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Beyond the plate

*Food and health, aesthetics and meaning-making in
Home and consumer studies*

GITA BERG



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Abstract

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The overall aim of this thesis is to cultivate understandings of how meanings regarding food and health are made within the school subject home and consumer studies (HCS). The thesis builds on empirical data generated through a comprehensive case study, where 12 students from one school class and their two teachers were followed in HCS over the course of a school year. The methods used were observations, interviews, focus groups, and document collection. This work comprises four papers, where Paper I covers students' meaning-making during cooking with a focus on aesthetic judgments. The results of Paper I illustrate different ways in which the students used aesthetic judgments, and how aesthetics became integral to meaning-making. Paper II investigates food for health as educational content, using qualification, socialization, and subjectification as an analytical framework. The results exemplify how these three educational functions can be operationalized empirically, and how a given educational content opens up for meaning-making that goes beyond learning facts and skills. In Paper III, thematic analysis is used to gain an overview of which aesthetic values were constituted in the studied practices, and how. Thus, the central roles of aesthetics in HCS food education were further illustrated. Lastly, Paper IV investigates use of the plate model as a food educational tool, using three planes of analysis as a framework. The results demonstrate how the plate model can be useful in food and health education, but also that it needs to be used with caution, for example to avoid conveying a rigid message of "right" and "wrong" dishes. Taken together, the results of the four papers show how food was a central transactant in the studied practices, i.e., how the food itself became an important co-actor in the meaning-making processes. Second, the discrepancy between the students' focus on immediate food experiences and the teachers' instrumental orientation is highlighted. In summary, this thesis provides empirically grounded contributions to support food educational practices in general, and HCS subject didactics in particular. Additionally, it strengthens the position of HCS as a subject to be reckoned with in wider didactic contexts, as well as in the emerging field of disciplinary aesthetics.

Keywords: Home and consumer studies, Home economics, Didactics, Food studies, Food education, Health education, Aesthetics, Meaning-making

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The process is the product

List of Papers

This thesis is based on the following papers, which are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals.

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- III. Berg, G., Lundqvist, E., & Mattsson Sydner, Y. (2023). Aesthetic values in Home and Consumer Studies – investigating the secret ingredient in food education. *Frontiers in Education* (8): 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2023.1240782>
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Contribution of authors

The contributions of Gita Berg to the papers included in this thesis are as follows:

All papers

Designed the case study with support from Ylva Mattsson Sydner, Eva Lundqvist, and Helena Elmståhl. Wrote the application for ethical approval with support from Ylva Mattsson Sydner. Conducted the fieldwork which generated data for all the included papers.

Paper I

Conducted the analysis together with the co-authors. Drafted and revised the manuscript together with the co-authors.

Paper II

Conducted the analysis and drafted the manuscript, partly together with the co-authors. Revised the manuscript with support from the co-authors.

Paper III

Conducted the analysis with support from Ylva Mattsson Sydner. Drafted and revised the manuscript with support from the co-authors.

Paper IV

Conducted the analysis independently in dialogue with Ylva Mattsson Sydner. Drafted the first version of the manuscript and revised it with support from the co-authors.

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Abbreviations

HE	Home economics
HCS	Home and consumer studies
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
PEA	Practical epistemology analysis
PREST	Practical-aesthetical
TA	Thematic analysis
WHO	World Health Organization

Preface

Education is not filling a bucket, but lighting a fire

William Butler Yeats

I will never forget my very first teaching experience. I remember the smells, the ambiance, and of course the tingling feeling of nervousness when my students arrived. It was in a harbor warehouse in the very north of Sweden; a beautiful red wooden building rebuilt into a dance studio, and I was fifteen years old. Back then, questions regarding what, when, and how we learn had already started to fascinate me. While I commenced my teaching career as a teenager in that dance studio, related questions arose: questions of what, when, and how to teach. My interest in these didactic questions might be the reason why I have never stopped studying.

This thesis is a result of my participation in the research school Uppsala Research school in Subject Education (UpRiSE), and I have undertaken the work at the Department of Food Studies, Nutrition and Dietetics, Uppsala University. Although the included papers can all be placed within the multidisciplinary arena of food studies, they nonetheless have a clear orientation towards food educational matters, and my own educational and professional background has certainly influenced the content. For example, I suspect that my upbringing in dance has made me receptive to the aesthetic dimensions of food education. In a similar way, my background as a dietitian may have steered the focus towards food-health relations.

The PhD marathon has been an incredibly rewarding journey where I have had the privilege to dive deep into didactics and combine questions concerning education with food, health, and aesthetics. My hope is that this thesis will contribute to insights in food education that encourage healthful relationships to food and eating, and position aesthetics as a central aspect of food educational experiences.

Gita

Uppsala, April 2024

Introduction

This thesis is about food education. More specifically, it is a study of teaching and learning with respect to food, and food-health relations, within the school subject home and consumer studies (HCS). In this work, empirical investigations of a single case are undertaken, to draw attention to educational aspects which might be overlooked in the everyday practices of teaching. By widening the perspective on what food education is – and what it can be – the thesis can contribute to informing the practices of food educators in general, and HCS teachers in particular. The work is premised on the position that teaching and learning are situated processes, co-constructed through actions where temporal, social, and cultural contexts all play pivotal roles in *which* knowledge is generated, and *how*.

This chapter begins with an introduction to food as a part of formal education in schools, introducing domestic science and the history, traditions, and current states of HCS as a school subject. The focus is subsequently directed towards food literacy and different perspectives influencing food and health education. Lastly, an account of food aesthetics is given, and the chapter ends with a clarification of the defined research gaps which this thesis sets out to address.

Formal food education – a brief history

In a broad sense, food education occurs from the first time we experience food. Food is thereafter a continuous feature throughout the lifespan. Thereby, informal food education takes place through everyday food encounters in differing spaces such as home kitchens, dinner tables, restaurants, and supermarkets. Additionally, dating back to the late 19th century and the emergence of domestic science, food education has been formalized by being included in educational curricula in Western countries (Levenstein, 2003), as well as in other parts of the world (e.g., Jang, 2007).

An academic discipline and a school subject

Domestic science, the study of household skills, originates in the 19th century U.S. The rationale behind its introduction was to apply scientific principles to

better the management of housework, ultimately improving the lives of individuals and families (Stage & Vincenti, 1997). As women were considered responsible for the home at that time, this was a scientific discipline targeting women and their work (Stage & Vincenti, 1997).¹ As such, domestic science can be seen as an attempt to professionalize housework, as well as a part of the women's movement. With this focus, domestic science enabled women to focus critical attention on their undertakings in the home (Shapiro, 2008). Housewives' frugality and efficiency were valued ideals, and the educational vision encompassed women from all social classes (Dreilinger, 2021). To a large extent, the emergence of domestic science did indeed have positive consequences for women. Whereas women from the middle and upper class gained possibilities for a career path, for example as cookbook writers or teachers, less privileged women could benefit from the education by getting work as housekeepers, as well as acquiring strategies for managing everyday life (Shapiro, 2008; Stage & Vincenti, 1997). As the domestic science movement evolved, home economics (HE) was formally established as an academic discipline in 1893 (Rutherford, 2010).² The beginning of the 20th century, when HE flourished as a discipline, was also a time when natural sciences made great progress. Many findings made at the time would come to have substantial influence on our understandings of food and health, for example, new knowledge on bacteria and vitamins. These discoveries, attributed to the highly valued natural sciences, came to affect how HE evolved (Brembeck, 2013). For example, nutrition came to be – and still is – an influential aspect.

As a school subject for children, HE was introduced in the U.S. and many parts of Europe in the late 19th century, driven by the idea of spreading knowledge about nutrition, cooking, household finances, cleaning, and textile care to the people (Mennell et al., 1992). In addition to these reformative, political underpinnings for introducing HE, the subject's proponents put forth a pedagogical idea of varying the school day with a practically oriented subject, which has influenced the subject's development concerning goals, content, and teaching methods (Stage & Vincenti, 1997).

Time has passed, and HE in different forms is currently included in school curricula in many countries, albeit with different names and scopes (Pendergast, 2012). The premise that education is a key factor for promoting health has been, and still is, a primary motive for providing the subject. Moreover, internationally, HE has common ground in the human ecology theory (Bubolz & Sontag, 1993). The human ecology theory, initially proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1975), highlights the interplay between humans and their environment, thereby recognizing the need to consider matters relating to individuals, societies, as well as nature within the subject. Hence, the foci of HE food

¹ Here, work is used in a broad sense, including the many times invisible and unpaid housework.

² This was when the National Household Economics Association was founded by the Women's congress at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

education in Western schools have evolved accordingly (Stage & Vincenti, 1997). For example, in times of food shortages and poverty, administration of resources and household finances were emphasized. Later, challenges related to lack of food were replaced with those related to food abundance (Smith, 2013). More recently, increasingly urgent concerns for climate change once again steer the focus towards resource management (McGregor, 2015). Founded in 1908, the International Federation for Home Economics (IFHE) is a global organization, working to preserve and develop HE to keep it up-to-date with current societal needs and demands “(...) so that wellbeing can be enhanced in an ever changing and ever challenging environment” (Pendergast, 2008, p. 1). In order to fulfil this mission statement and respond to societal challenges, HE researchers and teachers need to continuously develop and critically reflect on teaching methods and educational content (cf. Haapaniemi et al., 2022).

From HE to HCS: introduction and development in Sweden

The introduction of formal food education in Sweden took place during the same period as in other Northern European countries and the U.S. (Lundh, 1945). An influential education for professional home economists, “the School of Home Economics” [Fackskolan för huslig ekonomi], was instated in Uppsala in 1895 (Carlberg & Schenström, 1956),³ although an education for household teachers in Gothenburg had been established earlier, already in 1865 (Lundh, 1965). In Sweden, like in many other countries, homes were at the time considered the woman’s arena, and thus HE was a discipline for women. Furthermore, just as was the case internationally, the content and scope of HE varied, reflecting societal needs and concerns (Stage & Vincenti, 1997). For example, HE could target farmers’ wives and the challenges of rural living, or issues related to overcrowding, urban living, and industrial growth (Carlberg & Schenström, 1956). Through educating women in HE, the homes of people were to be well taken care of, food was to be preserved and well cooked, and living spaces kept clean (Hjälmeskog, 2006). The vision was thus to foster well-functioning citizens and thereby a strong, well-nourished, and resilient workforce (Palmlblad & Eriksson, 2014). Along with the progression of the Swedish welfare state in the 20th century, many of the chores previously undertaken by women in the homes (e.g., care and food provision for children and older people) “moved out” to the public sector (Mattsson Sydner, 2002). Hence, new professional requirements created an increasing demand for HE-related competencies.

As a school subject directed at children, HE was gradually introduced across the country, largely thanks to committed and engaged individuals

³ In 1977, the vocational school became a part of Uppsala University (Nordin, 1995), and the department is currently known as the Department of Food Studies, Nutrition and Dietetics.

during the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Carlberg & Schenström, 1956). At the time, the subject was primarily advocated as a means to combat malnutrition and poor hygiene (Hjälmeskog, 2000). In accordance with the spirit of the times, it was initially an all-girl subject (Johansson, 1987).⁴ The Swedish school subject HE has changed names over the years, from HE [huslig ekonomi], to “home knowledge” [hemkunskap] in 1962, and in the year 2000 to HCS [hem- och konsumentkunskap], which is the name used today (Hjälmeskog, 2006).⁵ Hence, the word *consumer* is now included in the Swedish subject’s name, like in the current name of the U.S. subject, “family and consumer science.” The consumer perspective has long played an important role within the subject, and by including it in the name, it is clarified that consumers in a consumer society are addressed, rather than only housewives in the home, as was initially the case (Brembeck, 2013). In addition, the fact that the home is connected to larger societal contexts is emphasized (cf. Benn, 2002), which is in line with the human ecology theory described earlier (Bulbolz & Sontag, 1993).

HCS in Sweden today

Currently, HCS is a part of compulsory school in Sweden and thereby mandatory for all students. This makes it the only subject in Swedish compulsory education which includes food as a core content, making formal food education available to all children in the Swedish school system (Lgr’22). HCS comprises 118 teaching hours, corresponding to barely three weeks of full-time work, which also makes it the smallest subject. Although schools are free to decide how to distribute these hours, HCS is commonly taught in grades 5–9, i.e., when students are 11–15 years of age (Lindblom et al., 2013). Assessment criteria are stated for grades 6 and 9, respectively, implying that the subject is intended to be taught both before and between the completion of these grades.

The HCS syllabus has changed over the years. Oljans et al. (2018) have shown that food in relation to health has been constructed in different ways within HCS syllabi. Through discourse analysis of the Swedish HCS syllabi in use between 1962 and 2011, Oljans et al. identified three different ways in which food in relation to health has been constructed over time: the medical, the consumer, and the human-ecological discourse. The medical discourse dominated the syllabi from 1962 and 1969, focusing on the physical body and

⁴ In 1962, the Swedish Government decided to make the subject as a whole compulsory for all schoolchildren, regardless of gender, in conjunction with development of the compulsory school (Hjälmeskog, 2000).

⁵ This is why the subject from here onwards is referred to as HCS and not HE in this thesis. However, HE is used in Paper IV due to the established terminology of the journal that paper is published in.

nutrition in relation to health. The consumer discourse dominated in the 1980 and 1994 syllabi, emphasizing practical decision-making in food choice, preparation, and distribution of nutritious meals. The human ecological discourse, highlighting environmental and social dimensions of food production and consumption, dominated in the 2000 and 2011 syllabi. Each of these discourses can be seen as informed by the societal views on food in relation to health at the time. While HCS has a history of prescriptive education, striving to foster the “right” choices (Håkansson, 2015), the current syllabus is oriented towards providing tools for making conscious choices and assessing the consequences of these choices.⁶ For example, the current HCS syllabus states: “Through teaching, pupils should have the opportunity to develop awareness of the consequences of making different choices in the household on health, well-being and use of resources.” (Lgr’22). The subject’s core content is currently divided into three so-called knowledge areas: food and cooking, private economy and consumption, and living habits. These areas are supposed to be covered from three different perspectives: health, economy, and the environment (Lgr’22).

