by food companies, however, emphasize the enjoyment children can experience through amusing activities relating to food.

Indeed, learning by playing and discovery seem to be the aim of all of the infopedagogical devices produced by food organizations. In order to 'promote the public utility of vegetables' as indicated on the logo, the strategy of the Louis Bonduelle Foundation kits is to suggest that not only is there something appealing to learn about vegetables and legumes, but also that such learning can be humorous and entertaining. These pedagogical devices try to integrate knowledge about food into two spheres of everyday experience that are more and more intertwined in children's life: school and play. As Daniel T. Cook explains, 'an object, edible or not, becomes "fun" for children when it somehow gives an indication of "belonging" to them – or more precisely, belonging to their world' (Cook, 2005, p. 19). The Louis Bonduelle Foundation kits seek to develop children's ability to recognize, identify and classify vegetables and legumes commonly used in French cooking and to indi-

cate their nutritional properties. Banal items from the trivial sphere of the table thus become objects of both learning processes and leisure activities. In an unexpected way, carrots, pies, courgettes, aubergines are at the centre of puzzles, quizzes and riddles. Vegetables are sometimes anthropomorphized, have a name, and become characters who give children instructions on the activities.

In the same way, pedagogical kits produced by other food business institutions place emphasis on the pleasure that comes from the association of food with elements specific to children's culture and everyday life. The majority of the activities proposed by the Danone Institute are an invitation to take part in a ludic, imaginative and amusing discovery of cooking and experiencing taste. The declared objectives are manifold: learn to identify, describe and experience different tastes; imagine, explain and illustrate a cooking recipe; recognize and classify fruits and vegetables. These learning goals are to be reached through a variety of tasting experiences and experiments and a range of playful exercises. In the Scolarest catering company newsletter, preparing and decorating a recipe is described as a creative and humorous way to appreciate the sensory qualities of the different ingredients.

### *Sensory Pleasures of Food*

In most of the nutritional works included in the loan kit or the Lille library selection, the presentation of the sensory pleasures associated with the taste, smell and feel of food is subordinated to more serious messages. In some of these works, for example, taste is described as intellectual rather than sensorial in nature: *I Know What I Eat (Je sais ce que je mange*, Morguet, 2001), produced by the French textbook publisher Magnard, presents taste as an information-processing phenomenon rather than an individual sensory experience. When taste preferences are mentioned, as in the non-fiction work on nutrition *What Do We Eat? (Qu'est-ce qu'on mange?*, Chabrol, 1997), published by the children's editor Casterman in 1997, they are often quickly dismissed or rewritten as dangers. Thus, we are told that cooking with hot oil may create crunchy and delicious fries and fritters, yet these foods are quickly decried as fattening; the holiday festivities and the foods we associate with them bring on the risk of indigestion, and so on. Similarly, the loan kit documents, centred almost entirely on an ecological perspective (reduction of waste, consumer awareness, world poverty and famine, alternatives to fast food, organic farming, etc.), offer little or no consideration of the sensory dimensions of eating.

An activity to promote taste education in the National Agency for Prevention and Health Education (INPES) booklet *Léo and the Earth* is featured, significantly, at the end of the text and occupies a single page. This activity is intended to suggest the importance of the sense of sight in the eating experience, yet while activities concerning the other senses are proposed in the teacher's guide, these senses are not mentioned in the children's book. Moreover, taste education is presented in the teacher's handbook as useful essentially in avoiding children's snap judgements on food and for sharing impressions with others, competencies that are thus not a celebration of the senses in and of themselves. This resource for teachers remains primarily focused upon nutritional and environmental or civic awareness.

As opposed to this intellectual approach to taste, which seems to avoid mention of the senses, we do find among the resources of the loan kit a limited number works of poetry or picture books that depict the experiences of taste, smell and even the sounds made by food, with a spirit of abandon: lyrical discourse is as if freed from

the constraints of didacticism. The loan kit features a poetry book *Full Mouth (La bouche pleine, Friot, 2008)*, with lyric texts by Bernard Friot, which espouse the point of view of the child: coloured candies may be artificial and 'poisonous', but their vibrant colours and sweet taste help one get through the sad and grey days; the sounds of foods and cooking are compared to music, etc.

