

Teaching Taste Competencies and Taste Authority

Research questions, aims and objectives

What is taste? How do you teach taste? These are the questions that form the basis of this research project.

With the establishment of the Danish *folkeskole* in 1814, theories of teaching – i.e. didactics – have emphasised cognitive and practical knowledge and skills, whereas aesthetic knowledge and skills, including those related to taste and emotion, have been underemphasised.

The project aims to strengthen children's and young people's taste competencies and their ability to participate in taste communities and make informed and critical judgements of taste, i.e. taste authority. The empirical basis is teaching and learning related to taste as practiced in the subject of Food Knowledge and other relevant subjects in Danish primary and secondary school (folkeskolen and gymnasiet) as well as various kinds of food-oriented vocational training.

Our research and publications to date (in Danish: Wistoft & Qvortrup 2017a, 2018a, 2018c, 2019. In English: 2017b, 2018b, 2019 in print) offer preliminary answers to the basic questions: what are taste competencies and taste authority, and how should they be taught? Further, we have developed a taste taxonomy with seven taste dimensions and presented the corresponding taste didactics.

However, this is only the starting point; in order to capitalise on these insights, it is essential to develop more specific answers to a number of questions evolving from this research basis. In the current research project, we will answer two specific research questions:

1. *How should we teach primary school students about health and sustainability as dimensions of taste in Food Knowledge and related subjects?* Our research has demonstrated that health and sustainability are currently dominated by a top-down, normative approach with limited learning achievements (Leer & Wistoft 2017, 2018). In comparison, we advocate for a broader conception of health and sustainability, where taste is not seen as a barrier for wellbeing and sustainability (Wistoft & Qvortrup 2017b and 2018c). By combining a theoretical approach (the taste taxonomy theory) with an empirical, classroom observation studies and a practice-oriented, experimental development approach, working together with teachers/associate professors from the six Danish teacher education programmes at the Danish University Colleges, we will develop a didactic approach to learning about health and food sustainability with taste as the gateway to wellbeing and sustainability.
2. *How should we support an interdisciplinary approach to taste education?* Our research has demonstrated that taste can be approached from a number of different positions: natural

science (taste buds, the sensory system), arts and literature (taste as an aesthetic category), history (taste in a historical perspective), religion (religious tastes), etc. (Wistoft & Qvortrup 2018). By combining a theoretical approach (the taste taxonomy theory) with empirical, classroom observation studies and a practice-oriented, experimental development approach, the ideal of interdisciplinarity will be addressed by creating inter-disciplinary learning programmes which include aesthetic subjects (poetry and art) and natural science subjects in secondary school (gymnasiet) with taste as the common focal point.

In parallel with, and based on, the results from these two empirical, development-oriented research activities, the basic taste taxonomy and corresponding taste didactics will be further improved and refined. This implies a two-way correspondence between three basic activities in the project, creating strong synergies between the different activities in the project: the two empirical activities are linked together and theoretically and conceptually informed by the common reference to the taste taxonomy and its taste didactics. Similarly, the basic theory of taste dimensions and taste didactics is continuously improved and refined by the empirical and development-oriented research activities.

Relevance and purpose

The project takes its point of departure in the fact that traditional didactics highlight cognitive and practical knowledge and skills, whereas aesthetic knowledge and skills (related to taste and emotion) have been undervalued. However, as Immanuel Kant pointed out already in 1790 in *Kritik der Urteilkraft* (Kant 1971), human judgement can be divided into two equal parts: purposeful, i.e. rational or objective judgement, and aesthetic, i.e. taste-related or subjective judgement (Kant 1971: 55). Today, taste is becoming increasingly prevalent in e.g. politics, marketing, social media and everyday life (e.g. Pollan 2008). Therefore, there is a contemporary need to deepen our knowledge about and teaching of, through and for taste. In the Danish school system, a central venue for the teaching of taste is the subject Food Knowledge, where students develop skills and knowledge related to food, taste, health, ingredients, cooking and meals, and thereby develop competences which enable them to define and judge their own taste preferences and food choices.

The overall aim of the project, to identify and develop children and young people's taste competencies and taste authority, is inspired by Immanuel Kant's seminal article from 1783, in which he presented his answer to the question, 'what is enlightenment' (Kant 1993 [1783]). His answer was the famous enlightenment imperative *sapere aude*: have the courage to use your own mind. This project adopts the motto but with a twist; it is not about the rational logic of the mind but about the subjective judgement of taste: *Sentire aude* – have the courage to use your senses. Give

your opinion. Trust your sense of taste. Know what taste arguments are valid in which contexts. Commit to making informed and critical judgements of taste.

From a civilisation perspective, how children taste and eat is just as important as what they know and find to be right. Consider contemporary politics, consumer choices, self-positioning or social media; here, taste is the driving force, and judgements of taste are made not least in communities of taste. The classic and central community of taste is the meal, where a *sensus communis*, as Kant calls it, may occur: i.e., a consensus based on sense, emotion and taste. The judgement of taste is social, built on a shared sensing receptibility and including all the many dimensions of taste. Taste judgements may be subjective from the outset, but still they appeal to common consensus: what does this meal taste like – what does it remind you of? Does it taste as you expected, or are you surprised about anything? What would you tell your friends about this meal? What we learn in taste communities is valid and relevant everywhere in society, whether we are referring to our role as consumers in close communities, as digital agents or citizens in political society. The basic idea is that what students learn in Food Knowledge and in similar subject areas supports their general education as citizens with the ability not only to perform rational judgements but also to perform subjective, taste-based judgements in taste communities.