Based on tradition, HCS is counted as one of the practical-aesthetical (PREST) subjects.⁷ This is reflected in the syllabus, where it is stated that “In a process where thinking, sensory experiences and action are all interlinked, pupils should be given the opportunity to develop expertise with regard to food and meals.” (Lgr’11, Lgr’22). Consequently, cooking is an important feature, as it has been since the subject’s introduction (Hjälmeskog, 2006). For a HCS classroom to be considered fully equipped, it should therefore contain several kitchen units, including stoves, sinks, and workspaces (Lindblom et al., 2013). Traditionally, HCS cooking in Sweden follows a certain rhythm where students, by following a recipe, prepare a meal in small groups and then taste the results (cf. Bohm, 2022; Lindblom et al., 2016). Accordingly, the foods prepared during HCS are usually eaten by the students. However, Höijer et al. (2014) highlight how students have less agency than teachers in deciding what food to include in the subject. They also mention how teachers in making these decisions consider both their own identity and the identity of the subject, as well as aspects of convenience (e.g., quickly made, affordable food) and responsibility (healthy and eco-friendly food). The food included in Swedish HCS can thus be seen as a reflection of the subject’s cultural structures as well as teachers’ educational visions.

⁶ However, there is ongoing critique of the subject for being overly prescriptive and normative. For example, Håkansson (2015) indicated that unqualified HCS teachers were more inclined than qualified teachers to convey norms that were not supported by the syllabus.

⁷ PREST was a grouping made in the Swedish 1962 curriculum, including art, HCS, music, physical education, and crafts (Lgr’62). The definition is not used in any current regulatory documents. However, based on tradition, the naming and grouping of PREST subjects remains common in Sweden today (cf. Skolverket, 2015).

HCS subject didactics

This thesis can be framed as a subject-didactical project, focusing on the didactics of HCS. While the traditions and meanings of didactics as a discipline differ between for example Anglo-American, French, and German traditions, the approach used in this thesis can be considered as influenced by a Nordic/Swedish conceptualization. Here, didactics is understood as “the art or science of teaching” (Strømnes et al., 1997, p. 237). Gundem (2008) defines didactics as the theory and practice of teaching and learning. However, it ranges from a broad theory which includes teaching and learning “in all circumstances and in all forms” to a more hands-on, classroom-oriented theory involving teaching practices (Gundem, 2000, pp. 236–237). Within academia, didactics has been uniquely used in teacher education. It has thus played an important part in developing a qualified terminology, supporting teachers’ professionalism as both practitioners and academics (Wickman et al., 2020).

A critical proposition for the concept of didactics to be relevant is that certain teaching increases the likelihood of certain learning. However, this pattern can never be fixed in advance. This is underscored by Hopmann (2007), who describes didactics as “(...) the necessarily restrained effort to make certain substantive outcomes possible, while knowing that it can always turn out completely differently from what was intended” (p. 177). Central questions consequently become “what, how and why” in relation to different aspects of teaching and learning (Hultman et al., 2012). In other words: *what* to include as content in educational practices, *how* to include it, and *why* (for what purpose) (Gundem, 2000). Another distinction is that between general didactics and subject didactics; whereas general didactics concerns general aspects of education, subject didactics is directed at the contexts of specific school subjects. Furthermore, general subject didactics (cf. Vollmer, 2021) – also referred to as comparative didactics (cf. Ligozat et al., 2015) – opens up for a comparative approach to the subject didactics associated with different school subjects. This is a growing research field, as the comparative approach has been shown to be useful in illuminating specific classroom practices that are taken for granted (Almqvist et al., 2023).

A basic tenet of this thesis is the notion of subject didactics as a relational matter, involving students, teachers, and the educational content of specific school subjects (in this case HCS). This relational matter can be visualized through the well-established didactic triangle (Figure 1). The subject didactics of HCS is interdisciplinary by nature as the subject content (encompassing cooking, personal finances, meal traditions, etc.) intersects with the educational perspective. HCS subject didactics is moreover what takes place in schools: every day in every HCS classroom, where teachers make didactic considerations to align with the curriculum, while meeting the experiences and needs of their students. As such, subject didactics needs to be anchored within both research and classroom practices (Schenker, 2011).

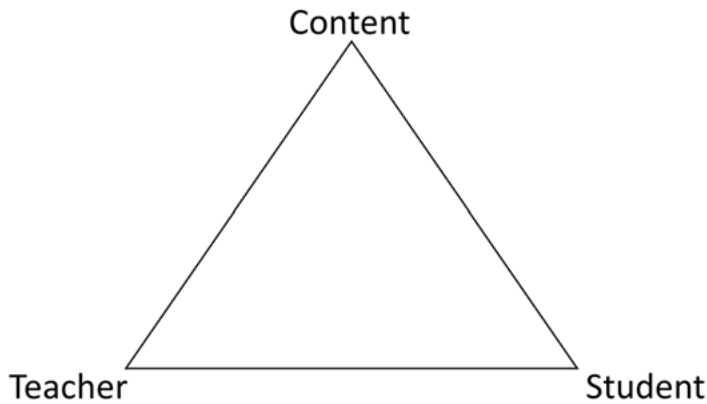


Figure 1. The didactic triangle (cf. Künzli, 1998).

Food and health education – different perspectives

Food education is often framed as an important part of health education. In this context, “health” is commonly regarded from a pathogenic perspective, as absence of disease (Swan et al., 2018). From this perspective, food education becomes a vehicle for obtaining and sustaining optimal functioning of the body (Leahy et al., 2015). Food education is thereby often advocated using instrumental logic, i.e., it is justified as a means to achieve something else. One illustrative example is Lichtenstein and Ludwig’s (2010) advocacy for food education in U.S. schools as a means to fight obesity. As obesity and other non-communicable diseases are pressing food-related problems in Westernized societies, prevention of non-communicable disease has been suggested as a key challenge to address through food education (e.g., Fordyce-Voorham, 2011; Ronto et al., 2017). However, health is more than absence of disease. The constitution of the World Health Organization (WHO) declares that “health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (WHO, 1948). Similarly, critical health studies have highlighted how food education in the name of disease prevention, however noble the intentions are, runs the risk of becoming normative and prescriptive at the expense of inclusivity and pluralism (e.g., Hayes-Conroy et al., 2013; Powell & Plum, 2020).

An alternative way of approaching food and health education is by adopting a salutogenic health perspective, originally introduced by the medical sociologist Aaron Antonovsky (1996). Salutogenesis is about turning away from the dualistic notion of health versus disease, and shifting the focus from risks to resources (Quennerstedt, 2019). As salutogenesis is known to take more aspects than biomedical and individualistic health notions into consideration,

it challenges traditional health discourses (Swan et al., 2018). Macdonald et al. (2014) provide an additional viewpoint by arguing that food education, although acknowledging societal concerns, should primarily focus on empowering individuals to act in their own interests.⁸

A concept widely used in food education research is food literacy, which can be described as a subset of the broader health literacy (Velardo, 2015). It emerged out of a need to define and delimit food-related knowledge, skills, and behaviors which support food-related health at both the individual and societal levels (Vidgen & Gallegos, 2014). Just like health literacy, food literacy can be interpreted in different ways depending on the understanding of the terms “food” and “literacy,” respectively (Benn, 2014). Consequently, the question of what food literacy should encompass has been recurrent, guiding numerous studies (e.g., Benn 2014; Cullen et al., 2015; Perry et al., 2017; Truman et al., 2017; Velardo, 2015; Vidgen & Gallegos, 2014). For example, food literacy has been defined as “the tools needed for a healthy life-long relationship with food” (Vidgen, 2014, p. 151). Using this definition, food literacy can be said to denote the desired outcomes of food education. However, in this thesis, the focus is directed at the processes involved in the food educational practices under study. Potential educational consequences will inevitably be discussed, but the research interest is not food literacy *per se*, but rather the educational processes, which may or may not entail food literacy.

Regarding the educational processes of food education in schools, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) published a vision statement in 2021. It reads:

School based food and nutrition education contributes meaningfully not only to individual capacities but also to sustainable development as a whole - supporting educational, environmental and economic goals, as well as those related to food systems, health, gender and social justice. This is the “north star” for all school based food and nutrition education and can serve for advocacy at all levels from policy makers to practitioners and parents. (FAO, 2020, p. 29)

Thus, the vision statement recognizes that, just like health is more than absence of disease, food is more than nutrients. It thereby leaves room for approaching food education in a broad sense. With this guidance, many viewpoints – for example individual, societal, and environmental – can be included. Similarly, in the food education research literature, the hegemonic stance of disease prevention as *the* rationale for food education has become more

⁸ The questioning of education as a means for individuals to act in societal interests is not unique to this context. The dual functions of education as indoctrination/emancipation have been extensively discussed and debated elsewhere, for example by Freire in his seminal work “Pedagogy of the oppressed” (1970/2000). Similarly, in a HCS context, scholarly debates concerning the balance between empowering and patronizing have been a recurring theme (Brembeck, 2013).

nuanced (Janhonen et al., 2016). A tendency towards promotion of students' agency can thereby be seen.

With a biomedical point of departure, it is reasonable to focus on foods' instrumental qualities (e.g., what the biomedical consequences might be of eating certain foods). Food does indeed have instrumental qualities, as it satisfies hunger and prevents disease, but it is also experienced in numerous other ways. With the salutogenic health perspective adopted in this thesis, immediate and experiential aspects of food become equally relevant. It is thereby acknowledged that food fulfills multiple needs which stretch beyond simple nourishment. If it were not for these needs, food would be ingested in a manner similar to how a car is filled with gas (Daun, 1999). This broadened approach to food is famously summarized by the anthropologist Mary Douglas, who stated that "food is not feed" (in Kuper, 2012, p. 7). Alongside other scholars such as Barthes (2018), Douglas has highlighted how food is a system of communication. Lupton (2005) similarly clarifies: food is a marker of social class, culture, and religion. And – not least – food is a source of pleasure.

Food aesthetics: from gustatory pleasure to social taste

In *Taste as experience*, the philosopher Nicola Perullo (2016) points out that "[w]e eat before we speak" (p. 29). With this, he highlights that taking pleasure in food is an aesthetic experience which starts "(...) before language, before the assimilation of cultural codes." Originating from the Greek word *aisthesis*, meaning sense perception, aesthetics is a branch within philosophy, as well as a topic for empirical inquiries. As such, aesthetics involves the study of beauty, pleasure, and taste as pertaining to the senses. In this context, "senses" can include "(...) a wide range of contents: the sensory, the sensational, the sensitive, the sensible, and the sentimental, along with the sensuous" (Dewey, 1934/2005, p. 22).

When it comes to food and aesthetics, scholarly discussions have mainly focused on whether or not food, and food-related activities, can be considered as art (Jaques, 2015; Perullo, 2016). Many philosophers have rejected the idea that food experiences can be regarded as fully aesthetic in their own right (Sweeney, 2012). This exclusion of food can probably be ascribed to the classical philosophical differentiation between higher and lower pleasures, where the sensory experiences of taste, smell, and touch are regarded as inferior to those of sight and hearing (Korsmeyer, 2017). This view can be traced back to the Kantian notion of disinterestedness⁹ as a prerequisite for making aesthetic judgments. By stating that "hunger is the best sauce", Kant (according to Sweeney, 2012) acknowledged that we all have an inherent preference for

⁹ Here, disinterestedness means that aesthetic judgments need to be made without influence from any personal needs or desires.

food. Using Kantian logic, experiences of food can thus never be fully aesthetic. Hence, food's physiological function as nourishment might have entailed exclusion from intellectual interests (Korsmeyer, 2002). Perullo (2016) adds that the repetitive, concrete yet fleeting nature of eating may also have contributed to the limited philosophical interest. However, in *Art as experience* (1934/2005), the pragmatist philosopher and educational reformer John Dewey elucidated the aesthetic relevance of food by rejecting the division between art and everyday experience. Every experience, Dewey states, has aesthetic qualities, as it leads towards – or away from – some sort of fulfillment (Dewey, 1934/2005). Using the Deweyan understanding of aesthetics as a dimension of everyday experience, a central aesthetic aspect of food is taste – in a broad as well as a narrow sense.

In relation to food, the word “taste” is used in a narrow or everyday way to describe and/or evaluate how it tastes in our mouths. However, taste can also be understood in a broader, Bourdieusian sense, as a social act which signals and discriminates between different forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1979/1987). Here, taste becomes more than a matter of personal preference; it functions as a form of symbolic capital through which people can demonstrate their economic, cultural, and social status. Taste can thus be used to signal belonging to, or distance from, a particular group. Correspondingly, people's tastes become shaped by their economic, cultural, and social background and experiences. With this view, not only does the taste concept include physiological perceptions of gustatory taste (salty, sweet etc.); it also encompasses normative judgments (such as tasty, disgusting), and emotional responses (which can be communicated through verbal expressions, such as yum or yuck, and non-verbal expressions, such as grimaces and other gestures).

Another way of framing taste for food is as hedonic quality. The hedonic index is used within sensory and consumer research to quantify liking or pleasure (Cardello, 2017). In this respect, sensory science has clear connections to aesthetics. However, a central point of departure for sensory science is that foods as objects have inherent properties which elicit sensory responses (Lahne, 2016). The pursuit thus becomes to systematically examine and chart these responses, which take place when individuals are confronted with foods (Shapin, 2012). This is a formalized and structured methodology, and the results of such studies are valuable in product development, quality control, and food marketing (Civille & Carr, 2015). Moreover, in an educational context, research on, e.g., children's sensory play (Coulthard & Sealy, 2017; Højer et al., 2020) and multisensory food discoveries (Coe et al., 2024), has shed light on how sensory-based education can be used to increase children's familiarity with, and acceptance of, different nutritious foods such as fish or vegetables. However, the striving to direct children's tastes in (normatively) “right” directions has been problematized by, for example, Leer and Wistoft (2018). They argue that taste education with such a normative agenda risks dismissing

children's own taste preferences and how they can be used to navigate the world.

As a contrast to the sensory-based approaches often used in food studies, aesthetics research following the pragmatist tradition of Dewey generally does not take interest in the food object in itself (Fooladi, 2019). The focus is rather directed at human action: what takes place during events when food is encountered. As Jackson (1998) has clarified, with this view, aesthetics is not inherent in the object – it is *transactional*.¹⁰ On this note, empirical research on how food aesthetics comes to be constituted, negotiated, and shared have been called for (Shapin, 2012), and research on aesthetics as a part of food education is thus warranted.