Yet for the most part, the sensual pleasures of food in these educational documents are depicted in order to fulfil an educational or even political purpose. In an illustrated cookbook, *A Kitchen as Big as the World (Une cuisine grande comme le monde, Serres, 2000)*, on reserve in the Lille public library, full-page illustrations of foreign lands, people, scenes and marketplaces alternate with selected recipes. Each recipe presents the olfactory, visual, gustative or even auditory delights associated with eating in each culture, in a message of cultural tolerance and diversity for which this French publishing house, Rue du Monde, is known.

Pleasure in these documents is seen as useful, and learned or acquired, rather than spontaneous and instinctive. In one of the works recommended to teachers interested in a sensory approach to food and nutrition, pleasure is 'conquered' through an educational process in which children progressively accept and appreciate new tastes: 'one must make the effort, even if what we see does not please us, and even if we do not like it, because surprises frequently happen in the mouth and they can be quite amusing. Pleasure is even greater when we do not expect it' (Stassart, 2003, p. 57).

Unlike the devices produced by the educational actors seen above, the sensory pleasures of food in the food company devices seem less subject to restrictions or conditions. The graphic tradition and visual playfulness of the Bruno Munari evocation seem to be revisited, as we can see in the Louis Bonduelle Foundation devices that invite children to play with the colours and the shapes of vegetables and legumes. These devices place particular emphasis upon the pleasure of the visual experience of these foods. Combined and arranged in an Arcimboldo-like style, onions, peppers and radishes compose imaginative and amusing faces to color. Images of potatoes, leeks and beans can also be cut, manipulated, pasted or become the protagonists of an unusual spelling book or of a picture book that brings out the aesthetic qualities of the forms, texture and colours of vegetables.

The pedagogical kits of the Nestlé France Foundation and the pedagogical projects created by the Danone Institute highlight the connection between gustatory pleasure and each of the five senses. Some of the proposed activities aim to demonstrate that the pleasure of taste can be learned and trained. For example, in order to prove that sight can influence taste, children are invited to test, with their eyes covered, foods that they like and dislike. They are supposed to appreciate foods that they do not like when they see them. To show the importance of sight, children can be offered foods with modified colours. Children will assume that a red cake is strawberry flavoured and that yellow yogurt is vanilla flavoured. But once they taste the cake and the yogurt, they will discover that their sense of sight has deceived them.

### *Pleasures Linked to Emotion, Affect and Sociability*

Within the different works of the loan kit, the emotional and affective pleasures of eating, cooking or sharing food are often linked to the interests of world solidarity and civic awareness. In this kit, the non-fiction work *One Earth to Nourish Mankind*



(*Une seule Terre pour nourrir les hommes*, Thinard, 2009), is comprised (for two-thirds) of a photo album celebrating cultural identity and difference, showing vibrant and emotionally charged photographs of groups and families from different societies sharing a simple meal or going to market, or of farmers working together in a beautifully photographed agricultural scene.

In the Rue du Monde cookbook previously mentioned, illustrations and annotations depict the warm social context of sharing, giving and appreciating new and different cultures. Short marginal explanations on each page explain the culinary customs observed by families and social groups in different countries or present proverbs suggestive of the social pleasures of sharing meals, such as the Indian adage 'Look at the person with whom you eat rather than at your plate'.

