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Montessori Method and Cooking With Kids

Cooking with kids to create bond with children.

September 5, 2019 by [Federico Bastiani](#) [Leave a Comment](#)



At the threshold of turning forty, I decided to reset the priorities in my life, I realized that more time was at the top of the list. I have two young children, one aged seven, Matteo, and one aged three, Noah. Time passes quickly and it does not come back. In life, there's always the possibility to reinvent a career and make certain life choices, but there is only one certainty: time cannot be frozen. So I decided to make a drastic and difficult decision, to leave my permanent job as a marketing manager, to become a full-time dad and work as a freelancer from home. I sacrificed the certainty of a job (if a job can ever be considered as such), due to the uncertainty of the future, which, however, offered an advantage to be seized: spending more time with my children, a time that would never come back.

I realized that the possibility to manage the time is a luxury and privilege, but like all assets, you must know how to invest wisely.

I started to think of ways, apart from playtime that allowed me to spend some constructive time with my children. Noah is three years old and as far back as I remember I would always see him playing with his pots, in his toy kitchen, pretending to cook and serve us invisible dishes, at some point, he started playing with our actual pots. I too have always had a passion for food, even though I had little time to devote to cooking. With my new life, I decided to start cultivating my passion by trying to replicate the rustic recipes my grandmother and my great aunt prepared.

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over the years or simply watching online tutorials. The kitchen soon became an intimate space, where I freely experiment, test alchemies by combining ingredients as time slowly passes.

There is no doubt that children are attentive observers of the family atmosphere, they are like sponges that directly or indirectly internalize patterns. This is why I think it is important, for children to spend a lot of time with their parents.

In the evenings when I'd cook and Noah saw me peeling an onion or making a sauce, he'd take his chair and stand beside me, observing.

I realized that the kitchen could turn into "our standing appointment" during which we could have fun, talk, and at the same time provide him with new stimuli. An idea I believed that perfectly aligns with the Montessori path that Noah started at his Montessori preschool where independence is taught, being spatially aware and responsible, learning directly from experience even making mistakes.

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The kitchen for children is also important for other reasons.

First of all, it helps to stimulate manual abilities. One of the first things I taught Noah was the subtle art of breaking the shell of an egg, a skill that requires a certain concentration and dexterity, that many adults are not even capable of.

It was important to involve him thoroughly in the recipe process so that he could understand the sequence and order.

We started from the beginning by going shopping together to choose the products. It proved constructive because he learned the names of the various vegetable and easily distinguished them.

Personally, I have a passion for seafood that I obviously transferred to my son. When we go to the fishmonger for him it is important to look at the aquarium and recognize the fish because he also understands the complexity in preparing different types of fish.

One of the first skills I exposed him to was to gut the fish in order to better understand his aptitude for activities that are not too fun and light-hearted. Painstakingly removing the insides, cleaning and stuffing it with herbs, encouraging his ability to do it himself.

As a result, he can be proud of having participated in the whole process, from the shopping to the cleaning of the fish, to plating and serving the dish, confers confidence in his own abilities and autonomy.

Often people prefer to "build" a suitable area where children can move around in the kitchen and involve them only in certain stages of the process, for example by skipping the most critical parts such as knife skills. With Noah, I decided not to exempt him from the more delicate tests that involve a certain amount of risk. The mistake is experience as Maria Montessori teaches.

I left my son free to choose. Plastic or steel knife? I gave Noah a plastic knife but when he realized the difficulty, he wanted to try the steel knife (not very sharp) and I let him do it, not without anxiety, but I didn't want to undermine his self-confidence.

Similarly, the use of pepper, chili or onion requires a sequence of use which if not followed has consequences that Noah has experienced on his own skin.

After using the chili pepper, he must wash his hands, he must wet the onion before cutting it and not taste his fingers after working with pepper. All negative experiences have resulted in small traumas. One time he forgot to wash his hands after using pepper and he touched his eyes. It was a real tragedy for him, a shock followed by inconsolable crying because it was his first experience with a stimulus he'd never felt before. This experience kept him away from the kitchen for a few weeks. I never forced him to try again, it was a natural process. As with all trauma, there were stages to be managed: anger, acceptance, learning, growth.

After a few weeks away from the kitchen, Noah returned to assist me in the development of new recipes. The kitchen is really a gym for him because it stimulates all the senses, allows him to test the consistency of the various ingredients, smell and taste varied flavors and hear new sounds. It seems trivial but it is not. A sound that struck him very much discovered it while preparing the asparagus risotto. Once he had added the rice to toast it, he added the vegetable broth that generated a sizzle that almost frightened him at first but that sparked his attention.

Overall, bringing children closer to the kitchen from an early age is the first step in directing them towards nutritional education. Children have the opportunity to learn about the food they are eating and gain greater awareness of food in general.

I didn't want to place limits on the possibilities for my son. I read tips on what recipes can be made with children. I wanted to give Noah the chance to test himself and discover his own limits anticipating the moment in which he says "Dad, help me please". As Maria Montessori said "help me to do it alone" and that's what I tried to do with Noah, provide him with all the tools so that he could progress on his own.

We started in stages, cutting parsley was one of his first assignments as a cooking assistant. He has learned to grate cheese, break eggs, chop onions, peel garlic which requires a certain level of dexterity and concentration as well as the more complex tasks like removing prawn shells. As his confidence increased, I decided to guide him through more complex processes.

It was important to stimulate him with new recipes and ingredients. One of the recipes that catapulted his skillset was the preparation of the octopus on a potato crema. Discovering the suction cups on the tentacles and how they work was pure fun.

Given the success of this journey that had already lasted a year, I decided to share this experience by opening the youtube channel "Noah Cooks".

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I'm glad because judging by the feedback received, it is already an inspiration to many friends.

People we know have started introducing their children to the kitchen with less apprehension and fear. It is true, it takes a little patience, disorder reigns supreme, but the benefits that Noah has gained have been remarkable, both in terms of concentration and also empowerment.

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About Federico Bastiani

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