Existing research and research gaps

As a discipline for academic inquiry, HCS subject didactics is quite young. However, there is a growing body of research investigating different aspects of HCS didactics. For example, regarding Swedish HCS as a site for education about food and health, it has been shown how syllabi have changed over time as a reflection of dominating societal health discourses (Oljans et al., 2018), and how teachers reason about their educational choices (Oljans et al., 2020). It has also been demonstrated how Swedish adolescents struggle with valuing the trustworthiness of health information conveyed in HCS compared with information from other sources (Rendahl et al., 2017). An often-overlooked aspect of food-related health education, food safety, has been investigated as a part of HCS teaching and learning (Lange, 2017). Moreover, there are now empirical examples of how foods promoted as healthy in HCS do not always align with what is cooked (Bohm 2023), how sweet foods are ambivalently treated within the subject (Bohm et al., 2023), and how aims of teaching responsible consumption can collide with HCS students' taste preferences (Gislevik et al., 2017). Research has furthermore shown how the (gustatory) taste of food can influence students' actions during cooking (Bohm et al., 2016; Gelinder et al., 2020). However, while aesthetics has been targeted in educational research within other school subjects, e.g., mathematics (Sinclair, 2009), science (Caiman & Jakobson, 2022), and physical education (Maivorsdotter & Lundvall, 2009), studies explicitly investigating aesthetics as a part of HCS educational processes were lacking prior to this thesis. Such investigations could therefore contribute to placing HCS within the wider context of comparative didactics. Additionally, there is still a need for expanding the

¹⁰ In this context, the term transaction, initially outlined by Dewey and Bentley (1949/1976), implies a holistic take on the practices under investigation. By moving away from the more established concept of *interaction*, transaction treats individual(s), surroundings, and context as mutually constitutive instead of separating them as individual entities. The transactional approach is further described under "Theoretical framework."

research base by adding to empirically grounded investigations of food and health educational processes taking place in HCS classrooms. Such research could provide insights which inform teachers' reflections on their didactic choices, encouraging deliberate decisions regarding what to include as educational content, how to include it, and why.

Aim

The overall aim of this thesis is to cultivate understandings of how meanings regarding food and health are made within HCS. This is achieved through investigating HCS educational processes with a transactional approach (Papers I–IV), and with special attention paid to aesthetic aspects (Papers I & III).

The specific aims of Papers I–IV were to

- I. Explore HCS students' meaning-making processes with a focus on aesthetic judgments when learning to cook in formalized practices.
- II. Contribute to the understanding of health education as a part of HCS, with a focus on how food for health is constituted as educational content in relation to three educational functions: (i) qualification, (ii) socialization, and (iii) subjectification.
- III. Gain understanding of aesthetic values as a part of HCS food educational practices.
- IV. Explore the plate model as a food educational tool in HCS.

Theoretical framework

In this work, theory is not understood as separated from practice but rather as a way of approaching and understanding the world. This standpoint opens for certain modes of action, whereas others become inconducive. In this chapter, an account is given of the theories and concepts which have shaped the ways in which data are perceived and handled within the thesis. This includes some terminological explanations on how key theories and associated concepts are understood and used. The chapter starts with epistemological clarifications, followed by an account of the pragmatist standpoints which have guided the work. The framework presented here encompasses not only the theoretical underpinnings of the work, but also the methodology. That is, the assumptions guiding the processes of planning, generating, interpreting, and analyzing the empirical part of the thesis.

Epistemological clarifications

The thesis work has been undertaken based on the epistemological assumption that what counts as valid or relevant knowledge depends on temporal, cultural, and social contexts. Knowledge and education are thus regarded as socially determined and contextual, and “What is good education?” becomes a question with many answers. Moreover, teaching and learning are considered in the light of a sociocultural perspective where individual, interpersonal, and institutional aspects of the educational situation are recognized as important (cf. Wertsch et al., 1995). To avoid the notion of knowledge transmission, distinguishing sending (teaching) from receiving (learning), the term “education” is preferred throughout the thesis, as it entails a more holistic approach (Biesta, 2004). The only exception is when a distinction between teaching and learning is necessary, e.g., for analytical reasons.

Understanding food education through a pragmatist lens

Pragmatism can be understood as a set of philosophical tools which can be used to solve practical problems (Biesta, 2010). In relation to food education, pragmatism is a fruitful approach, partly because food effectively bridges

some dichotomies which pragmatism is operating to dissolve: nature-culture, object-subject, and mind-body (see Pryba, 2012, for an elaborate discussion on this). In the progressive “Dewey School,”¹¹ the founder and first director John Dewey took advantage of the integrative potential of food by making cooking a prominent feature of the education (Koczanowicz, 2023). HCS was established contemporaneously with the Dewey school, and there are clear influences from Dewey’s pragmatism to be seen within the subject’s teaching traditions. One example is the emphasis on practical tasks, mirroring what is encountered in everyday life outside the school context.

Following the Deweyan tradition, all parts of the thesis rely heavily on pragmatist tools in terms of standpoints and concepts, which will now be described further.

An action-oriented philosophy

With its roots in an American school of thought, pragmatism is an action-oriented philosophy, where knowledge is regarded as situated in – and observable through – actions (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Hence, pragmatism emphasizes that the way to “know” reality is through actions. Or, as Rorty (1991) phrased it, “knowledge is not a matter of getting reality right, but rather a matter of acquiring habits of action for coping with reality” (p. 1). By dealing with the consequences of our actions, we acquire new ways of relating to similar events in the future (cf. Biesta & Burbules, 2003). Framed this way, knowledge is tightly interwoven with Dewey’s notion of *experience*.

With an emphasis on actions and their consequences, the empirical grounding of research becomes important: to learn more about something (a phenomenon, an event etc.), it must be investigated *in situ*, that is, in the real-life contexts where it takes place (Biesta & Burbules, 2003).

Knowledge as experience and action

In the pragmatist stance, knowledge, experience, and action are treated as deeply intertwined and mutually constitutive. Experience is understood as a continuous concept that delineates a movement of actions, linking together our past, present, and future (Dewey, 1925/2000; 1938/2007). Dewey further treats experience holistically, as involving both the person(s) who is experiencing, and who/what is being experienced (Dewey, 1938/2007). He furthermore describes experience as acquired through engaging with the environment: “An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place

¹¹ The Dewey School, also known as “the laboratory school,” was Dewey’s attempt to incorporate his pragmatist ideas into the educational system. It was an experimental school founded in 1896, which provided progressive education in line with Dewey’s ideas and in affiliation with the University of Chicago (Mayhew & Edwards, 1936).

between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his [sic] environment.” (Dewey, 1938/2007, p. 43).

Drawing on Dewey, actions are seen as guided by previous experiences, and by experiencing the consequences of actions in the now, the movement continues as future experiences are affected. Experiences thus have a constant and ongoing quality which Dewey refers to as the “principle of continuity” (Dewey, 1925/2000). In a continuous process, experiences are created and re-created. As relations between actions and consequences are formed, more functional ways of action can thus be acquired and new meanings made.

Meaning-making

Traditionally associated with sociocultural research, *meaning-making* acknowledges the contextual conditions of learning. Within the framework of this thesis, both meaning-making and learning are used to describe the transformative consequences of educational processes. Meaning-making is used as a broader notion which involves acquiring and challenging values and worldviews, as well as positioning oneself in relation to activities, societies, and other beings. Learning, on the other hand, is used in a narrower sense to delineate meaning-making with respect to subject-specific content or skills (cf. Lidar, 2010). As both meaning-making and learning are considered to be based on experience, knowledge is to a large degree context-dependent. Accordingly, groups of people in different contexts have their own (implicit or explicit) agreements on what is held as relevant or true. This stance, best described as intersubjectivity, stresses the centrality of shared meanings and social agreements.

A transactional approach

In this thesis, a transactional approach to meaning-making is used to gain an understanding of how meanings with respect to food and health are offered and created. Accordingly, instead of separating individuals from the context in which they act, the work focuses on the actions in themselves (Garrison et al., 2022). This means that situated action, i.e., individual(s) acting in a given context, become the primary unit of analysis. Furthermore, language use is included as a form of situated action. As utterances are not regarded in a representational sense as statements of what the mind is thinking, the focus is on language as a form of embodied engagement and a part of a social practice. This is commonly referred to as a first-person perspective on language (Andersson et al., 2018).

Dewey's aesthetics

Aligning with the pragmatist stance, aesthetics is in this work understood as a quality, or a dimension, of experiences. As stated in the introduction, Dewey's *Art as experience* (1934/2005) is an elaborate motivation of how art cannot be separated from everyday experience. It begins with Dewey declaring that "In common conception, the work of art is often identified with the building, book, painting, or statue in its existence apart from human experience." (Dewey, 1934/2005, p. 3). He then proceeds to state that "(...)the actual work of art is what the product does with and in experience" (Dewey, 1934/2005, p. 3). Through this statement and throughout *Art as experience*, Dewey clearly shifts the focus from external physical objects over to the processes of experiences. Thus, he develops a theory which integrates human action, attentiveness, and aesthetic experience.

All experiences have aesthetic qualities, but for an experience to be aesthetic in a Deweyan sense, a certain attentiveness is required (Koczanowicz, 2023). Eating, for example, can involve profound aesthetic experiences, but it can also be done without paying attention to (or appreciating) what is eaten. Furthermore, aesthetic experiences are literally an acquired taste in the sense that, to a certain extent, likes and dislikes are learnt. One aspect of food education thus entails learning to functionally coordinate one's aesthetic experiences with the aesthetic experiences of others (Shapin, 2012). In that way, intersubjectively established aesthetic values are constituted. Accordingly, the "aesthetics" in this thesis does not treat qualities of foods as objects (e.g., through sensory profiling). Rather, it focuses on pleasure and taste as a part of transactions when food is encountered and experienced.

Methods

In this chapter, the empirical part of the thesis will be presented. The chapter starts with an overview of the fieldwork and the four included papers. This is followed by a brief justification of the case study, and a description of the study design, participants, and context. Thereafter, the methods for data generation and analysis are accounted for, and the chapter ends with ethical considerations.

Overview

The empirical fieldwork consisted of a longitudinal single case study, where students from one school class and their two HCS teachers were included. The fieldwork took place over the course of a school year, and a range of methods to generate and document data were used. The work with this thesis started in the fall of 2016, whereas the fieldwork took place throughout the school year 2017/2018. In Table 1, an overview of the four included papers is presented.

Table 1. An overview of the four papers.

Paper	Research focus	Included data	Analytical tool
I	Students' meaning-making during cooking in Home and consumer studies	Classroom observations	Practical epistemology analysis
II	Educational functions of food for health in Home and consumer studies	Classroom observations Teacher interviews	Biesta's three functions of education
III	Aesthetic values in Home and consumer studies' food education	Classroom observations Teacher interviews Student focus groups	Thematic analysis
IV	The plate model as a food educational tool in Home and consumer studies	Classroom observations Teacher interviews Student focus groups Documents	Rogoff's three planes of analysis

A single case study rationale

Early on, it was clear that this project was going to focus on food education within HCS. With the pragmatist, transactional approach described earlier, knowledge, experience, and meaning-making are treated as inseparable from – and visible through – action. Thus, the interest was inevitably directed at participants’ transactions in HCS practices, and process-oriented “how” questions were raised. These inquiries, where operational processes need to be traced over time, are well suited for a case study (Yin, 2018). Yin furthermore recommends case study as a method for exploring contemporary events within their actual contexts, and this was the rationale behind the framing of the empirical part of the thesis work.

Study design and context

The study design built upon the case study methodology described by Yin (2018), which had previously been used in a similar context by Gisslevik et al. (2019). Using Yin’s terminology, the longitudinal, single case study design is defined as a strategy where the case is revisited on two or more different occasions, and where processes and/or their changes over time are targeted.

In one sense, every paper of the thesis could be regarded as a case in itself, as they have different foci. However, they all stem from – and highlight different aspects of – the same empirical data. “The Case” is therefore defined as, and delimited to, the educational processes taking place during the time of the fieldwork. More specifically, this was the HCS education at one particular school, in one particular school class, during the school year 2017/2018, and further limited to the participating students and teachers.

Recruitment for the case was made through critical case selection. According to Yin, critical case selection is appropriate when research is guided by “(...) circumstances within which its propositions are believed to be true” (Yin, 2018, p. 49). The critical case is then selected in relation to these circumstances and propositions. For this study, favorable conditions for education about food, meals, and health were sought for. Accordingly, three strategic criteria for inclusion were chosen:

- i. formally qualified teacher(s) with several years of working experience and a pronounced interest in working with food, meals, and health education,
- ii. communicative students who were assumed to have good chances to achieve curricular goals,
- iii. functional classroom(s) with fully equipped kitchen units.

The recruitment took place at a Swedish national conference for HCS teachers in March 2017, where I presented the overall focus of the thesis, the planned fieldwork, and the inclusion criteria. Several teachers expressed interest in participating, and through purposive sampling, two HCS teachers working at one school were recruited.

The two teachers, who are referred to in this thesis as Birgit and Annika (the names are pseudonyms), worked at a compulsory school (F-9) in a large Swedish city. They were both women aged 55–60 years, had more than 20 years of working experience as qualified HCS teachers, and were explicitly interested in teaching issues related to food and health. Informed by the inclusion criteria stated above, the teachers then suggested a school class that was considered suitable for participation. At this particular school, the main part of the HCS course was provided in the eighth grade. Accordingly, all 26 students (aged 14–15 years) from an eighth grade class, and their legal guardians, were informed about the study at the beginning of the fall term 2017. All students from the class became a part of the studied context. However, twelve of the students were included in the case study, meaning that their participation was documented and subjected to research.

The school where the study was conducted had a total of barely 1,000 students and 100 employees and was located in a very privileged area with residential incomes and educational levels well above average (Statistics Sweden, 2023). Judging by the location of the school, the study participants' statements, and observational notes, the participants could be defined as privileged by virtue of socioeconomic status and physical environment.

Birgit and Annika were permanently employed full-time HCS teachers at the school. They each had a classroom where they taught half-classes. Each classroom contained eight kitchen units, a refrigerator, a freezer, a washing machine, and a small office space. Furthermore, there were many other details that distinguished the HCS classrooms from the school's other classrooms. First, they stood out in a physical sense as to where they were located, separated from other classrooms, at the far end of the school building. Second, they were decorated in a way that gave the rooms a homey feeling. There were kitchen curtains and flowers in the windows, and school desks were put together so that they formed a big table in the middle of the classroom, resembling a dining table.

For the HCS lessons, the school class was split in two: one half was in Birgit's classroom, and the other half in Annika's. The lessons commonly started with a teacher lecture. These lectures involved topics related to the HCS syllabus, such as meal planning, sustainable consumption, and nutrition. The introductory lecture generally lasted for approximately 20–40 minutes and ended with an introduction to the cooking part of the lesson. Here, the students were usually assigned a recipe which they subsequently used, cooking in pairs at separate kitchen units. At the end of the lesson, the students

cleaned up their working spaces and ate their food while summarizing the lesson content together with the teacher.