In nutritional guides created for youngsters and selected for use by teachers in Lille, the description or illustration of mealtime gatherings is meant to demonstrate the dangers of not conforming to social norms and parental rules. In *Food, in Small Steps* included in the loan kit, the narrator explains that sharing a meal is like a party, and that the taste and smell of foods can evoke happy memories of family gatherings. An illustration shows a delighted family sharing a meal together. Yet later in the work we find the amusing portrait of 'Mélanie' who loves candies, sugary foods and is in open conflict with her parents, as we see in an illustration of the mealtime conflict. 'It's war with my parents; they want me to like the dishes... I'm often a bit hungry, [so] I keep candies and caramels in my pockets' (Mira Pons, 2008, pp. 26–27). Melanie's misguided pleasures are criticized by the narrator, yet here the child is portrayed as the master of her eating choices since she has found an alternative to the unappetizing meals prepared by her parents. Differing views on 'pleasures' of eating are thus shown to be a potential flashpoint between generations; the rhetorical device (giving voice to a youngster in order to better demonstrate his wrongdoings), which is intended to amuse as well as to instruct, seems to challenge the normative message of the work.

In the National Agency for Prevention and Health Education booklet *Léo and the Earth*, created for children aged 10–12, social rituals related to food are associated with civic education. In this pedagogical booklet, a group of school children learn about the Earth as a source of life and nutrition, as they joyously share canteen meals, picnics and other adventures. The pedagogical objectives mentioned in the guide are not centred on nutrition or food-related knowledge, however, as much as upon writing, speaking, debating and conflict resolution skills. The idea here is to show that individual hedonistic pleasures are to be channelled into collectively valuable experiences (sharing, respecting others' preferences, etc.). Pleasure is depicted as positive only if socially beneficial: in the accompanying guide we find a suggested activity in which the teacher is expected to thank pupils for their opinions and their motivations for eating sugary foods, and then to ask them each to write down a pleasurable experience that is also good for their health.

Devices produced by food companies highlight the pleasures of sharing without necessarily introducing concomitant notions of duty or obligation. The Nestlé France Foundation pedagogical kit places emphasis on conviviality and sharing – cooking, offering, eating together – as one of the main pleasures of the food experience. In particular, an entire section of the kit is dedicated to the cooking tradition of each French family and the importance of specific recipes for the pupils' family history. Children are encouraged to present a family recipe to their classmates and to share it with them. The drawings that illustrate this section as well as the picture on

the cover of the kit emphasize the pleasure of home cooking and of family members eating together.

With regard to the pleasurable and ludic aspects of food and eating, institutional and corporate devices thus have many elements in common: page layout, graphic style and iconographic themes, and a broad vision of food education covering a range of issues drawn from nutritional, environmental and sensory approaches to food that circulate in French society. But each gives different emphasis to the various forms of pleasure associated with food (see Table 1).

### Risks in Educational Devices on Food: Dangers for the Body, Dangers for the Planet

Despite their differences, the devices produced by both educational and corporate actors present the pleasures of food as problematic: adults, teachers, educators and parents often see food and food experiences that children consider pleasurable, as risky. The word 'pleasure' appears just once in the pedagogical kits of the Louis Bonduelle Foundation and is associated with sweets. The correct answer to the question 'Candies, honey, sugar are good, but what are they good for?' is in fact just 'for pleasure'. Rather than other foods, which give our body good things (meat provides proteins and iron that are good for the muscles, fruits and vegetables provide vitamins that are good for the muscles and the brain...), the 'only' role sweets seem to fulfil is to satisfy the pleasure of taste. What is at stake is therefore the capacity of children to govern themselves and to manage with moderation and precaution the pleasures of the food experience. Pleasures of taste and in particular the pleasure of sweets can give rise to conflicts between adults who watch over their children and set the rules, and children who, through their gluttony and voracity, experiment, transgress, putting themselves in danger.

As suggested by the depictions of pleasure and preference in the works for children selected for the loan kit or for the teachers' reserve of the Lille library, risk and pleasure are almost always intertwined. Even in works that promote a sensory approach to taste, risks are present: risks that our food carries poisonous substances or is somehow dangerous to our health, or that rich foods can lead to an unsatisfactory or blurred gastronomic experience. In most of these works, the risks outweigh the pleasures of eating; priority is clearly given to the potential dangers related to poor nutrition rather than to the delights and curiosity related to food and food practices. The sometimes frightening representations of dangers are often directed at children