It is the general hypothesis of the project that, by performing the two empirical projects, the students' ability to make informed and critical judgements as taste citizens will improve. It is the specific hypothesis of the project that it will enhance the didactical abilities of teachers to teach taste in Food Knowledge and other taste related subjects with a particular focus on the interdisciplinary potentials of taste as a subject. Both hypotheses will be tested by comparing students' abilities at the start of the project and subsequently three years later at the end of the project. Both student groups will be compared with a control group of similar students who have not participated in the project.

The project has three target groups: 1) teachers at primary and secondary school, and teachers and students at teacher training programmes at the six Danish University colleges; 2) teachers on other food training courses, including chef, waiter and baker training, as well as kitchen worker training; 3) food entrepreneurs in different fields, including food and meal suppliers for day-care and schools, and professionals disseminating taste knowledge and experiences to children and young people. All three target groups will be offered participation in practice-oriented seminars based on the results of the project.

Research background

When carrying out research on and teaching taste, it is important to understand that taste is not only a sensory/physiological phenomenon. Nevertheless, physiology (taste buds, mouthfeel, sense of smell, sight and hearing) has dominated the field. It is important to stress that taste is much more, as both cultural science and anthropology have highlighted in recent years (Højlund 2016). What has been missing is a systematic alternative to the sensory science of taste.

This alternative was presented in 2018 with the publication of *Smagens didaktik* (Wistoft & Qvortrup 2018). This book presents a taste taxonomy based on seven dimensions: when we taste, not only do we use our (1) senses (sour, sweet, bitter, salty, umami; sight, sound, smell, mouthfeel), but we also taste (2) aesthetically (e.g. through our gastronomic taste repertoire), (3) healthily (through our knowledge about what is healthy and unhealthy), (4) morally (through our knowledge about e.g. animal welfare, fair trade or environmental considerations that can all be detected in the taste), (5) religiously (the taste of Christmas, religious taste traditions), (6) lovingly (whether the food tastes seductive or nurturing), and (7) trendily (through knowledge of food trends, fashionable food or food that feels old-fashioned). Based on this taxonomy of taste, the book suggests a first draft of a taste didactics, i.e. a reflection repertoire for teachers who teach taste-related subjects and topics.

State of the art

Both in Denmark and internationally, the research basis for the subject that today is called Food Knowledge has been Home Economics, which includes disciplines such as cooking, hygiene, nutrition, etc. Its state of the art is covered in publications by e.g. Benn and Carlsen (Benn 2014; Carlsen 2017).

However, the current project covers much more than the teaching of taste (seasoning, taste preferences, etc.). Two systematic, scientific literature reviews of international studies have been carried out, drawing on the inclusion criteria ‘taste’, ‘education’ or ‘learning’ (Leer & Wistoft 2015; Leer & Wistoft 2018). The results demonstrated that most literature on taste education employs a reductive understanding of taste and is essentially mistrustful of children’s taste competences, rather than seeking to develop their ability to make critical food choices. Taste is seen as a barrier to the adoption of ‘correct’ eating habits and not recognised as a source of pleasure or a central way of understanding and approaching the world through the senses (Battjes-Fries et al. 2014; Dazeley et al. 2012; Dovey et al. 2007; Heim et al. 2009; Kim & Chung 2014; Libman 2007; Parmer et al. 2009; Reverdy et al. 2008; Shon et al. 2012). The international research literature on the subject of health, on the other hand, tends to view taste as something that needs to be disciplined because it is perceived as a barrier for health. The consequence is that taste is not perceived as a resource, and

consequently not as something that creates meaning in our lives, neither in relation to our individual memories of taste or in relation to how taste functions in social life (cf. Bourdieu and post-Bourdieuian tradition) as experiences and frames of reference that create connections, meaning and hierarchies in children's (and adults') everyday lives. Generally speaking, pleasure is either ignored or described as something that needs to be controlled because it can lead to eating unhealthy and fattening foods. This state of the art in existing research may be due to the fact that children and food in these studies are primarily associated with risk, unhealthy lifestyle, danger and prohibitions. In relation to food, the central task is for adults to prevent malnutrition, which is why the focus is on management of correct and controlled nutrition. In summary, the existing research in the field tends to have a narrow, nutrition-oriented focus, mainly treating taste as something that should be managed externally. It is noteworthy that teaching focuses on behavioural modification without allowing room for competence development and independent realisations. This prevents teaching based on reflection and validation, where the aim is for students to develop personal taste competences and confidence so they can make informed food choices. Students must be included in a far more reflective process with an eye to the meaning and importance of taste as well as the aesthetic, cultural and social dimensions of taste. It requires completely different scientific methods and designs to measure the effect of this form of teaching and learning. Based on interviews with children, it has been realised that it is necessary to speak with the students and include, perhaps even begin with, their views on food experiences (Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy 2013; Jonsson et al. 2005; McKinley et al. 2005; Mustonen et al. 2012; Mustonen & Tuorila 2009). However, these studies have not drawn the corresponding didactic conclusions. Only one Danish study includes such a child and taste-centred didactic approach, namely our own: "Taste as a Didactic Approach: Enabling Students to Achieve Learning Goals" (Christensen & Wistoft 2016).