In planning and performing lessons, the teachers stated that they followed the HCS syllabus used at the time of the fieldwork: Lgr'11. In this syllabus, the core content was divided into the knowledge areas “food, meals and health,” “consumption and personal finance,” and “environment and life-style.”¹²

Pilot study

In the process of designing the study, a pilot study was conducted during spring 2017. The purpose was to get acquainted with the research setting and the technical equipment. The pilot study consisted of one classroom observation of a HCS lesson and included one teacher (Birgit) and one school class (Swedish eighth grade). Four students were video-recorded while cooking, and the observation was also documented with fieldnotes. Subsequently, the pilot data were analyzed, which led to refinements of the study design and placement of the technical equipment. The teacher later became a participant in the main study, whereas the observed students did not.

Data generation

The data generation process started in early August 2017. Throughout the school year, I visited the school once or twice a week (with the exception of during school breaks etc.). The class had HCS lessons scheduled for 100 minutes, once a week, which I observed. The other weekly visit was used for teacher interviews, student focus groups, and document collection. Data generation ended with final interviews and focus groups in early June 2018. Table 2 provides an overview of the generated data, and their use in the respective papers.

¹² Since the time of study, a new curriculum, Lgr'22, has been introduced. For the HCS syllabus, this has meant some changes, mainly in relation to clarifying and delimiting the scope and assessment criteria of the subject. However, the three perspectives which are to pervade HCS: health, economy, and the environment, remain unchanged, and food and health are still core features of the subject.

Table 2. Generated data.

Method	Documentation	Amount	Included in papers			
			I	II	III	IV
Classroom observations	Video, audio, fieldnotes	36 x 100 minutes	x	x	x	x
Teacher interviews	Audio, interviewer notes	8 x 60 (39–64) minutes		x	x	x
Student focus groups	Audio, moderator notes	4 x 46 (42–48) minutes			x	x
Document collection	Written assignments, teacher evaluations, exams, recipes, HCS textbook	427 pages (+ textbook 312 pages)				x

Classroom observations

In educational research, the undertaking of observations as a method to generate data is well-established. The most common site for such research is the classroom (Angrosino, 2012). If well-executed, these observations can offer insights into the everyday and, in a certain sense, invisible practices taking place in classrooms. Thus, classroom observations can enhance the understanding of education, as well as contribute to improvement of its quality (Wragg, 2011).

Within the social sciences, observations have been referred to as “the fundamental base of all research methods” (Adler & Adler, 1994, p. 389). In line with this, classroom observations of HCS lessons constitute the main empirical base of this thesis, and are included in the analyses for all four papers. The data generation process followed the essential principles of observational research outlined by Angrosino (2012), i.e., it consisted of conducting and documenting the observations, finding patterns in the documented data, and subsequently reporting the findings in a representative way.

The observations all started when the students were invited into the classrooms at the beginning of each lesson, and ended with the students leaving after the lessons had ended. As an observer, my role was participatory in the sense that I sometimes initiated conversations with the participants and asked clarifying questions (as described by Kawulich, 2005). I also responded when the participants approached me with questions etc. However, consideration was taken on my behalf not to intervene excessively during the lessons. The observations were documented with fieldnotes, photographs, and audio and video recordings. The fieldnotes were written in an unstructured manner, without the use of any protocol. As perceived ambiances, overall chains of events,

etc. were noted, the fieldnotes were not exhaustive, but served as a complement to the other documentations. Photographs were taken of the classroom interior, teachers' illustrations on whiteboards, students' meals, etc. to serve as an additional complement. For the audio documentation, the teachers wore small microphones attached to their clothing, which recorded their voices throughout the lessons. Moreover, the cooking parts of the lessons were documented with video. Here, guidelines on how to conduct video observations of two to three people in semi-public settings were followed (Luff & Heath, 2012). This entailed a fixed camera placed on a tripod, capturing an open camera angle (i.e., a stable mid shot). The cameras were strategically positioned in order to capture as much as possible of the students' activities in the kitchen, with a focus on their manual work, such as chopping, stirring, and other hands-on tasks involved in cooking. However, the recordings generally did not capture the students' faces: a strategic decision made for privacy reasons. The students were instructed not to block the camera angles with kitchen tools etc., and a Dictaphone was placed at each kitchen unit, to complement the audio uptake from the video cameras. Figure 2 provides a schematic illustration of the placement of the video cameras. All the class's HCS lessons during the school year were included in the observations, with three exceptions: two lessons were used for written examinations, and one was missed due to external circumstances. In addition, a few of the HCS lessons during the school year were cancelled due to holidays, national test days, and outdoor activities. All in all, 36 lessons were observed.

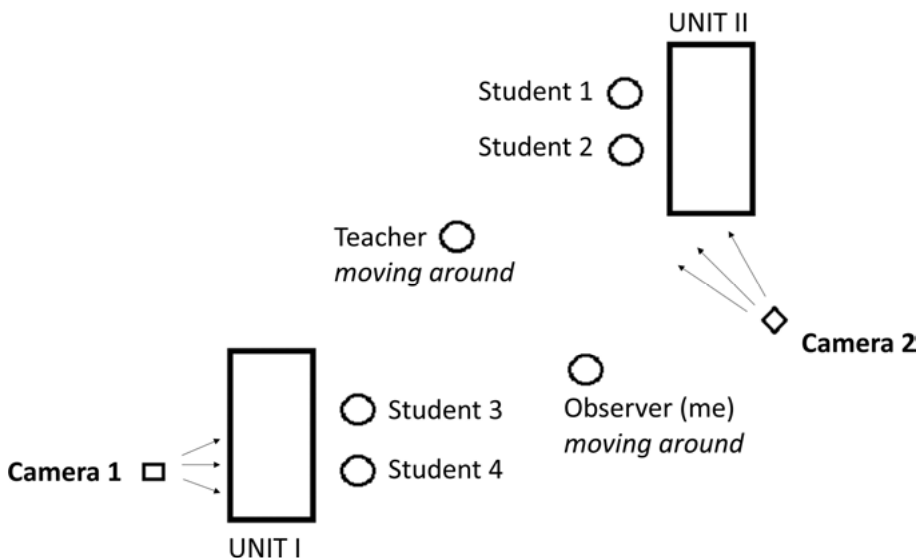


Figure 2. A schematic illustration of video camera placement during observations.

Teacher interviews

In educational research, interviews are recognized as a flexible and accessible way of generating data, advocated as both a complementary method and a standalone method. They provide a valuable means to gain insights into educational matters (Powney & Watts, 2018). For this thesis, teacher interviews were considered a valuable contribution to the study design, partly because they allowed for a follow-up on events taking place during observations. Accordingly, the teachers were interviewed individually on four occasions each, resulting in eight interviews which each lasted 39–64 minutes. The interviews followed the comprehensive guidelines suggested by Magnusson and Marecek (2015). These guidelines include many aspects, such as interviewer appearance, recording equipment, making sure the interviewee is comfortable, following the interview guide, asking follow up-questions etc.

Furthermore, the interviews were semi-structured in the sense that a few open-ended questions and topics for discussion were prepared in an interview guide before each session. The topics were broad, and covered matters related to teaching, learning, and evaluation in HCS. During the interviews, the teachers were encouraged to expand on these matters, and to discuss their actions in the classroom. Throughout the interviews, the conversations were very much a balancing act: listening to – and following up on – the teachers' reasoning, while avoiding straying too far from the interview guide.

During the second interview session for each teacher, we watched selected video clips from the classroom observations together. This method, in the literature called stimulated recall (Bloom 1953; Haglund, 2003), was used in order to draw attention to certain aspects of the situations occurring in the classroom, and to stimulate discussions around topics related to the research interests. However, during the teacher interviews, I experienced that the method did not have the desired effect, as the teachers acted self-aware and critical of their own recorded actions, rather than discussing the educational aspects of the watched events. Therefore, stimulated recall was only used on one interview occasion with each teacher. Data from the teacher interviews were included in the analyses for Papers II, III, and IV.

Student focus groups

Student focus groups were used to acquire additional information on the students' perspectives regarding the matters under study. Furthermore, focus groups were chosen as they could create an environment in which the students encouraged each other, even if they had been reluctant to be interviewed on their own (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Another reason to use focus groups was that they provided opportunities to get informed about students' experiences and perspectives at a more collective level (Gibbs, 2012). Hence, the participating students were all invited to join focus groups, which were held

on four separate occasions, evenly distributed across the school year. All in all, ten of the students participated in focus groups on one or more occasions. Each focus group lasted 42–48 minutes. Due to practical constraints (the students' schedule), each focus group could last for a maximum of 50 minutes.

For all the focus groups, stimulated recall was used, i.e., I watched video clips from the classroom observations together with the students and they got to comment and discuss what they saw. For this reason, the number of participants was limited to four students per focus group. Unlike during the teacher interviews, stimulated recall proved to be a successful approach with the students. They seemed to enjoy watching the clips, and the discussions became both lively and focused on events which I had selected based on their relevance for the research. Consequently, all the student focus groups included watching and discussing 3–5 video clips. Data from the student focus groups were included in the analyses for Papers III and IV.

Document collection

Document collection was undertaken with the purpose of acquiring complementary information on the studied practices. Merriam (1988) argues that, for case study research in education, “documents of all types can help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem” (p. 118). Furthermore, document collection is an established complement to other qualitative research methods as a means of triangulation (Bowen, 2009). Throughout the year of the fieldwork, documents of different kinds were collected. They included:

- Documents related to the HCS course itself: study plans
- Educational documents: fact sheets, recipes, and other instructions
- Examination documents: student assignments and texts (evaluated and commented on by the teachers), the teachers' own notes on the students' achievements
- The HCS textbook (purchased from a bookstore)

The collected documents have provided context and support throughout the thesis work, but were only included in the analysis for Paper IV.

Data analysis

For the four papers, the analyses have been framed and undertaken with the use of different analytical tools. These tools – or frameworks – provided different concepts and approaches which were found fruitful for exploring and answering the research questions associated with the respective papers. Each of these analytical frameworks will now be further described.

Practical epistemology analysis (Paper I)

In Paper I, video documentation from the classroom observations was included in the analysis. Practical epistemology analysis (PEA) was used as an analytical tool in order to illustrate students' meaning-making processes taking place during the HCS cooking practices. Initially outlined by Wickman and Östman (2002), PEA was developed to study how experiences are re-actualized and transformed into situated action. PEA can furthermore be described as "(...)an analysis of the actions taken by the participants of an activity as they engage in coping with what occurs in the situation" (Piqueras et al., 2008, p. 155). One of the strengths of PEA is that it deals with situational, continuous, as well as transformational aspects of the learning process (Wickman, 2006).

Hence, in the analysis process of Paper I, the emphasis was on describing *what* the students encountered, *how* they acted to proceed with the activity, and the relationships between these aspects. It is important to note that actions were not only considered in terms of physical movements of the body, but also in terms of the students' participation in language games.¹³ Thus, rather than considering language in a representational way as outer statements of an inner mind, the focus was on the use of words and utterances in situated action (cf. Wickman & Östman, 2002). The analysis started with a viewing of all the recorded video data, and an initial coding to mark events was performed. Clips from the videos were then selected based on their relevance for the research and transcribed verbatim¹⁴ for further analysis. All utterances in the transcriptions were translated from Swedish into English with the intention to retain the original connotations of the sentences. Subsequently, the transcripts were further processed by applying the central concepts of PEA: *encounters*, *standing fast*, *gaps*, and *relations* (see Figure 3 for a brief overview of these concepts).

¹³ *Language game* is a concept initially introduced by Wittgenstein (1953/2009) to describe how words acquire meaning through their use in different contexts.

¹⁴ When it was considered relevant, transcriptions also described bodily actions such as stirring, touching, feeling, smelling etc.

Encounters occurred through transactions, including students and/or their surroundings, such as teachers, recipes, appliances, food etc. During these encounters, the transactions took place in a variety of ways, where talking was one. Moreover, the meanings of words or utterances were not seen here as something set in stone but rather as consequences of different language games. **Standing fast** was hence used to describe what was seen as taken for granted and remained unquestioned. What stood fast between the students did not necessarily equal what stands fast in another or a broader context. Through encounters, and with the help of what stood fast, activities could proceed. However, as there inevitably are elements of transformation in learning situations, **gaps** occurred that needed to be filled with meaning. A gap was seen when an activity was disrupted, and actions were taken to fill the gap. With the use of what stood fast from previous encounters, gaps could be filled and new **relations** established.

Figure 3. A description of PEA concepts used in the analysis (inspired by Wickman & Östman, 2002).

Although I was responsible for viewing and selecting video clips, all authors took part in reviewing the selected clips and agreeing on the final results. The PEA was in part performed together with the co-authors.

Three functions of education (Paper II)

In Paper II, the educational content of food for health was explored, utilizing the conceptualization of three functions of education, as proposed by the educationalist Gert Biesta (2009; 2015a; 2015b; 2020). More precisely, Biesta's three functions of education was operationalized as an analytical framework, with the data from classroom observations and teacher interviews being scrutinized.

According to Biesta, education always functions in relation to three different aspects: qualification, socialization, and subjectification. Qualification includes factual knowledge, skills, and other elements that enable qualified action. Socialization involves the norms and values which inevitably follow as a consequence of conveying a qualification content. Lastly, subjectification stands for actions and ways of living which are made possible through education, i.e., individuals becoming acting subjects (as well as being subjected to others' actions) (Biesta, 2015b).

The analytical process encompassed three stages, starting with the process of generating and transcribing data. Then, an inductive reading of transcripts was undertaken in order to get an overview of the data and look for regularities and patterns. The third phase consisted of a deductive reading, where Biesta's three functions of education served as a conceptual tool, and the empirical data were sorted in accordance therewith. However, as educational situations always involve more than one function, the labeling of transcripts was not a categorical either-or process. Instead, the data were organized with a focus on

finding empirical examples that both represented the overall content and could be used to highlight the different functions. In this paper, I was primarily responsible for the analysis. However, all authors actively participated in the analysis, engaging in discussions, and reaching a consensus regarding potential understandings of the data and the framing of the results.

Thematic analysis (Paper III)

In Paper III, reflexive thematic analysis (TA) was undertaken in order to generate a broad and descriptive overview of *which* aesthetic values came into play in the data, and *how*. Included data came from the classroom observations, teacher interviews, and student focus groups.

TA is a flexible method for qualitative analysis, whereby patterns within the data are explored, coded, and presented as themes (Nowell et al., 2017). In the analysis, the foundational principles of TA as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021) were adhered to. The analysis process thus consisted of six distinctive phases: (1) data familiarization, (2) data coding, (3) initial theme generation, (4) theme development, (5) theme refining and naming, and (6) writing the results (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The familiarization phase (1) started in the processes of data generation and transcription. The transcripts were subsequently read and re-read with a focus on events, including utterances and non-verbal actions, which could be related to aesthetics, i.e., to beauty, pleasure, and/or taste. The coding and theme generation phases (2–4) were performed using the software program NVivo11 (QSR International, 2015). Throughout the analytic phases, I revisited the raw data regularly to check for adequacy and consistency. Hence, the phases were not strictly linear, as I went back and forth between them. The writing of the results was an important part of the analysis, and it was during this process that the themes took on their final shape.