**Table 1.** Depictions of pleasure, comparison of institutional and corporate devices.

Types of pleasure	Institutional resources	Corporate devices
Playing to learn, playing with food	Activities, games that reinforce serious messages	Emphasis on amusement and surprise
Senses	Senses and taste remain secondary; seen as capacities that must be refined or 'civilized'	Focus on stimulating the five senses
Emotion, affect, sociability	Food sharing and conviviality presented in order to promote cultural tolerance and civic or global responsibility	Positive evocations of conviviality and sharing traditional food

as individuals, as if their food choices and practices were isolated from familial or social contexts. As one may expect, the primary risks found in these works are those related to poor nutrition, on the one hand, and security risks, on the other. In pedagogical kits created by food companies and foundations that emphasize different pleasant aspects of food and food practices, references to risks are not very frequent and the potential harms associated with food are often suggested implicitly. Nevertheless 'scare tactics' are used by the catering company Scolarest. In particular the pages of its newsletter *De bouche à oreille*, aimed at parents, is abound with explicit references to different dangers to which children are allegedly exposed if they do not acquire good food habits. How are these risks represented and to what extent are young readers given a role in preventing or accentuating risk?

### *Risks for Children's Bodies*

In a number of the general works on nutrition, health risks are mentioned on almost every page. Behind every food, every eating practice, there is a corresponding danger. At the same time, these works often touch upon the most trivial risks, those that belong to children's everyday lives, while more serious health dangers remain very unclear, looming large yet in a vague and mysterious way. This is true of the two nutritional guides, *What Do We Eat?*, on reserve at the Lille public library, and *Food, in Small Steps*, included in the food kit, both of which introduce many health risks, for the most part limited to the minor consequences of bad eating habits such as flatulence, choking, bad digestion, hiccups or constipation. These 'minor' risks abound, whereas more serious health issues are often vaguely mentioned (a 'tired heart', a 'critical state of health' or 'artery problems that make people's lives sad') or even hidden through the use of difficult terms such as 'deficiency' (*carance*), defined in a glossary at the end of *Food, in Small Steps*.

Another nutritional guide, reserved by Lille teachers in the public library, while remaining vague about the precise symptoms and ailments that might occur if one overeats or eats the wrong foods, speaks openly of the risk of death: in *I Know What I Eat*, the young reader finds in the final chapter of the book that overeating can cause an increase in cholesterol leading to blood clots and death, and that mad cow disease is always fatal. Yet by confining risks to specific passages, and by using an impersonal, clinical language, the work suggests that these dangers are remote or exterior to the reader's universe.

This exteriority can also be emphasized by the apparent contradictions between text and image. In the non-fiction work *What Do We Eat?*, the reader is told that children should not drink alcohol, which can cause stomach aches or vomiting, and that, in adults, alcohol can produce liver ailments and heart problems as well as the risk of car accidents. Yet, a comical drawing of a drunk person inside a car shaped like a bottle introduces levity to a potentially dangerous subject. Similarly, if dioxins can be dangerous to our health, as we find in *Food, in Small Steps*, a humorous illustration shows a chicken sitting up on a plate pointing at a very surprised consumer while the text tells the young reader that dioxins are 'very dangerous to one's health'.

This ambiguity, created by the juxtaposition of humorous and serious interpretations of the health risks related to food is also to be found in the representation of the most prevalent risk to appear in these nutritional guides, that of being overweight, or obese. These two health issues are often not clearly distinguished, and the caricaturish visual representations seem to undermine the gravity of the health risk by

emphasizing social prejudices against 'fat people'. Thus, in *What Do We Eat?* the reader is told that the problem of obesity is increasingly widespread in our society, and therefore, that one should not call one's overweight friends cruel names. The accompanying illustration is, however, a comical portrait of a fat child on a see-saw. In *Food, in Small Steps* we find two illustrations (coloured drawings) of 'fat' people: a carefree and overweight girl reclining on a lounge chair in a bikini drinking soda and licking an ice cream cone, and a young overweight boy trying unsuccessfully to climb a rope in his physical education class, with other children pointing and laughing at him. These images, while they show the dangers of eating too much or eating the wrong foods, reinforce the negative cultural stereotypes concerning overweight people in our society and suggest that the reader can avoid these problems with sufficient will power. The textual messages are more serious and present overeating as a health danger: Which risk is meant to touch the reader more? That of social ostracism (fat people don't have friends) or that of the (imprecise) danger to our health?

