



Reflection on the MTW Restaurant Study

Peggy McNamara

Midtown West is an option (non-zoned) District 2 school. It is located in the theater district but students come from across District 2, which contributes to the diverse student body. There are a significant number of male teachers and teachers of color. Varied family configurations are represented at MTW – same-sex and heterosexual parents, single parents, interracial families and families formed through adoption. Many of the faculty graduated from Bank Street Graduate School. Midtown West began as a collaboration between Bank Street Graduate faculty, and district 2 parents and teachers. The school has maintained a relationship through professional development and supporting student teachers.

For many years now I have worked as a social studies professional developer at MTW. School-wide Social Studies curriculum has been developed over time by grade level teams with some variations based on teachers' preferences. The Social Studies grade curricula are organized in outline forms with suggestions for how to launch a study, trips, reading materials, potential learning experiences (role play, recreations, artistic expression, interviews, and writing) and culmination. In grades PK-2 teachers have work to integrate science units into their studies by relating the content to an aspect of a social studies unit.

When approaching individual teachers or a grade level team to review their plans, I begin by assessing what the teachers understand about the content and processes of their curriculum and what they might be willing to learn in order to engage with new content and processes. MTW teachers usually work with their students for two years (K/1, 2/3, 4/5). Sarah and Kristin became a grade level team as Kindergarten teachers. During kindergarten, the demands of a year-long family study appeared to capture all of their curricular energy and there was little room for a meaningful science unit. When they started teaching first grade they

decided that they needed to work on integrating science into social studies. We began by planning a study of water and integrated it into the first study, which examined what made a school function. The water study began as an emergent curriculum, teachers found out what children knew and what they were interest in. Based on students' questions and teachers' comfort with exploring the answers, the focus of the study had to do with how water changed.

What would happen if we left a cup of water on the window sill for a week? What would happen if we put water in the refrigerator or freezer? What would happen if we boiled water? What would happen if a piece of ice was left out of the freezer? Teachers focused on how to guide students to pay attention to changes and to use different tools (thermometer, refrigerator, hot plate, freezer) to document what they observed happening. When interviewing the cafeteria staff and custodian for the school study, students created questions to find out about how these jobs used water. The emergent study of water was a stretch for Kristin and Sarah they wanted their students to learn more content.

The restaurant study had a more natural link to science content and processes for Sarah and Kristin. Students could learn about different food groups, which was science content and cooking built on some of the concepts that were touched upon in the water unit. However, I realized that I needed to provide more structure to planning the unit than I did during the water study. Both teachers needed me to provide them with an outline of the potential concepts and questions. With that structure the teachers integrated the science learning experiences into their outline for the restaurant study. Through our twice a month conversations, we were able to expand on those ideas as we thought about how we would guide the students' observations of what happens when we used different methods to change food.



The overarching science question for the study was, How do we change a liquid (water) or a solid (different types of food ingredients) through using an outside force? I think the teachers discovered these ideas as they engaged their students but this process made them unsure about how to explain what was happening. Although the students were able to observe and describe what they saw happening, I think the teachers wanted the students to demonstrate their learning of content more explicitly, as they did in the restaurant enactment where they demonstrated their understanding of a job by doing it.

As I support teachers to integrate science content and processes, I need to guide them to observe the learning and be able to document what students have learned. With kindergarten and first grade students, they may learn more about the process of learning than the actual content. If you put water in a freezer for two hours it will freeze because it is very cold. If you heat water in a pot on a hot plate it will boil. If you measure the water before you boil it, you will notice that there is less water after you boil it. If you fry food it gets crispy. If you boil some food it gets soft. These are all ideas that the students thought about without knowing exactly why it happened. Not being able to explain the “why” seemed frustrating for the teachers at first, until they saw the benefits of guiding students’ observations, which might lead to inferences and questions.

As I support teachers to integrate science content and processes, I need to guide them to observe the learning and be able to document what students have learned.



Restaurant Study Reflection

Sarah Hellerstein

Last spring, I completed the Restaurant Study with my class of twenty-eight first graders. Our backwards planning was crucial to the success of a study with multiple field trips, parental involvement, requested donations, and food preparation. This was my second time teaching this study; overall, I felt more comfortable and competent this time around. However, our continual reflection provided ideas for potential growth in future years.

Many areas for improvement related to logistics: for example, next time we will hold dining shifts during teacher lunch hours so more staff can attend. Also, we will schedule the opening days for later in the year, so that we can spend more time on designing the décor for the space. Through observation during the restaurant days, we noticed that students would benefit from increased practice in communicating with one another and working through the sequence of transitions that occur in a restaurant (for example: servers speaking with their chefs or bartenders to explain any special orders or clarify notation; bussers asking customers if items can be cleared; servers directing their chefs to begin making the next course based on where the customers were in their current course; and on and on!). And while we thought we had been concrete in our descriptions of how to plate food (we posted visuals and practiced “pretend plating” with the chefs prior to opening day), we learned that the chefs needed actual plating practice; manipulating large serving spoons while wearing plastic gloves was difficult for many children!

One way we felt successful this year was in our integration of science and social studies. Through guided inquiry and read alouds, we generated a list of different food preparation methods. The students brought background knowledge to our conversations and influenced what we would prepare during science half classes. We emphasized active learning with hands-on demonstrations, but did not do much

individual reflection afterwards. In future years, I would like to have the students demonstrate their learning with more writing, drawing, and through play. I envision having a science center in the classroom where the students can use pictures and artifacts from our cooking days to reflect in science notebooks.

The Restaurant Study has been taught at Midtown West for many years, by multiple teachers, and in various iterations. What makes MTW unique is its proximity to so many restaurants and its high level of family involvement. Families were integral in facilitating connections with local restaurants, and many of our field trips resulted directly from families contacting restaurants on our school’s behalf. Given these factors, the study is highly replicable in other schools. The most critical factor to success is the collective belief (from administration to teachers to families to students) in the importance of studying a system as a function of its interdependent parts. MTW understands the far-reaching implications of this study: beyond learning about how to run a restaurant, this study teaches students that, regardless of specialization or title, every member’s contributions count toward the success of a community of people



What makes MTW unique is its proximity to so many restaurants and its high level of family involvement.