One of the advantages of TA is that it can be combined with different theoretical and methodological frameworks (Nowell et al., 2017). However, as Braun and Clarke (2021) emphasize, this theoretical freedom does not mean that “anything goes.” On the contrary, the reflexive approach entails that the researcher’s active role in generating themes is recognized; thus, rejecting the stance that pre-existing themes “emerge” from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). An account for how I worked with reflexivity in the research process is provided in the Discussion chapter of this thesis.

For this paper, I conducted the analysis independently. However, I discussed every step of the process with the last author, making revisions as needed. The final themes were collectively agreed upon by all three authors.

Three planes of analysis (Paper IV)

In Paper IV, the entire data corpus was included in the analysis: data from classroom observations, teacher interviews, student focus groups, and text documents. Here, use of the plate model as a food educational tool was explored by employing three planes of analysis as a framework. The notion of three planes of analysis was first presented by the developmental psychologist Barbara Rogoff (1995). Rogoff put forth the idea that sociocultural activities can be analyzed in relation to institutional, interpersonal, and personal planes. Whereas the *institutional* plane targets the structures, norms and traditions governing the studied practices, the *interpersonal* plane focuses on how participants negotiate meaning and construct knowledge in transactions. Lastly, the *personal* plane recognizes the participants' individuality, and that each person comes into activities with unique experiences which contribute to shaping what takes place (Rogoff, 1995). Hence, this framework recognizes that the practices under investigation are not happening in a vacuum but are part of larger, ever-changing sociocultural contexts. It thereby provides a fruitful way of understanding education from a sociocultural perspective (Aspden & Smith, 2012).

The first analytical phase started in the process of generating and transcribing data. In the second phase, the entire data corpus was scrutinized, and data relating to the plate model were extracted and organized in NVivo11 (QSR International, 2015). In the third phase, Rogoff's three planes of analysis was used as a framework and the extracted data were reviewed accordingly. Here, displays of the plate model as a part of the investigated "HCS institution" were framed as the institutional plane. The participants' transactions, where understandings of the plate model were negotiated, were framed as the interpersonal plane. The personal plane included the participants' reasoning around their individual understanding and use of the plate model. I conducted the analysis in this paper independently, in parallel with an ongoing dialogue with the last author. All authors discussed and agreed on the final results.

Ethical considerations

The guidelines for good research practice by the Swedish Research Council (2017) were followed throughout the research process. This included adhering to ethical principles regarding information, consent, confidentiality, and utilization. Hence, the teachers, the students, and the students' legal guardians were provided with written and verbal information regarding the study and its voluntary nature. Written consent was obtained from all the participants and, if they were under fifteen years of age, their legal guardians.

The chosen methods had some ethical implications that needed careful consideration. For example, there was a risk that the participants could be

uncomfortable with audio- and video-documented observations, and food and eating in a health context can be a sensitive discussion topic (cf. Alfonsi et al., 2012). Moreover, the two participating teachers were in a particularly exposed position, as various aspects of their professional undertakings were subjected to scrutiny for an entire school year. The voluntary nature of the study and the right to discontinue participation were therefore repeatedly emphasized.

Before each observation, interview, and focus group session, all the participants were reminded of the right to discontinue, and that there were no predetermined “right” ways to act or answer questions. When stimulated recall was used in focus groups, the participating students were only shown video recordings of themselves and/or their teacher in action. An ethical dilemma that can be associated with focus group interviews is that confidentiality cannot be fully ensured (Wiles et al., 2008). Therefore, before and after each focus group session, the students were urged to keep what was said during the session to themselves.

As audio and video documentation was used during the classroom observations, attention was paid to informing all students about the placements and recording ranges of the cameras and Dictaphones. Still, students who were not participating in the study were sometimes unintentionally recorded. All recorded utterances and actions from students who did not participate were excluded from data processing. Names of participants were changed in the transcription process and the code key is securely stored together with collected documents and video and audio documentation. Regarding the collected documents, certain precautions have been taken to present data in a way that makes identification of any single study participant impossible: when data from the documents have been presented, the participants have only been referred to as “student” or “teacher.”

The Regional Ethical Review Board in Uppsala approved the study (ref. no. 2017/230).

Results

Taken together, the four included papers correspond to the overall aim of the thesis, which is to cultivate understandings of how meanings regarding food and health are made within HCS. Further, each individual paper has a more precise aim and/or associated research questions. In this chapter, the main results of each of the four papers are summarized.

Paper I

In Paper I, the aim was to explore HCS students' meaning-making processes with a focus on aesthetic judgments when learning to cook in formalized practices. This was reflected in the more specific research question "In what ways do students use aesthetic judgments in meaning-making processes during cooking?"

PEA was used to investigate how students used aesthetic judgments when learning to cook in the video-documented, formalized cooking practices. Generally, the students made efforts to prepare food that was aesthetically pleasing: primarily with regard to gustatory taste, but also in relation to visual appearance. Using the PEA conceptual framework, events taking place in the classroom were analyzed. Five distinct events were included in the results. Taken together, these five events illustrate three different ways in which the students used aesthetic judgments. These three ways were:

- as arguments in negotiations (Event 1)
- as reference points when re-actualizing experiences (Events 2, 3)
- as non-verbal actions when evaluating sensory qualities (Events 4, 5)

Event 1 illustrated how the students used aesthetic judgments as arguments when they negotiated ingredient choice. The argumentation involved optimizing the gustatory taste and visual appearance of the food, as exemplified by Marie's assertion in event 1: "*We can make this much more tasteful, I promise!*" Events 2 and 3 highlighted how aesthetic judgments played a role as reference points when the students linked past and present experiences, and thereby fostered continuity in the meaning-making processes: "*But do you remember the last time we made sushi? We did it like that, and then it became*

really hard.” (Caroline, event 3). Events 4 and 5 involved students making sensory evaluations relating to pleasure and taste, using more modes of action than language; here referred to as embodied aesthetic judgments. The students engaged in a broad spectrum of embodied actions, using their senses to feel, see, and taste whether the prepared food was ready or not. This is exemplified in event 4, where Fred and Carl stuck boiling potatoes repeatedly with a skewer to determine if they were properly cooked.

The analyzed events highlighted the integral role of aesthetic judgments and experiences in the students' meaning-making processes during cooking practices in HCS. This paper furthermore offered a description of how PEA can be used to study aesthetic judgments as non-verbal actions, opening for new ways of exploring meaning-making processes in relation to “tacit knowing.”

Paper II

This paper focused on how food for health was constituted as educational content within the studied practices. More specifically, the aim was to contribute to the understanding of health education as a part of HCS, with a focus on how food for health is constituted as educational content in relation to three educational functions: qualification, socialization, and subjectification.

In the analysis, Biesta's conceptualization of these functions was used and the data were explored accordingly.

Qualification – nutritional knowledge and cooking skills

Educational content which could be related to knowledge, competencies, and skills were considered to be aspects of qualification. We found that the qualification content mainly involved nutrition and cooking. With regard to nutrition, the teachers focused on nutrients and the nutritional properties of different foods. It was also noted that individual food items were discussed rather than food habits, and that the food items were further reduced into, and referred to, as nutrients: “*Have you seen all these lovely avocados? What kind of fat do we have in avocado?*” (Annika, observation 8b). Another qualification function was the implementation of nutritional knowledge when planning, selecting, and preparing food. For example, the teachers held a lecture on how foods could be combined to optimize nutrient uptake and how to cook food to protect against nutrient loss: “*(...) when we cook food, it should be noted that we should try to get as many nutrients as possible.*” (Birgit, observation 11a). As for cooking, a considerable amount of lesson time was spent on practical cooking training. Here, the focus was on students practicing cooking skills such as chopping and frying, but also keeping workspaces clean.

Socialization – food and eating: good or bad

Viewed from a perspective of socialization, the educational content demonstrated how norms and values regarding food and eating were contextually produced and reproduced in situated action. We could see how food items were dichotomously categorized as healthy/good or unhealthy/bad based on their nutritional content and, likewise, how certain ways of eating were valued in similar ways: “(...)we can eat scrambled eggs and bacon, but we still eat fruit and relatively healthy soured milk.” (Anna, observation 12b). Additionally, food was discussed in terms of its potential effects on the body, either as protective or risky, which can be seen as reinforcing the idea that food serves instrumentally, as a tool to optimize bodily functions: “*The purpose of this lesson is to understand what food can do to us if we eat all the wrong things.*” (Birgit, observation 8a).

Subjectification – becoming a conscious consumer

As subjectification, actions and ways of living that were promoted in the studied practices were highlighted. One of the teachers’ explicitly stated goals was to educate the students on how to be conscious consumers, particularly in relation to food choices and health: “*I want them to think that it’s easy to cook too. That their choices, conscious choices, make them, uhm...feel better and that you can change your life a lot, simply through what you eat.*” (Annika, interview 2). The teachers emphasized the importance of being “conscious” when undertaking actions related to food, including choices, preparation, and consumption. Environmental considerations were also integrated into the educational content, encouraging actions like cooking at home and choosing locally sourced produce. Moreover, being a “conscious consumer” involved not only actions, but also the intentions guiding those actions, where occasional indulgences or exceptions from “good” food choices were seen as acceptable to a certain degree.

The analysis indicated that the educational content had consequences which differed from those intended by the teachers. For example, by reinforcing dichotomous values of food as either good or bad. Therefore, this paper emphasized the importance of HCS teachers critically reflecting on their teaching and its potential educational consequences.

Paper III

With this paper, we aimed to gain understanding of aesthetic values as a part of food educational practices. The investigation was guided by the research question “What aesthetic values are central when teachers and students engage with food in HCS educational contexts, and how do these aesthetic values

come into play?” Through TA, we described three different ways in which values could be seen as constituted in the studied practices: culinary, production, and bodily aesthetics.

Culinary aesthetics

Encompassing cooking processes, cooking skills, and arrangement of food and meals, values related to culinary aesthetics were found to be the most prominent theme across the dataset: highlighted during interviews and focus group sessions, as well as in observations. During cooking, the students’ actions indicated concerns related to making the food gustatory and visually appealing: *“You should always have a lot of butter (...) Butter is tasty.”* (Daniel, observation 12a). We could see that gustatory taste included a universal aspect that stretched beyond personal preferences, and that the students changed their evaluative taste statements so that they aligned with those of the teachers. Thus, the teachers became the ones who set the frame for the desired aesthetic values. By presenting relations between actions and outcomes, the teachers suggested how the students could best undertake cooking activities: *“(...)when you see that the dough comes loose from the edges of the bowl, so that it becomes like a ball, then things start to get better.”* (Annika, observation 8b).

Production aesthetics

As for production aesthetics, values related to different aspects of the food industry were included: primary production, processing, and transports. While organic and locally sourced foods were generally valued as pleasurable and tasteful, animal production and imported foods were negatively valued: *“The meat industry is horrible!”* (Jennie, focus group 2). The degree of industrial processing that the food had undergone was also valued aesthetically, and flavors coming from “natural” ingredients were valued more positively than artificially produced flavors: *“[prefabricated food] is not necessarily really bad, but it might not taste the best.”* (Birgit, observation 16a). The students correspondingly stated that they would prefer what they called “real food,” even if an artificial substance was identical with respect to gustatory taste and nutrient content.

Bodily aesthetics

This theme illustrates how the teachers and students assigned aesthetic values (including both likes and dislikes) to food based on its biomedical and emotional impact on the body. Teachers and students alike tended to use biomedical consequences of eating certain foods as a basis for aesthetic valuation, and nutrient content was shown to be an important criterion in this valuation: *“If*

you skip meals or eat a lot of sweet stuff, then the blood sugar levels can look like this. Not good. You do not want that. So do not skip meals. Eat vegetables. Eat good food." (Annika, observation 13b). The way that the students used aesthetic values was moreover seen to create relations between biomedical aspects of food and emotional bodily responses. Through the use of a dichotomy – healthy/unhealthy – food was framed as having the power to evoke either feelings of pleasure (both “healthy” and “unhealthy” foods) or unpleasant feelings (“unhealthy” foods).

By highlighting the significance of aesthetics in HCS food education, this paper advocated for an awareness of values relating to beauty, pleasure, and taste within the subject, as this could have the potential to enrich the educational experiences and outcomes for learners.

Paper IV

Here, the aim was to explore the plate model as a food educational tool in HCS by addressing the research question “How is the plate model used in a food educational practice, considering institutional, interpersonal, and personal planes?”

Through employing Rogoff’s three planes of analysis as an analytical lens, the results were described by foregrounding the institutional, interpersonal, and personal aspects of how the plate model came into play within the data. Two different ways in which the plate model was consistently used in the studied practices were distinguished: as a way of communicating the “proper” meal and as a way of bridging (abstract) nutrients with (concrete) dishes. In the results, these ways of using the plate model were illustrated by foregrounding each of the three planes in turn.

The institutional plane

To foreground the institutional plane, we investigated how the plate model was displayed as a part of the formal HCS context. This highlighted how the plate model was presented visually, verbally, and textually through classroom interior, lectures, and textbook content. The plate model was visually and verbally stressed as the right way to eat: “*The plate model shows how you should put together a good lunch or dinner.*” (Textbook, page 9). This was not only reflected in the textbook and on classroom posters, but also in the teachers’ and students’ talk. Furthermore, it was shown how the plate model was used as a template in assessment and grading. Here, the importance of adjusting the model in accordance with one’s own needs was stressed. There was a mutual understanding among the participants that the plate model was used this way; as a template for assessing and grading the students: “*When they cook their food, I look at if they have considered the plate model.*” (Annika, interview

8). Moreover, the students argued during focus groups that they were more likely to be using the plate model during HCS lessons than outside of HCS, as they were graded on their use of it.

The interpersonal plane

As for the interpersonal plane, the focus was on how the plate model was communicated and negotiated through transactions taking place within the studied practices. During HCS lessons, the plate model was used as a template for serving food, when it was applicable. Both teachers framed the plate model as a way of making abstract understanding of nutrients more concrete through their representation in real food. It was also noted how the teachers used nutrients instead of foodstuffs to describe the different parts of the plate model: *“The plate model is certain nutrients, carbohydrates and protein in the plate model give the body energy. But the vegetable part, that doesn’t provide much energy, but don’t think like that – think about vitamins and minerals.”* (Annika, observation 13b). The students, when using the plate model as a template, problematized it with respect to its composition. They argued that the nutrient content would be the same regardless of how the food was plated, and moreover that not every meal had to have the exact same proportions: *“You don’t really have to eat everything in one meal. You could eat more meat for lunch one day and then you could eat more vegetables in the evening. That doesn’t matter.”* (Caroline, focus group 4). The teachers also problematized the model, in particular with respect to the proportion of starchy staples, for which they felt there was no clear guidance from the National Food Agency. However, they stressed that they still used the model, for lack of better alternatives: *“I don’t have any choice. I can’t make my own model.”* (Birgit, interview 7).