Unlike the other resources examined here, the National Agency for Prevention and Health Education document *Léo and the Earth* produced for elementary school teachers does not emphasize health risks or poor eating habits. One of the only dangers mentioned is that of eating unripe fruit, which is bad for the digestion (and which the fictional children in the booklet proceed to do in order to miss an exam!). The young narrator Léo alludes to another health risk, yet he seems only to give voice to the social and health dangers he has heard about, in order to intimidate a schoolmate into sharing his picnic: 'I told him: if you eat too much, you won't be able to run and no one will want you on his football team' (INPES, 2005, p. 32). The health risk is brought up as a ploy, and Léo's threat to his friend suggests once again that social ostracism (with which the young reader can perhaps best identify) is the one of the primary risks of overeating. This pedagogical document avoids the vague and frightening presentation of risk that we find in many resources for children, yet one of the effects of this choice is to suggest that eating well is the obvious and easy solution to individual unbridled childhood impulses; we find no realistic explanation of nutritional choice-making in its social or familial context. Certain documents suggest, in a critical way, that normative discourse about nutrition fosters only parrot-like repetition, and that 'risk' is, for children, often merely empty language about food conveyed by parents and educators. In Bernard Friot's poetry book, included in the loan kit, nutritional advice intersperses the poems, reminding us that children hear these messages on a regular basis but can often consider them as the expression of dogmatic authority: 'fries are fatty / you'll see later on / the heart and so on'; 'too fat / the cakes / and he is too... WATCH OUT. DIET. BALANCED FOODS' (Friot, 2008, pp. 47, 49).

Unlike these general works on nutrition, in which risks are meant to make children aware of the consequences of their own eating habits, many of the documents in the loan kit accentuate the health risks related to industrial farming techniques or the introduction of chemicals into the farming process. These documents, in line with the ecological objectives of the loan kit, highlight dangers to our health that derive from environmentally unsound practices. Two examples can be found with the non-fiction books *Food (L'Alimentation)*, Benlakhel, 2008) and *Respecting My Stomach and My Planet (Je suis bien dans mon assiette, car je respecte mon estomac et ma planète)*, Gombert, 2007). In these two works, the fact of being obese is not a risk as much as a criticism of the inequalities of rich and poor: unlike children in poor counties who do not have enough to eat, children in France eat too much and snack too much. Health

risks, while linked to an ecological discourse, remain as vague as those presented in the nutritional works: eating too much meat can be bad for your health, intensive agriculture is a 'threat to our health', and genetically modified foods have unknown consequences on our health, therefore it is better to avoid them. The reader is also told that crowding chickens through intensive production perhaps leads to avian flu, yet no explanation is given to support this claim. In these environmental works, the risks remain so vague (additives, nitrates, a break in the 'cold chain', are dangerous) as to seem merely a pretext for enumerating the solutions, suggestions and other advice for sustainable eating and consuming.

In contrast to the light-hearted and frequently dismissive representations of risks that we find in certain of these works, and the vague but alarming messages in others, one of the politically engaged works in the loan kit, *One Earth to Nourish Mankind* openly criticizes social inequalities and its effects, including hunger and lack of water. Health risks are specified with greater detail than in the general nutrition works, since one of the objectives here is to introduce the young reader to the complexities and controversies surrounding agricultural industries: we thus find that certain vegetables are irradiated and can cause cancers, and that glutamates may have a health risk to the brain, yet the ultimate message is the need to act, to avoid the excesses inherent in our consumer society. The work ends on a positive note, encouraging the youngster to espouse a posture of engagement (political, environmental, international) and to participate in different strategic debates and issues, such as the fight to reduce industrial fishing, to reduce world hunger, to adopt an organic diet.

