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## YOU CAN TASTE WHERE IT COMES FROM

### Introduction

This programme was set up in cooperation with "Junior Science Week" (Wetenschapsweek junior), an organization which brings children aged 11/12 years in contact with science. The organization selects primary schools and scientific institutions and brings them into contact with each other. Together, the school and the institute design a programme which will give young children an introduction to science.

### History

Junior Science Week is an initiative of Utrecht University. It has its roots in the National Science Week, a programme aimed at 15 to 16 year old children which was also started at Utrecht University. Junior Science Week incorporates all scientific disciplines and this includes languages, history and social studies. It was started in 1989.

### Programme organization

All programmes have the same main structure. Beginning with the school and scientific institute meeting, participants are introduced to each other and the meeting is used to exchange ideas and make a first selection. A few weeks later a choice is made. The teacher plays a major part in the programme as at least two-thirds of the programme takes place at school. The children spend only one morning in the institute which serves as a spectacular end to the programme. Using the knowledge they have acquired throughout the programme in school, the children use the time in the institute for something special, which can vary from a press-conference, to a lecture, to an audience of university staff.

### Why participate?

This may seem an unusual question. At our botanic gardens the emphasis is on adult education and this has an historical background. Until 1989, our Gardens were open to the general public, but there was hardly any active support. The gates were opened when the first gardener appeared and closed when the last one left and the few leaflets

we had were made by the gardeners in their own spare time. The first job of the education officers (all volunteers at the time) was to update these leaflets and to start a campaign to improve our public relations. This has been done by using our regular visitors as target-group.

The development of education asked for a widening of our target-groups. The University rarely actively supports working with children, so by using Junior Science Week, which is a university initiative, the Gardens were able to take advantage of the occasion to develop programmes for children.

### **The theme**

In 1990 during Junior Science Week the Gardens faced a special challenge. Out of the 24 children in the class we received, only one was Dutch. The other children came from three ethnic groups. The majority were from Turkey, several were from Morocco and one was from Surinam.

The Gardens' task was to find a subject that would be attractive to all children. The origin of food was our first choice. It is something very familiar and yet strange. Not many children wonder where their food comes from or about the difference in diet between countries.

This gave us the opportunity to tell something about the origin of food, and the different parts of plants which are used as food (leaves, stems, bulbs etc.).

Several factors needed to be taken into account with the design of the programme:

- Many of the children were behind in their Dutch language development. At school, all lessons are given in Dutch, but at home and on the street the children use their own language, as such their vocabulary was limited.
- Diets vary a lot between different cultures. Comparison of Turkish and Moroccan diet for instance can reveal striking similarities and all kinds of differences.

The language problem was the most easy to solve. The children learnt botanical Dutch and if the teacher noticed any problems, she asked us

for the solutions. Much could be done with simple drawings of plants, accompanied by a list of terms.

The choice of the theme "You can taste where it comes from" proved to be very convenient. Food is something everyone needs and is in contact with every day. It is also something most children in our society take for granted. Hardly any child wonders what he or she is eating and where it comes from. The element of surprise is not in the subject but in the questions.

The programme at our Gardens did not confront them with major problems. Many preparations were made at school and the children received classes in their school gardens. They kept record of the things they ate during one week which was evaluated at school and which helped to give them the knowledge they needed during their visit to the Gardens. At the Gardens they prepared a meal with courses from each of their home-countries.

The children were divided into ethnic groups, each preparing parts of the meal. The ingredients were provided by us. The children sorted the ingredients to see which parts of the plants each course contained.

Occasional waiting time was filled with a task in the tropical greenhouse, for example looking for several food-plants (bananas, cocoa, vanilla etc.) and answering questions on the origin of the plants, parts used as food, etc. A large map of the world was used to indicate the *origin of the food-plants*. On this map the children also indicated the origin of the ingredients they used in their meal. Dinner was served on specially prepared tables. Photographs of the home-countries gave each table a special touch. The children wandered from table to table to try each other's cooking.

## **Evaluation**

A programme like this is quite unusual in our Gardens as we do not work with young children very often. The result was that we are more confident about the possibilities of working with children than before. It is fun and it gave us materials with which to develop a school-programme without too much trouble.

The programme has been very successful. The large amount of preparation time at school gave the children a good grounding for their visit. They were able to come to the Gardens without having to learn too much. For many of the children this was one of the few times that they left their own street. Weeks later their teacher informed us that the children were still talking about the event and remembered it as something very pleasant.

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