The personal plane

This plane was focused around the participants’ own reasoning about their understanding and use of the plate model. Here, it was foregrounded how the participants described that they related to the plate model when choosing and eating food. Both teachers and students emphasized that the plate model could be a support in planning nutritionally balanced meals. Some students reported that they had begun to use the model when choosing food: *“But I’ve started to think a bit about Home Economics, or the plate model, when I’m eating. Now I’ve started taking vegetables for the first time.”* (Fred, focus group 1). However, the students’ overall accounts indicated that their awareness of the plate model was not crucial in determining whether they actually ate according to it outside of HCS: *“I think about it, but I don’t do anything about it.”* (Caroline, focus group 3). Some students stated that they chose to prioritize taste over following the model, for example Oscar in focus group 2: *“If I’ve had a*

... serving and I'm still a bit hungry. Then maybe I'll just take a piece of meat and not a potato too (. . .) it's probably just because the meat is tastier." Towards the end of the course, students reported that HCS had provided them with a deeper understanding of the plate model in relation to nutritional benefits and environmental impact.

Based on the results of this paper, we argue that reducing and naming the parts of the plate model as nutrients might impede understandings of fundamental principles for nutritional classification. We therefore stress that the plate model can be used, but also overused in food educational practices.

Discussion

The aim of this thesis is to cultivate understandings of how meanings regarding food and health are made within HCS. Through the empirical fieldwork – which allowed for the tracing of educational processes over time – several ways of understanding meaning-making in HCS were generated. In this chapter, I will initially address the overall aim by revisiting, synthesizing, and discussing the results. Then, a section on methodological considerations follows, where strengths, limitations, and researcher reflexivity will be addressed. Lastly, I will provide some notes on knowledge claims, discuss how the results can inform practice, and propose implications for future research.

The results revisited

In summary, the main results of this thesis highlight:

- How students used aesthetic judgments during cooking when negotiating choices of ingredients, re-actualizing previous experiences, and evaluating foods' sensory qualities. This showed how aesthetics played an important part in HCS food educational processes and was integral to students' meaning-making (Paper I).
- How the content of food for health in HCS could be related to qualification (nutrition knowledge and cooking skills), socialization (dichotomous values of food as “good” or “bad”), and subjectification (fostering conscious and responsible consumers). As the educational content may have consequences that are not in line with the teachers' intentions, teachers are encouraged to critically reflect on what content they include and how (Paper II).
- How aesthetic values relating to culinary, production, and bodily aspects were constituted through encounters in HCS food education. These aesthetic values indicated what counted as valid or desired outcomes, and they thereby played a key role in directing and bringing the studied practices forward (Paper III).

- How the plate model was (over-)used as a food educational tool, seen from institutional, interpersonal, and personal perspectives. The plate model was framed as the “proper” way of eating and served as a metaphorical bridge linking abstract nutritional content to concrete dishes. It was furthermore demonstrated how these ways of using the plate model may impede fundamental nutritional understanding and, additionally, lead to unfair judgment of those who do not eat dishes adhering to the model (Paper IV).

The results from all four papers taken together can moreover be synthesized into two (separate but interrelated) core points around which I will build this discussion: “Food – a central transactant,”¹⁵ and “Savoring the present while shaping the future,” respectively. Whereas the first point is focused on food in itself and its role within educational practices, the second point addresses the interplay between the immediate experiences (savoring the present) and instrumental functions (shaping the future) involved in food education.

Food – a central transactant

The inclusion of actual food distinguishes food and health education in HCS from education in many other contexts. Because of the subject’s practical orientation, students do not only learn *about* food, but also *with* and *through* food (Höijer et al., 2011). Thus, in the HCS meaning-making processes, foods inevitably become what Hofverberg and Maivorsdotter (2018) have described as transactants. In other words, foods are more than static substances placed on the plate. On the contrary, by acting and being acted upon, food influences the meaning-making taking place in HCS, in terms of both *what* meanings are made, and *how*. This is shown in different ways and to differing degrees in the results of the four papers. Most prominently, it is evident in Paper I, where several examples of student-food transactions were highlighted. One example was that students engaged in repetitive actions, seeking sensory feedback from the food to make aesthetic judgments of whether or not it was cooked. While these actions could lead to increased familiarity with the food and its changing qualities, it also led to negative consequences for the prepared food (such as crumbling fish or a split pancake). This is an example of how, as transactants, foods pose a challenge during cooking processes: their qualities change constantly, placing demands on the cook’s evaluative abilities. Therefore, the types of transactions involving students and food, as seen in Paper I, can be regarded as a crucial aspect of students’ development of the embodied

¹⁵ The concept of a transactant is a play on words, combining “transact” from Dewey and Bentley’s (1949/1976) transactional approach with “actant”, originally used by Latour (1999) to refer to a (human or non-human) source of action. To highlight how actants operate in transaction, Hofverberg and Maivorsdotter (2018) introduced the concept of the transactant as an analytical tool. They subsequently used it to describe how students learn with garments and textile.

knowing emphasized as important in cooking by Jaffe and Gertler (2006) and Fine (2008), among others. This importance can be related to the results of Paper II, where cooking skills were described as a qualifying aspect of the education. In Paper II, we demonstrated how cooking skills, together with nutritional knowledge, constituted the qualification content. The results of Paper II illustrated how the teachers linked not only technical aspects of cooking skills, but also nutritional aspects of food preparation – such as optimal cooking temperatures, nutrient uptake, and preservation – to the foods that the students encountered. This likely influenced the transactions as well as the meanings made. Moreover, in the studied practices, food was included and discussed at many different levels, for example as nutrients, foodstuffs, dishes, and diets. As highlighted by Hofverberg (2022), “what is acknowledged in a transactional activity has a great impact on what is considered as valuable knowledge” (p. 147). In Paper III, we used empirical examples to show how aesthetic values were constituted in transactions involving both participants and food. For instance, we illustrated how the teachers pointed out desired student-food transactions, and their anticipated consequences. This became evident when the teachers articulated which sensory impressions to pay attention to when working a dough, and how to aesthetically value them. This way of teaching sensory attentiveness has been similarly highlighted in the context of crafts education (Risberg & Andersson, 2022). Another way of attending to food is as components on the plate model. In Paper IV, foods became central transactants through their compatibility with, and placement in, the plate model. One empirical example of this was when vegetables’ placement on a plate became the subject of an argument between two students, with the point of contention being if the positioning of the vegetables was crucial.

Through the use of the term “transactant” in studies of meaning-making, Hofverberg (2022) emphasized the non-human aspects of transactions, expanding the narrow focus on humans as imposing actions on passive material. Similarly, by depicting food as a central transactant in the studied practices of this thesis, I want to acknowledge that meaning-making processes in HCS involve “reciprocally transforming relations” (cf. Hofverberg, 2022, p. 138), encompassing not only human participants, but also materials and contexts.

Savoring the present while shaping the future

By recognizing food as a central transactant in HCS meaning-making processes, the immediacy of aesthetic experiences involving food is brought to the fore. Aesthetic experiences affect what becomes possible to learn in different situations, as empirically shown by, e.g., Wickman (2006). I argue that this has relevance, not least when it comes to food. The results of the four papers of this thesis show how the participating students took actions to create positive experiences of beauty, pleasure, and taste through manipulating their food’s appearance and taste. For example, in Paper I, it was reported how the

students used aesthetic judgments to negotiate ingredient choice, where gustatory taste served as a central argument. Students' orientation towards gustatory taste has been shown in classroom observations of other Swedish HCS contexts. For example, Gelinder et al. (2020) used observation data from HCS classrooms to describe taste as decisive for students' ingredient choices, triumphing over sustainability concerns. The students' focus on gustatory taste and visual appearance was further elaborated in Paper III of this thesis, where culinary aesthetic values were described as the most prominent theme across the studied practices. Although the participating students were high achievers and explicitly concerned with meeting the expectations of the teachers, their personal aesthetic concerns were still central aspects of their negotiations. In Paper IV, the students discussed the use of the plate model and compared it to food presented in a TV show. Although they seemed to agree that the plate model was not the most visually pleasing way to serve the food, they still used the model in the HCS practices. However, the quest for pleasurable and tasty food had many students secretly deviate from the teachers' instructions; in Paper III, we described how they added extra butter behind the teacher's back to make their food taste better. In a study including 59 students in northern Sweden, Bohm et al. (2016) highlighted similar results by demonstrating how the main factor guiding students' ingredient choices when they were not evaluated was their gustatory taste preferences.

The students in the case study of this thesis seemed preoccupied with savoring the present through making their food as aesthetically pleasing as possible. On the other hand, Papers I and II highlighted how the teachers' stated lesson purposes were more oriented towards shaping the future through conveying instrumental aspects such as teaching cooking skills and nutritional consequences of different food choices, and fostering conscious consumers. These results are in line with those of Höijer et al. (2011), who showed how HCS teachers framed food in HCS as "food with a purpose," i.e., food as a means to achieve something, rather than as a source of immediate experiences. However, based on the results of this thesis, I argue that – by paying attention to students' immediate aesthetic experiences of food taking place during educational activities – teachers can further their own understanding of how to didactically meet the experiences and needs of their students. Furthermore, the results support Leer and Wistoft's (2018) suggestion that children's taste should be understood as a resource rather than a barrier; by focusing on students' experiences while downplaying the normative agenda of fostering the "right" food preferences, food education can become more inclusive and resource-oriented. In other words, savoring the present can be just as important as teaching instrumental aspects with respect to shaping healthy futures. This discussion also sheds light on a broader societal issue, where the access to (immediately) pleasurable and tasty foods necessitates inclusion of both immediate and instrumental dimensions in food and health education, and a balancing of these aspects.

Methodological considerations

The participants in the case study of this thesis came from privileged conditions as regards socioeconomic status and physical environment. As a group, they could thus be considered to have a favorable position with respect to the social determinants of health (cf. Marmot et al., 2012). The idea of studying the practices of institutions, groups, or individuals belonging at the upper end of social power structures was introduced by Nader (1972). She argued that such “studying up” could complement studies on marginalized or less privileged groups and allow for a more comprehensive understanding of what works in any given context, and why. In the case of this thesis, the decision to “study up” was made consciously and based on the interest to investigate a critical case with good conditions for food and health education. However, as a likely consequence of the group composition and homogeneity, many perspectives and understandings regarding food and health seemed to be shared among the participants, as they remained unquestioned. To paraphrase Bourdieu (1979/1987), the participants’ shared habitus was undoubtedly pivotal for how the study unfolded, and for how aesthetic aspects came into play.

It should moreover be highlighted that the students who participated in this study were included in part because of their communicative abilities. The students’ propensity to communicate their experiences likely facilitated the investigations. However, not all students in HCS classrooms have the same communicative skills, which can make it more difficult for teachers to notice and attend to, e.g., aesthetic experiences. The homogeneity and privileged positions of the group must therefore be taken into consideration when interpreting the results.

Methods discussion

One strength of longitudinal, single case study designs is that they provide opportunities to “(...) investigate a contemporary phenomenon (‘the case’) in depth and within its real-world context” (Yin, 2018, p. 15). Accordingly, the design of the empirical fieldwork made it possible to explore and describe educational processes taking place over time, using a variety of data sources. This allowed for investigations of one and the same context from different perspectives and utilizing a variety of analytical tools. However, the longitudinal data-generating process was time-consuming, and produced a vast amount of data, which had to be managed accurately. First, all data had to be reviewed at least once (another time-consuming task). Second, the video documentation occupied a significant amount of digital space, and needed to be stored securely. This was solved through the use of flash drives, kept in locked archives. Third, there was an ethical risk related to generating unused data; although all data were sifted through, only parts of the video data were transcribed and/or analyzed in detail. However, I argue that, in some sense, all

experiences made in the different phases of the study contributed to the understanding of the case as a whole, meaning that no data were neglected.

Another methodological consideration concerned the combination of qualitative methods. Biesta (2021) defines methodological triangulation as a way of seeking corroboration of results from different methods studying the same phenomenon. Patton (2015) mentions data triangulation as a way to combine different data sources. The importance of triangulation in case study research is also emphasized by Yin (2018). The methods were therefore intentionally selected in order to generate rich and multifaceted data, to complement each other, and to converge in a triangulating fashion. Moreover, the use of stimulated recall (Haglund, 2003) functioned as a way of member checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000), as the participants were invited to comment on, and sometimes clarify, their actions.

Regarding the use of observations as a data generation method, one concern is their high dependence on selectivity; a broad coverage is difficult and the observer is forced to make constant choices about what to observe (Kawulich, 2005). This selectivity problem was somewhat mitigated by using audio and video documentation as the basis for analysis. However, as the students' faces were typically not recorded on video, there may have been numerous instances of non-verbal aesthetic communication that went unnoticed. This can be seen as a limitation, particularly in relation to Papers I and III. In this case, the ethical consideration of safeguarding students' integrity by minimizing their appearance on video, was prioritized.

Another consideration relates to the reflexive nature of observations: actions may proceed differently simply because they are being observed (Yin, 2018). When observing the same participants on repeated occasions during the extended period, they appeared to become habituated to the situation, which in turn should minimize researcher influence. However, from a pragmatist point of view, the question of whether studied actions were "altered" or not became less pressing as the analyses took their point of departure in the actions as they occurred, focusing on potential consequences rather than causes.

Concerning the interviews and focus group sessions, they were sites where the participants gained new experiences and meanings about food, health, and HCS. This became especially clear when the teachers during interviews reflected critically on their study plans, which made them decide to change the plans for the upcoming school year. This meta-perspective on meaning-making is not included in the results.

The documents collected during the fieldwork were intended to be used as support to the other methods, and to serve as means of triangulation (cf. Bowen, 2009). Although the documents were not included in the analysis for the first three papers, they have been a support throughout the processing of empirical data, as they provided complementary information regarding the case's context and participants.

Navigating changes – a post-data reflection

HCS is a subject striving to achieve “optimal and sustainable living for individuals, families and communities” (Pendergast, 2008, p. 1). As such, the educational content of the subject reflects the temporal and sociocultural contexts in which the subject is undertaken (Stage & Vincenti, 1997). As in all educational settings, change processes are constantly in motion. Goodson (2003) has described these processes as driven by personal, internal, and/or external agents. Whereas personal change refers to individuals’ changes in beliefs or plans, internal change works within school settings. External change is mandated top-down, for example through societal or curriculum changes.