Food company devices, like the nutritional guides produced by children's editors, present some of the potential consequences of poor eating habits, as related specifically to the familiar universe of the child. For example, the spectre of failure at school hangs over the pages of *De bouche à oreille*, the Scolarest catering company newsletter aimed at parents. This device points in fact to bad food habits as a cause of bad school performance. A failed 'back to school' season, a child's inability to meet the often harsh demands of the school environment, a lack of concentration and energy needed to acquire knowledge, are some of the risks that children incur if they do not eat regularly, do not consume fresh fruits and seasonal vegetables, and if their diet is not varied and balanced. Healthy, well-balanced and tasty food is considered 'an incomparable advantage for success in school' (*De bouche à oreille*, Autumn 2011, p. 1). Bad food habits are also seen as the cause of bad sport results. 'Your child has an after school judo class? He can't be down and out on the tatami... Dried fruits, an orange, yogurt, with these your champion will never be knocked down' (*De bouche à oreille*, Winter 2011/2012, p. 1). Foods that contain the substances necessary to build a strong and efficient body are the remedy against such failures and can improve school and physical performance.

With the slogan 'Good Nutrition for Good Growth' the Louis Bonduelle Foundation pedagogical kits suggest implicitly that inadequate nutrition can provoke irregular growth. In the functionalist vision of food proposed in this device, every food contains substances that are useful for the proper working and regular development of children's bodies. As we have already seen, the only exceptions are sweets, whose unique purpose seems to be the satisfaction of the pleasure of taste. Bad nutrition and, in particular, an unbalanced diet, poor in vegetables and legumes, are presented as harmful for the child's development and therefore for the health of the adult in the making. Fruits and vegetables are also depicted as a real defence to prevent both minor and serious health diseases. In the Scolarest newslet-



ter, oranges, kiwis, exotic fruits, broccoli and spinach are recommended because of their high content in vitamins A and C, which can help the body's immune defences in the prevention of minor health concerns all winter long. The Danone Institute pedagogical kit also urges pupils to eat a lot of oranges, strawberries and kiwis, but here the medical implications are more serious: the danger is that of scurvy. The text contains a short description of the frightening symptoms of this disease resulting from a vitamin C deficiency. This illness is represented in a remote past, in the almost imaginary and adventurous world of British sailors of the fifteenth century. At the same time, however, advice given by the 'wise' professor Kimangedetout (Professor Eatswell) and reference to statistical data about the presence of scurvy among North American teenagers who do not eat any fruit and vegetables, portray the danger as real and near.

Thus, with regard to health risks, we find a variety of communication strategies, varying from alarmist messages to risk prevention information, social awareness and political activism. In nutritional guides and works, children are presented as individuals making potentially dangerous choices for their own health, whereas the more environmentally related publications imagine children as potentially engaged in these issues: environmental education seems more at ease with promoting active forms of engagement, whereas nutritional education publications depict the child as merely having mechanically interiorized the norms of good eating as risk prevention.

### *Risks for the Environment*

It comes as no surprise that the environmental education loan kit includes many documents that mention the risks of pollution and environmental degradation related to food production and transport. These risks are often quickly transformed into opportunities, to act, to solve problems collectively, according to an ecological ethos. In *One Earth to Nourish Mankind*, for example, photographic images estheticize nature and agricultural work on a local scale, and stirringly depict the ravages of deforestation and the consequences of intensive agriculture across the world. In this work, photography is used to elicit feelings of sympathy with developing countries in a personal way (a portrait of a young girl with her goat shows the emotional attachment of children to animals as sources of food, unlike impersonal industrial food production). In the textual documents, we find information about the economic risks to small producers caused by the competition of industrial production, or risks to the environment of the use of pesticides and heavy industry, but emphasis is placed on finding and implementing solutions, through consumer choice in the home and participation in political activity. Since risks for the environment remain even more remote to children than health risks, dangers to the planet are rarely explained in detail; the practical side of life is given priority, as are the very concrete actions that children can take in their daily lives.

