

# Values and Food Education Seminar 1

By Sophie Wynne-Jones

Department of Geography and Earth Sciences, Aberystwyth University



On the 17<sup>th</sup> September 2014 we held the first in a series of seminars as part of a nine-month action-research project on Values and Food Education, which is a collaboration between myself in DGES and Jane Powell from the Organic Centre Wales (OCW). The seminar was intended as an interactive, ideas generating session to inform future educational events, asking:

## **How can a values approach inform the delivery of successful food education events?**

At the end of the year we intend to produce a ‘tool-kit’ of good-practice for educationalists working in food sustainability, including useful & meaningful metrics to measure the success of events and education programmes. Today we started that journey by sharing exemplars of good practice listed below, and considered the educational and social-psychology behind these different approaches.

Previous approaches to OCW food events have been grounded in educational theory: emphasising experiential approaches to learning and acknowledging the different dimensions of learning from the individual to the collective, subjective to objective ([see the approach described here](#)). Through this project we hope to augment this basis for our work by considering the implications of a values-based approach to education and social change.

To do this, we are working with the [Public Interest Research Centre](#) to draw on their experience of values through the Common Cause approach. Their [positioning paper](#) sets out some key starting points for our project and the discussion of the seminar. In summary, this approach offers the following insights for food education:

- **Values connect** - join the dots across issues, don't present food as a ‘single issue’ make connections to wider agendas that reinforce wider value shifts.
- **Social change not behaviour change** – in contrast with strategies such as ‘nudge’, working with values can lead to more enduring and empowering forms of change.
- **Scale** - values don't just work on an individual level, they also work through community and society (at micro, meso and macro scales). These different scales are inter-dependent and mutually reinforcing.

- **Be the change** - consider the relationships you nurture and embody through your educational projects and events and how values are affected in the different groupings and institutions you work in /with.

In the seminar, we evaluated previous OCW events, and other examples that people shared, which showed us that there are a number of overlaps between values and wider approaches. Using a ‘values’ approach is not about re-inventing the wheel – but providing a useful framework to understand what we know is working well. Good food events make the social relationships visible: they show that the food chain consists of real people and places, rather than anonymous, disconnected dispensers. A values approach sees education events as part of the wider social change required, rather than just a tool to make the participants change their behaviour.

The overlaps and differences between a values ‘social change’ approach and wider ‘behaviour change’ approaches were highlighted for us by Mark Whitehead, who encouraged us to think about the **efficacy, ethics, and empowerment** associated with different methods. This enabled us to position the values approach against others including nudge, practice-theory and mindfulness. He noted that a values approach might be intimately linked with some ‘progressive’ behaviour change models, giving the example of mindfulness, which when practiced can give people space to reflect on and align their values. These insights helped us to consider how to avoid manipulative, short-term, and fragmented approaches to education - promoting instead approaches which enable an inclusive and empowering decision process, as well as nurturing more social and joined-up approaches to learning.

### **Good-Practice identified:**

- Connect decisions and values – use mind-maps and diagrams for lifecycle decisions.
- Make the links - avoid a ‘single issue’ focus. How do food decisions relate across a spectrum of factors?
- Jump scales - seemingly ‘individual’ issues (such as health) translate up and down scales, so can be about community, public and global health and well-being. Promoting people to make connections is therefore also about transcending scales as well as ‘issues’.
- Food is affective and bodily – it is our connection with the natural world. Education events should be affective and work with an awareness of bodily and emotional responses.
- Make it fun and creative - Consider ways of engaging beyond ‘meals’ and ‘gardening’ which are often obvious choices for food education – how else do people relate? use theatre and art? What else do they enjoy?
- Make it visual – use maps and aerial photos (following the approach of participatory community mapping) – so people see what land is around them, what (food growing) it is used for, and who gets to decide.
- Use citizen science – don’t just educate people with facts from ‘expert science’, support them to collect data and develop local knowledge networks in their own neighbourhood.
- Support people to develop tools to acknowledge the frames that influence their values – so they become critical consumers of knowledge.
- Promote education which prompts questions – participants have questions and ideas that we as educationalists won’t have thought about – opening up new knowledge...

- Work with Welsh speakers and resources to ensure that positive local community and cultural values are not undermined.

### **Questions for further consideration:**

- How do you deal with your own values? Do you bring them explicitly? How can we promote a co-produced / participant-led approach without over-informing the project?
- How do you use values when your brief is to 'sell' something? How do we get away from marketing? And how do you evaluate if you need to demonstrate 'uptake' rather than 'transformative change'?
- How should we think about health? When it comes to food, we often associate this with physical health of individuals, but we need an approach that includes the wider mental and social health of communities.
- Can we identify the higher-level constraints on bad eating habits which create a values-action gap? e.g. aggressive corporate marketing of food products.
- Has the framing of food education changed over time? There seems to be a downward trend increasingly highlighting the clinical, hygiene aspects of food.
- How do values and other education theories align –what does work and what doesn't. Can we look at examples of bad food education – learn from what's gone wrong.
- Consider schools curricula – how are children learning about food – what values are being prompted? What connections made?

### **What Next?**

Over the next nine-months we will host a series of food education events working with partners across Wales. These events will run in an action learning cycle with academic seminars designed to evaluate and inform the educational approach taken at the events. Our next seminar will be held in January; please contact me (Sophie Wynne-Jones: [sxw@aber.ac.uk](mailto:sxw@aber.ac.uk)) if you would like to be involved.