The fieldwork for this thesis was conducted in 2017/2018. Since then, there have been significant external changes – to say the least. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic has tested many people’s abilities to manage household, shedding new light on the relevance of HCS (Pendergast, 2021). The urgency for action against climate change has intensified, highlighting the value of addressing this challenge in HCS (Haapaniemi et al., 2022). Moreover, disturbances in the food chain (Leal Filho et al., 2023) and rising inflation (FAO et al., 2023) have resulted in increasing food prices, which also calls for attention within the subject. With all these changes taken together, it is reasonable to assume that, as a subject, HCS is not what it was in 2017.

Additionally, after the fieldwork was performed, the Swedish syllabus for HCS has been revised. The current syllabus (Lgr’22) was introduced on July 1st, 2022. In the revised syllabus, the three HCS perspectives – health, finance, and environment – have become more strongly integrated into all three knowledge areas. The assessment criteria have moreover been revised for clarity. However, as the previous syllabus (Lgr’11) was implemented at the time of the fieldwork, that is what I used when relating the findings to the curriculum.

Despite these immense external changes, including the fact that some details of the HCS syllabus have changed with the launch of Lgr’22, I believe that the results of this thesis can still be relevant for HCS practices. This assumption finds support in the notion of teaching traditions, i.e., subject-specific patterns in the selection and implementation of educational content and teaching manners (Almqvist et al., 2023). Teaching traditions in science education have been defined and discussed by, for example, Lundqvist and Sund (2018), and Marty et al. (2018). In a HCS context, Bohm (2023) has illustrated how subject-specific teaching traditions were reproduced by HCS teachers. Bohm argued that teachers, by adhering to their own views of what HCS is, may feel as if they are keeping the subject’s boundaries and contents intact.

Against this backdrop, the results of this thesis can be used for comparative analyses of teaching traditions in HCS and in other educational settings. They can thereby stand the test of time. Nevertheless, the results need to be read in light of the time and space within which they were created.

Reflexivity – my role(s) as a researcher

Reflexivity is about researchers' awareness of, and accounting for, their subjectivity, i.e., their own background, experiences, and contexts (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). From an epistemological viewpoint, reflexivity is necessary when taking a stance where knowledge (including research data) is regarded as co-constructed through the research process (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Subjectivity, which in many research traditions has been (and still is) considered as a problem, can thereby be transformed into a strength (Finlay, 2002). Correspondingly, reflexivity has even been argued to be the gold standard for judging the trustworthiness of results within qualitative research traditions (Gabriel, 2018). Establishing trustworthiness thus requires acknowledging my various positions as a researcher, particularly with regard to the reflexive TA conducted in the study for Paper III.

To ensure reflexivity, I kept weekly and sometimes daily journals throughout the PhD project. In these journals, I reflected on my position as a researcher. Moreover, I documented and reflected on the research process, and related it to my own personal and professional development. The following accounts are to a large extent based on my reflections in these journals.

I started this PhD project with an explicit interest in food and health education, and this interest remains. However, my own understanding of what food and health education is, and what it should be, has changed and evolved throughout the process. Although I started out with a quite dualistic notion of health as the absence of disease, I soon shifted towards a more salutogenic and process-based approach. This personal journey has most likely influenced the progression of the thesis, and my hope is that the included papers are imbued with salutogenesis (albeit implicitly).

Throughout the process, I have recognized myself as a co-creator of the research, meaning that my presence, actions, and persona have affected every step. This was most tangible in relation to the fieldwork. As I came to the classroom as a woman of Swedish ethnicity, a teacher, a registered dietitian, and PhD student, the participants likely had preconceptions about what I expected to experience, which in turn might have affected their actions. With this in mind, I made an effort to communicate that I was not looking for anything specific, but rather interested in the educational processes as a whole. I also stated that my aim with the research was not to judge the participants or their actions. Furthermore, I strived to consistently reflect on what I perceived during the fieldwork, self-critically scrutinizing and challenging my own preconceptions, and relating the observations made to my own experiences.

However, it would be naïve to disregard the inevitable power relations created between me as a researcher and the study participants; relations which might have affected participants' willingness to participate, as well as how the study progressed (Robson & McCartan, 2016). With awareness of different power dynamics, I consistently tried to take caution to respect the integrity of

the participants, and I experienced the data-generating sessions as increasingly comfortable and that the participants acted in a relaxed manner.

One challenge was to retain my role as a researcher while getting better acquainted with the participants. The balancing act between closeness and distance became even more challenging about a month into the fieldwork, when the teachers started to invite me to their lunches, which took place in direct conjunction with the observations. At first, I declined their invitations, but I soon realized that the lunches were an opportunity to get to know the teachers better, and thereby gain a fuller understanding of the case. Although these lunches did not generate data in the formal sense, careful consideration was taken to keep a professional stance.

Lastly, a reflection on the results. In compiling the results for the four papers, I noticed a striking uniformity in their structural composition: the results were all organized around three central focal points or themes. Due to the deductive approach of employing Biesta's three functions of education and Rogoff's three planes of analysis in Papers II and IV, respectively, the three foci were given. However, in Papers I and III, the three themes were abductively generated through the analysis process. This insight is intriguing, but it necessitates a reflection on whether my own analytical susceptibilities may have inadvertently guided the findings in the data. I acknowledge that there are undeniably other ways in which the results could have been framed. However, whether or not these alternatives would have painted a more accurate picture of the studied practices is impossible to tell. I can only hope that, by working systematically and in a constant motion between the analytical tools and the empirical data, I have done justice to the investigated practices.

Knowledge claims

Like all qualitative research, this PhD project is contextual, with respect to both the research itself and the empirical foundation. Thus, knowledge claims based on the results from this single case study will not include generalization in the traditional, statistical sense about how students and/or teachers in general act, teach or make meanings. Nevertheless, as Wolcott (1994) has argued, "(...) there must be a *capacity* for generalization; otherwise there would be no point in giving such careful attention to the single case." (p. 113). More recently, Hays and McKibben (2021) similarly stressed that ignoring generalizability in qualitative research risks conveying a message of irrelevant findings. Therefore, I invoke Larsson's (2009) notion of generalization through recognition of patterns, where the intention is to contribute to informed discussions, derived from a particular case. Thus, the results can offer ways to understand other "cases," where similar (or dissimilar) situations occur. This enables readers to relate the results to their own practices and thereby evaluate their relevance. With this reasoning in consideration, the results of this thesis

can offer transferability, i.e., deliberate application of the results to other settings and situations (Carminati, 2018). To contextualize the results and thereby facilitate their transferability, I have included an overview of the history and traditions associated with HCS food and health education in the Introduction chapter. Furthermore, to enhance transparency, I have provided thick and detailed descriptions of the investigated practices in the respective papers, as well as in the Methods chapter of this thesis summary. Thereby, the results can hopefully contribute to informing discussions and practices among researchers and practitioners within food education in general, and HCS teachers in particular.

Contributions to research

By highlighting the centrality of aesthetics within the studied practices, the results support ongoing scholarly arguments, advocating for experience-oriented and experimental approaches to food education in general (Christensen et al., 2022; Coe et al., 2024; Leer & Wistoft, 2018), and HCS in particular (Beinert et al., 2020; Bohm, 2022; Lindblom et al., 2016). In this thesis, I support these arguments by contributing with empirically grounded illustrations of the balancing act between “savoring the present” and “shaping the future” in food education. Previous qualitative research has illustrated how teachers take on an instrumental approach to food and cooking in HCS (Granberg et al., 2017; Höijer et al., 2011), whereas students seem to focus on taste (Bohm et al., 2016; Gelinder et al., 2020; Gisslevik et al., 2017). However, to my knowledge, this thesis is the first of its kind, elaborating on these aspects in relation to food and health, using one and the same empirical context and including both teachers’ and students’ perspectives. It is thereby highlighted how processes of “savoring the present” and “shaping the future” take place simultaneously in HCS.

Through illustrating subject-specific practices in HCS, the results can furthermore contribute to studies in comparative didactics (as described by, e.g., Almqvist et al., 2023). Hence, the results can be of value to educational contexts outside HCS and food education. With respect to comparative didactics, I would argue that the thesis makes a significant contribution by focusing on aesthetics as an integral part of HCS practices. This positions HCS among other school subjects studied within the emerging field of disciplinary aesthetics (Anderhag et al., 2024).

Implications for teaching

As regards food educational practices in general, I would claim that the main implications generated through this thesis are two-fold. First, the results highlight how a certain content can influence students’ meaning-making when it comes to food and food-health relations, and they thereby underscore the

importance of teachers' critical reflection on educational content. Second, the results provide empirical examples of how the immediacy of aesthetic experiences become a part of food educational practices. Thus, the results demonstrate how food education is not only about teaching and learning foods' instrumental qualities in terms of potential future effects. Food education is nonetheless about what happens in the moment, when foods are encountered and experienced as central transactants.

One way to cherish the immediacy of aesthetic experiences in the classroom could be to vary the traditional rhythm of the HCS lesson (cf. Bohm, 2022). By not only focusing on preparing a meal from start to finish, one could take on a more experimental approach, where the focus could be on aesthetic experiences rather than on producing a complete dish. An example of food education which can serve as inspiration is the Danish "Gardens for Bellies" program (Nielsen et al., 2020). In this program, the students' experiences are in focus, as they are encouraged to pay attention to their experiences and to experiment with food in cooking processes. Another example is the Reggio Emilia approach, as described by Coe et al. (2024), wherein food ateliers provide an educational context where children are encouraged to explore and experience food in diverse ways.

The importance for teachers to reflect didactically on *what* educational content of food and health is included in teaching HCS, and *how* it is included has previously been emphasized by Oljans et al. (2020). Similarly, based on the results of this thesis, I suggest that teachers can benefit from reflecting upon questions such as "What do I want to convey regarding food in relation to health and why/in what purpose?", "What aesthetic values do I want to communicate, and why/in what purpose?", and "Will I use the plate model or other educational tools and, if so, what can be the potential educational consequences?" In this reflection, Biesta's (2015b) notion of educational functions and the results from Paper II can be of assistance, by clarifying how qualification, socialization, and subjectification are all integral to the content. By providing empirical examples of how aesthetics can come into play in the HCS classroom, the results of Papers I and III can direct teachers' attention at the aesthetic dimensions of educational practices. Additionally, the results from Paper III can support a reflection on how contents can be treated aesthetically – that is, how values relating to beauty, pleasure, and taste can be communicated in the classroom. Moreover, contemplation on institutional aspects, as described by Rogoff (1995) and in Paper IV, can help in clarifying how meanings are contextually offered, how the plate model (or other models) can be used, and what the educational consequences might be.

One analogy to describe the practice of teaching can be made to playing jazz music: although both activities are necessarily informed by theory, they also depend on improvisation. How the music – or the teaching – progresses is highly contingent on the situation, and a good practitioner knows how to navigate the rhythms, twists, and turns; aspects which follow no rules, but

rather need to be felt (Eisner, 2002). By being fully present and engaged with the students during the educational processes, teachers can navigate the unfolding classroom dynamics and thereby respond attentively to students' needs by adapting the content in the moment.

Future directions

As previously stated, the empirical foundation for this thesis is contextual. It comprises a specific and, in many ways, non-representative (privileged) educational context. It is therefore important to consider the need for studying food for health as educational content in other educational environments. One would imagine that similar research including other participants, whose experiences might not be shared to the same extent, would yield other, complementary results. Based on the results of this thesis, I want to highlight a few specific suggestions for future research:

- Studies of how meanings regarding food and health are made in more diverse settings
- Multimodal analyses of video data to explore aesthetic experiences taking place in the classroom, especially with respect to food as transactants, embodiment, and tacit knowing
- Studies specifically targeting subjectification, i.e., functions of food and health education with respect to students' individuality
- Quantitative studies investigating use of the plate model and other educational tools among teachers in food education

This research could be relevant to undertake within HCS as well as other food educational contexts, both formal and informal.

Concluding remarks

In conclusion, this thesis has contributed to understandings of how meanings regarding food and health are made within a HCS context. Through empirical investigations of different educational processes, I have hopefully provided new insights which can be of value for food educators in general, and HCS teachers in particular. The results underscore the necessity of a nuanced and reflective approach to the planning and undertaking of food educational practices. Moreover, the results demonstrate the centrality of food as a transactant in HCS, i.e., how food functions in ways that extend beyond the plate. Lastly, I want to emphasize the importance of immediate aesthetic experiences in food education with a paraphrase of Dewey's (1897/2013) timeless aphorism:

Food education is not only preparation for life; it is life itself

Sammanfattning på svenska

Bortom tallriken

– *Mat och hälsa, estetik och meningsskapande i hem- och konsumentkunskap*

I denna avhandling undersöks meningsskapande om mat och hälsa inom skolämnet hem- och konsumentkunskap (HK). Arbetet har genomförts med fokus på estetik som en del av meningsskapandeprocesser, men också på vilka konsekvenser ett visst utbildningsinnehåll kan få för meningsskapandet. Genom att synliggöra aspekter på utbildning som vanligtvis kan gå obemärkta förbi i klassrummets vardagliga praktiker, kan avhandlingen bidra med nya insikter och infallsvinklar kring mat och hälsa som utbildningsinnehåll. Mer specifikt belyses olika estetiska aspekter och didaktiska implikationer av utbildningen inom HK, vilket bidrar till HK som forskningsfält såväl som dess undervisningspraxis. Avhandlingen bidrar således i strävan mot att främja meningsfullt lärande i HK och en holistisk förståelse av mat- och hälsoutbildning.

Bakgrund

Skolämnet HK har sina rötter i en reformistisk idé om att utbilda folket i hemmets praktiker för att minska ohälsa och fostra en stark, arbetsduglig befolkning. Detta gäller såväl internationellt som i Sverige (se t ex Stage & Vincenti, 1997; Palmblad & Eriksson, 2014). Ämnet kan ses som en reflektion av rådande samhällseliga och kulturella ideal gällande bland annat hemmets skötsel, mat och hälsa (Oljans et al., 2018). Därmed är dess innehåll föränderligt, sett ur såväl historiska som geografiska perspektiv (Pendergast, 2008). Från att inledningsvis ha varit ett skolämne enbart för flickor blev HK en del av den obligatoriska svenska grundskolan för ett drygt halvsekel sedan (Hjälmeskog, 2000). Alltsedan dess erbjuds alla skolbarn i landet en grundläggande utbildning om mat i relation till tre, för ämnet centrala, perspektiv: hälsa, ekonomi och miljö (Lgr'22).