In certain very exceptional works, an effort is made to explain the sources of the discourse on risk and to develop critical awareness about media. In a non-fiction work on the fishing industry, *Where Do Fish Sticks Come From? (D'où vient le poisson pané?)*, Baumann, 2008), the reader is encouraged to seek verifiable information rather than listen to reports in the media. A scientist explains that there are indeed risks and dangers to the food chain if certain species disappear, but adds that there are governmental measures that can or should be taken. Thus the discourse on risk

is closely associated with attempts to suggest children's empowerment and political engagement, coupled with a heightened awareness of how different media operate.

Unlike other pedagogical kits proposed by food company foundations and institutes, the Scolarest quarterly newsletter goes beyond risks for children's bodies by stressing risks to the health of the planet caused by poor food practices: 'What is in our dishes has consequences for our health and on the future of the planet. Health crises, pollution, impact on biodiversity, are linked to our modes of production and consumption. What can we do to return to responsible, local and organic food?' (*De bouche à oreille*, Autumn 2013, p. 1). As an answer to this question, parents are encouraged to change their buying and cooking habits for their children and to become expert and responsible buyers and consumers. A long list of remedies to fight the risks to the environment is suggested: reading labels and information about the origin of products, choosing seasonal fruits and vegetables, buying locally produced food, choosing organic food, avoiding palm oil, and so on. Ample advice is also given to avoid waste, while reminding parents that they are an example for their children who must learn responsible behaviour as future 'consom-actors'. Yet unlike the devices in the environmental loan kit, Scolarest portrays parents and children primarily in their eating and consumption practices rather than in the sphere of political or social activism.

The institutional and corporate devices we have examined address the issues related to risk in similar ways, with a tendency to avoid emphasis on serious illnesses or environmental and sanitary crises, in an attempt to highlight the need for positive nutritional behaviour, individual preventive practices and consumer awareness. The two types of resources differ mostly with regard to the contexts in which risks are portrayed, corporate devices focusing exclusively on the private sphere of the child and their consumer behaviour, with institutional devices more readily placing risk within the wider-reaching arenas of social or political practice (see Table 2).

## Conclusion

This analysis reveals both the variety of informational and pedagogical devices created for primary school children, and the wide scope of issues related to food and food practices, which these devices address. Teachers and other educational professionals, pupils and parents thus have access to a range of pedagogical kits comprised of diverse supports (booklets, worksheets, exercises, games), created and produced

**Table 2.** Depictions of risk, comparison of institutional and corporate devices.

Risks	Institutional resources	Corporate devices
Health risks	Risks to the body remain vague, sometimes laughable; emphasis on minor consequences of poor eating habits or overeating; social ostracism suggested	References to health risks infrequent and often implicitly suggested
Environmental risks	Risks to environment of agricultural or eating practices openly presented yet often seen as avoidable or reversible, through modern technologies or political activism	Few references to risks to the planet of poor food practices

not only by the actors traditionally associated with schools and educational institutions, but also by actors from the food industry sector. As whole, these devices propose a broad vision of food education that ranges from proper table manners to the respect of food traditions, from improving nutritional balance to the appreciation of different tastes, from the knowledge of food safety to the awareness of environmental issues related to food consumption. These pedagogical tools thus contribute to the shaping and dissemination of the notions of 'good food' and 'good food practices'. By highlighting the responsibility and the awareness of pupils in making appropriate food choices, these devices seek to inculcate in children the behavioural codes necessary to eat well and 'right' and to share the experience of eating in an acceptable way.

These codes of conduct seem to be divided between two divergent imperatives, those related to the quest for pleasure and those related to the protection from risk. The devices analysed here seek to make primary school pupils aware of a diversity of pleasurable experiences related to food and food practices: experiments and often adventurous discovery of new recipes, sensory exploration of new tastes, the joys of sharing meals and meal preparation with friends and family, developing curiosity about other countries through their culinary practices, etc. As we have shown, however, the pleasures of taste, of discovery and of conviviality in these devices are tied closely to a series of dangers for the body and for the environment, dangers that lurk on our plates.

The nature of the tension between the pleasures and risks of food differs according to the origin of these devices. Devices created by editors and actors specialized in the production of pedagogical and informational resources for children are often conceived primarily to educate children and to encourage them to interiorize the norms presented in their school curricula, which are closely related to the nutritional guidelines established at a national level, through the French National Nutrition and Health Program. Children are portrayed as tempted by uncontrolled (or unsanitary, and uncivilized) behaviour, and at the same time, as potential actors in their educational process. Children are also projected into the political discourse of ecologically minded educational publications. The ambiguous portrait of the passive-active child, who receives nutritional and ecological instruction and also participates willingly in the process of self improvement, reveals an attempt to involve children, often through humour and caricature, as independent individuals and empowered actors. Contemporary pedagogical discourse on empowerment and active learning traverses these texts, leaving little room for pleasure and placing the young child in a responsible social role that seems to leave out the various familial, cultural or social influences on his or her behaviour.

The pedagogical discourse of food industry multinational foundations and school food companies seeks to centre food and food practices within the everyday experiences of children, mixing learning, games and entertainment. While attempting to create ties to the school environment, from which these companies have long been excluded because they are not considered to have the required legitimacy to speak about food to children, actors in the food production sector seem to view children through a marketing ethnography approach, which, in the words of Stephen Kline, 'has validated children's emotional and fantasy experience, which the educational researchers have by and large avoided and derided' (Kline, 1993, p. 19). In these devices, children's daydreams, absurdist humour and keen sense of group identity are associated with food and eating and employed as tools to communicate with pupils

seen as consumers who have to be informed and educated. Through the actions of their research institutes and non-profit foundations, food companies try to play the role (and to offer the image) of corporate social responsibility, *entreprises-citoyennes*. To this end, they participate in the same strategy of responsabilizing children with regard to food choices as French governmental institutions. The food industry thus takes part in the production of authoritative knowledge about proper food habits, gives advice and seeks to educate children, leaving them (and sometimes their parents) accountable for their food choices and behaviours as personal matters.

While sensory education is not entirely absent from corporate and educational devices, the pleasures of taste and gastronomy are not at the forefront of the discursive shaping of these tools, but are subordinated to nutritional and environmental messages. Indeed, French gastronomy and traditional French culinary practices and meal-sharing experiences are often represented implicitly, or mentioned explicitly, as potential solutions for the health and environmental risks related to homogenized and globalized or fast food, or poor or individualistic eating habits, influenced by advertising. Not too unexpectedly, the United States is mentioned as a counterexample to French traditional eating and cooking practices. The construction of food risks and pleasures is thus related to national identity. A comparative approach to the risks and pleasures presented in informational and pedagogical devices of different countries or regions would allow further investigation of the links between identity and food practices, as constructed by the discursive position of educational and corporate actors. Our ongoing research on how the devices chosen by teachers are actually presented and used in the classroom will also allow us to understand just how teachers and pupils appropriate these resources, and how knowledge and values about food circulate in the school setting.

## Notes

1. See the most recent official educational curricula published in the French *Bulletin officiel*, January 2012 (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2012): children are expected to receive instruction about nutrition and personal hygiene starting in preschool and to learn to make reasoned choices about a balanced diet starting in elementary school. 'Taste class' approaches have also been adopted by a number of schools in France but are not integrated into the official school curriculum. See the guide for teachers on taste education published by the Education Ministry et al., Ministère de l'Agriculture and Ministère de l'Éducation nationale (2012).
2. This article presents the first results of a 2013 short-term research project on 'School Food: Actors, Practices and Discourses in Nord-Pas de Calais', funded by Lille Métropole and by the Louis Bonduelle Foundation.
3. This kit was created by a resource centre in Lille, specializing in environmental education, in cooperation with a Belgian educational network. For a description of this kit, see the website of the Lille Regional House of Environment and Solidarity (MRES) <<http://mres-asso.org/spip.php?breve333>>.

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