Av tradition är HK praktiskt orienterat och eleverna får därigenom möjlighet att lära sig, inte bara *om* mat, utan även *med* och *genom* mat (Höijer et al., 2011). Lektionerna följer ofta en viss rytm, som innefattar att eleverna i mindre grupper tillreder en måltid genom att följa ett recept och att de därefter äter resultatet (Bohm, 2022; Lindblom et al., 2016). Tidigare forskning har

bland annat visat hur HK-lärare ser på maten som inkluderas i ämnet som ”mat med ett syfte”, det vill säga att maten väljs utifrån olika instrumentella kriterier (Höijer et al., 2014). Andra studier har visat hur instrumentella aspekter, exempelvis miljömässig hållbarhet, kan falla i skymundan när elever under matlagning i HK fokuserar på att maten ska smaka gott i stunden (se t ex Gelinder et al., 2020).

När det gäller smak i specifik relation till mat kan begreppet tolkas på olika sätt. Dels kan det handla om matens smak i munnen, den så kallade gustatoriska smaken, dels om ett vidgat smakbegrepp. I denna vidare bemärkelse kan smak ses som en social handling som signalerar bland annat ekonomisk, kulturell och social status. Smaken kan således kommunicera tillhörighet såväl som avståndstagande i relation till olika sociala grupper (Bourdieu, 1979/1987). På så vis blir smak någonting mer än en fråga om personliga preferenser; den fungerar som en form av symboliskt kapital. Smakupplevelser kan också sägas ingå i ett slags estetiskt erfalande som, enligt Dewey (1934/2005), innefattar förnimmelser av just smak, men även av skönhet och behag. Att exempelvis ge uttryck för gillande eller ogillande är båda estetiska omdömen som kan säga något om en individs preferenser i stunden, men också om förväntningar och tidigare erfarenheter (Wickman, 2006).

I HK konfronteras elever ofta med resultatet av sin matlagning på ett mycket påtagligt vis: genom att äta det. Det är därför av intresse att utforska estetik som en del av meningsskapandeprocesser inom ämnet. Studier inom andra skolämnen har illustrerat hur estetiska erfarenheter påverkar meningsskapandet, till exempel genom att styra vad som blir önskvärt, eller ens möjligt, att lära sig (se t ex Wickman, 2006). Utifrån ovanstående bakgrund väcks dessutom frågor om hur mat- och hälsoutbildning äger rum i HK, och om vilka konsekvenser ett givet utbildningsinnehåll kan få för elevers meningsskapande.

Syfte

Det övergripande syftet med denna avhandling är att främja förståelsen för meningsskapande i relation till mat och hälsa i HK. Därutöver har vart och ett av de fyra inkluderade delarbetena ett eget, mer specifikt syfte:

- Delarbete I Att utforska HK-elevers meningsskapandeprocesser med fokus på estetiska omdömen under matlagning.
- Delarbete II Att bidra till förståelsen för hälsoutbildning som en del av HK, med fokus på hur mat för hälsa konstitueras som utbildningsinnehåll i relation till kvalifikation, socialisation och subjektsskapande.

Delarbete III Att öka förståelsen för estetiska värden som en del av matutbildningspraktiker i HK.

Delarbete IV Att utforska tallriksmodellen som utbildningsverktyg i HK.

Metoder

Den empiriska delen av avhandlingsarbetet designades som en fallstudie där jag, under ett läsår (2017/2018), följde två HK-lärare och tolv av deras elever från en skolklass. Lärarna var båda behöriga och erfarna inom ämnet HK och båda hade ett uttalat intresse av att undervisa om mat och hälsa. Lärarna arbetade på en F-9-skola i ett mycket välbeställt område i en svensk storstad. Eftersom majoriteten av HK-timmarna var förlagda till årskurs 8 på den aktuella skolan, tillfrågades elever ur en klass i denna årskurs om deltagande i studien. Klassen som tillfrågades bestod också, enligt lärarna, till stor del av kommunikativa elever som bedömdes ha goda chanser att tillgodogöra sig ämnets kunskapsinnehåll.

Olika metoder användes för att generera data: observationer, intervjuer, fokusgrupper och dokumentinsamling. Video- och ljudinspelade klassrumsobservationer ägde rum under klassens HK-lektioner, vilka var schemalagda under 100 minuter vid ett tillfälle per vecka. Därutöver genomfördes enskilda intervjuer med lärarna, fokusgrupper med eleverna, samt insamling av dokument såsom recept, prov och inlämningsuppgifter.

Delarbeten

Fallstudien genererade data som kom att ligga till grund för de fyra delarbeten som inkluderas i denna avhandling och som samtliga är publicerade i vetenskapliga tidskrifter.

I delarbete I undersöktes elevernas meningsskapande under matlagning, med fokus på deras användning av estetiska omdömen. Videodata från klassrumsobservationerna undersöktes med hjälp av praktisk epistemologisk analys (se Wickman & Östman, 2002). Därigenom beskrevs tre olika sätt på vilka eleverna använde estetiska omdömen. Det första sättet var som argument i förhandlingar, vilket innebar att eleverna – genom användning av estetiska omdömen – argumenterade för att göra maten så tilltalande som möjligt med olika ingrediensval. Det andra sättet på vilket estetiska omdömen användes var som referenspunkter när tidigare erfarenheter återaktualiserades. Det här innebar att eleverna fällde estetiska omdömen av matrelaterade händelser som de hade varit med om tidigare och därigenom kopplade dessa tidigare erfarenheter till den pågående matlagningen. Slutligen användes estetiska omdömen även i form av ickeverbala handlingar under matlagningsprocesserna när

eleverna, i samspel med maten, bedömde huruvida den var färdiglagad eller ej. Sammanfattningsvis visar delarbete I hur estetiska omdömen används på olika sätt under matlagning i HK och arbetet pekar mot att estetik spelar en central roll för meningsskapandet under dessa processer.

I delarbete II riktades fokus mot mat för hälsa som utbildningsinnehåll. Här analyserades data med lärarna i förgrunden: ljudinspelningar från observationerna samt lärarintervjuerna. Med hjälp av idén om tre utbildningsfunktioner (Biesta, 2009) beskrevs hur innehållet kunde relateras till kvalifikation, socialisation och subjektifiering. *Kvalifikation* handlar om de kvalificerande kunskaper som traditionellt förknippas med utbildning, exempelvis faktakunskaper och färdigheter. *Socialisation* innefattar de ofta mindre synliga följemeningarna i form av normer och värden som förmedlas. *Subjektifiering* handlar om utbildningens konsekvenser på elevers tillblivande som handlande subjekt. I detta delarbete illustrerades hur kvalifikationsinnehållet framför allt handlade om kunskaper i näringslära och praktiska matlagningsfärdigheter. Socialisationen innefattade dikotomier kopplade till mat och ätande som antingen ”rätt” eller ”fel”. Maten behandlades som antingen ett skydd eller en risk med grund i dess potentiella effekter på kroppen. Som subjektifiering beskrevs hur lärarna gav uttryck för att de ville fostra medvetna konsumenter, det vill säga individer som gjorde väl överlagda matval i relation till såväl den egna hälsan som miljön. Delarbete II kan sammantaget sägas synliggöra hur idén om tre utbildningsfunktioner kan tillämpas på ett empiriskt material. Dessutom visades hur ett givet utbildningsinnehåll om mat för hälsa kunde öppna för ett lärande som gick bortom själva kvalifikationsinnehållet.

I delarbete III undersöktes vilka estetiska värden som skapades i den studerade HK-kontexten och hur dessa värden skapades. För att få en bred översikt genomfördes en reflexiv tematisk analys (Braun & Clarke, 2021) av data från observationerna, lärarintervjuerna och fokusgrupperna. Därigenom beskrevs hur de estetiska värden som skapades kunde relateras till kulinarisk estetik, produktionsestetik och kroppslig estetik. Värden kopplade till kulinarisk estetik var mest påtagliga. Det var värden som rörde matlagningsprocesser, matlagningsfärdigheter och presentationen av mat och måltider. Här beskrevs bland annat hur lärarna, genom att presentera önskvärda handlingar i matlagning, och handlingarnas konsekvenser på matens egenskaper, satte ramarna för kulinariska estetiska värden. Produktionsestetik handlade om värden relaterade till primärproduktion, bearbetning och transport av mat. Här beskrevs exempelvis hur graden av bearbetning som maten gått igenom påverkade hur den värderades estetiskt, där hemlagad mat värderades i mer positiva termer än hel- och halvfabrikat. Den kroppsliga estetiken handlade om hur maten värderades baserat på dess potentiella inverkan på kroppen. Genom att använda biomedicinska konsekvenser som grund för estetisk värdering skapades dikotomin hälsosam-ohälsosam mat, där den ”hälsosamma” maten enbart värderades i positiva ordalag. Den ”ohälsosamma” maten värderades däremot både positivt (den smakade gott och kunde användas som belöning) och negativt

(den kunde skapa skuld känslor). För att sammanfatta synliggjorde delarbete III estetikens centrala roll i HK-matutbildning ytterligare. Därigenom framhölls värdet av en medvetenhet kring uttryck kopplade till smak, skönhet och behag inom HK-ämnet specifikt, men också inom matutbildning i allmänhet.

Slutligen undersöktes användning av tallriksmodellen som utbildningsverktyg i delarbete IV. Här inkluderades alla datakällor i analysen, som genomfördes med Rogoffs treplansanalys som analytiskt verktyg (Rogoff, 1995). Därigenom beskrevs användning av tallriksmodellen utifrån tre olika plan: det institutionella, det interpersonella och det personliga. På det institutionella planet beskrevs hur tallriksmodellen presenterades som en del av den formella HK-kontexten: genom klassrumsinteriören, föreläsningar och läroboken. Här blev det tydligt att tallriksmodellen fick representera den ”rätta” måltiden och vidare att modellen användes som underlag för bedömning. Det interpersonella planet beskrev hur tallriksmodellen kommunicerades och förhandlades i de studerade praktikerna. Tallriksmodellen användes som en mall vid servering av mat, som kunde läggas upp i enlighet med den. Därutöver talade lärarna om modellens olika delar i termer av näringsämnen i stället för livsmedelsgrupper och såväl lärare som elever problematiserade modellen i relation till dess beståndsdelar. På det personliga planet fokuserades studiedeltagarnas resonemang kring deras egen förståelse och användning av tallriksmodellen. Här beskrevs hur deltagarna relaterade till modellen när de valde och åt mat. Även om de använde modellen som ett slags utvärderingsverktyg för att bedöma om maträtterna var välbalanserade beskrev eleverna att de många gånger valde att bortse från modellen när de gjorde sina matval. Resultaten av delstudie IV visade att tallriksmodellen kan vara användbar i utbildning om mat och hälsa, men att användningen behöver ske på ett reflekterat vis, bland annat för att inte riskera att maträtter som frångår modellen övertvägts blir klassificerade som ”fel”.

Diskussion

Resultaten från de fyra delstudierna syntetiserades och diskuterades genom två centrala aspekter: den första belyste maten som en central transaktant och den andra handlade om balansen mellan maten i nuet och i framtiden.

Begreppet transaktant användes för att åskådliggöra hur maten blev en central och föränderlig medaktör i mötet med studiedeltagarna (jfr Hofverberg & Maivorsdotter, 2018). Genom att agera (och bli agerad på) påverkade maten i allra högsta grad meningsskapandet. Mat är i konstant förändring under tillagningsprocesser, vilket ställer krav på matlagarens förmåga att, på ett adekvat vis, bedöma dess tillstånd. Matens roll som transaktant bör således tas i beaktande som ett betydelsefullt inslag i matutbildning.

Den andra diskussionspunkten, balansen mellan maten i nuet och i framtiden, handlade om hur de deltagande eleverna tycktes fokusera på det

omedelbara estetiska erfandet av maten: de ville helt enkelt att maten skulle se bra ut och smaka bra. Trots att eleverna uttryckte att de var måna om att vara lärarna till lags, dokumenterades exempel på hur de frångick lärarnas instruktioner för att, när lärarna inte såg, lägga till exempelvis mer socker eller smör i maten för att den skulle smaka bättre. Lärarna tycktes däremot vara mer orienterade mot matens instrumentella kvaliteter, det vill säga vad maten kunde leda till i framtiden. Detta i termer av exempelvis sjukdomsförebyggande och prestationshöjning. Därigenom sågs en diskrepans mellan elevernas fokus på nuet och lärarnas fokus på framtiden.

Slutsatser och bidrag till fältet

Sammantaget har den här avhandlingen bidragit till förståelser för hur meningsskapande om mat och hälsa sker i en HK-kontext. Genom empiriska undersökningar av olika utbildningsprocesser pekar avhandlingens resultat på hur maten i sig utgör en central transaktant i meningsskapandet. Dessutom talar resultaten för att lärare inom matutbildning skulle kunna främja sina förhållningar till didaktisk anpassning genom att ha en lyhördhet för det omedelbara estetiska erfandet som sker i mötet mellan mat och människor i klassrummet. Därigenom har avhandlingen förhoppningsvis genererat nya insikter som kan vara värdefulla för matutbildare i allmänhet och HK-lärare i synnerhet. Utöver dessa praktiska implikationer vill jag även göra gällande några mer specifika vetenskapliga bidrag:

- Genom att synliggöra estetikens roller i de studerade praktikerna ger avhandlingens resultat ytterligare stöd för pågående akademiska diskussioner som förordar ett experimentellt och erfarenhetsorienterat förhållningssätt till matutbildning (se t ex Coe et al., 2024; Beinert et al., 2020).
- Tidigare forskning har belyst lärares instrumentella syn på mat i HK (Höijer et al., 2011) och elevers orientering mot att göra maten god i nuet (se t ex Gelinder et al., 2020). I denna avhandling används ett och samma empiriska underlag för att illustrera och diskutera diskrepansen mellan lärares instrumentella fokus och elevers orientering mot nuet. Därigenom öppnar den för fördjupade undersökningar av hur balansen mellan omedelbara och framtida aspekter på mat och ätande kan navigeras i mat- och hälsoutbildning.
- Avhandlingen stärker även skolämnet HK:s plats inom det didaktiska forskningsfältet. Genom att illustrera ämnesspecifika klassrumspraktiker kan avhandlingens resultat användas i fortsatta ämnesdidaktiska studier såväl som i studier inom komparativ didaktik (se t ex Almqvist

et al., 2023). Slutligen vill jag hävda att ett av avhandlingens främsta bidrag är att den, genom att synliggöra estetikens betydelser i meningsskapandeprocesser i HK, positionerar HK inom det växande forskningsfältet som fokuserar på estetik i relation till olika skolämnen, så kallad ämnesbunden estetik (se t ex Anderhag et al., 2024).

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