This underpins the need for developing a taste pedagogy that leaves room for the child and the non-externally managed taste experience. In this project, we will continue this effort. Our taste didactics is based on a number of principles that challenge the external management mentality. Our aim is not to make students eat something specific; rather, we aim to make students aware of their own capacity for taste and able to make informed and reflected food choices. We view taste as an important tool in the encounter with the world. Such a didactic approach is radically different from the one represented by the reviewed literature (Christensen & Wistoft 2016).

This forms the basic guiding principle for the experimental, development-oriented taste didactical teaching laboratories in the two empirical activities of the project. Taste sanctuaries will be created in which students learn to claim ownership of taste through cooking, common meals and taste

experiences. Taste experiences also relate to being allowed to be oneself, be creative and try things – alone or together with others.

Organisation and research tasks

The research group will consist of senior researchers professor (mso) Karen Wistoft and professor Lars Qvortrup, a PhD student and a postdoctoral researcher.

Professor (mso) Karen Wistoft is the project manager. Her research task during the project is to continue work on the theoretical and empirical development of taste didactics. She is responsible for ensuring synergy between the subprojects, and she has main responsibility for the interaction between the project research and the practical development of new teaching forms, among others in collaboration with the members of Academy of Food Knowledge Didactics and other affiliated agents (vocational training college teachers and food entrepreneurs). She will also manage the international network of researchers working with taste didactics. Karen Wistoft will also act as main advisor for the PhD student.

Professor Lars Qvortrup is responsible for further development of the sociologically informed system of taste. His main objective is to test and develop the theoretical hypothesis of the project. He will be the assistant supervisor for the PhD student on the project, particularly with a focus on the philosophical and sociological aspects of the PhD project. Further, he will participate in the collaboration with taste educators in Denmark and with the international network of researchers working with taste didactics.

Together, Wistoft and Qvortrup will be responsible for the interrelation between the theoretical and development oriented parts of the project; the taste taxonomy and the corresponding taste didactics, which has been drafted in Wistoft and Qvortrup 2018, will be further developed based on the results from the two empirical and development oriented work packages. The conceptual coherence of the empirical projects will be guaranteed through the continuous reference to the theoretical work.

The theoretical study design consists of: A) analyses of relevant contemporary taste research studies and different theoretical and philosophical perspectives on taste education; B) theoretical analyses of the way in which a theoretically/philosophically informed system of concepts can be used for the constitution of a system of taste dimensions and their mutual links.

The theoretical studies will result in three international publications:

1. State of the art of taste sociology and philosophy. Journal article.
2. How to present taste and taste dimensions systematically. Journal article.
3. A system and didactics of taste. International monograph.

The PhD student is required to have a background from food science and/or pedagogical sociology. He or she is expected to work with two dimensions of taste, i.e. healthy taste (focusing on health as both wellbeing and nutrition) and moral taste (focusing on food ethics, fair trade, sustainability etc.) through theoretically informed empirical and development studies. The main objective is to work with research question 1: how do we teach primary school students about health and sustainability in Food Knowledge and related subjects?

The postdoc researcher will be part of the project for the last year-and-a-half. He or she will work with the development of cross-disciplinary competences in upper secondary school through teaching taste in the subjects of Danish (literature, poetry, art), Physics and Chemistry. In other words, the postdoc researcher will investigate – through empirical studies, development work and collaboration with upper secondary school teachers – the links between taste education in literature, poetry and art, on the one hand, and gastro-physics and chemistry on the other. The main objective is to work with research question 2: how do we support an interdisciplinary approach to taste education?

The empirical study design of the PhD and the postdoc projects consist of: A) participant/classroom observations in primary school classes (N=12) and upper secondary school classes (N=6) with social and geographical diversity; focus group interviews with students in primary and secondary school; personal interviews with teachers in primary and secondary school and personal interviews with taste and food educators. B) development oriented participatory research activities based on the above-mentioned research findings and oriented towards developing professional teaching practices with the same classes. C) baseline and follow up measurements in each class (N=18).

Empirical and theoretical findings from the two study designs are going to be tested, further refined or modified, and developed into an applied taste didactics repertoire.

In order to disseminate the results and insights of the project internationally, and in order to learn from related, international research, an *international advisory board* will be established. It will consist of three subgroups: a Scandinavian, a European and a South Asian group (cf. enclosure).

[Research plan, including work and publication deadlines](#)

The research project period is February 1st 2020 – December 31st 2023. The PhD project period is September 1st 2020 – August 31st 2023. The postdoc project period is January 1st 2022 – June 30th 2023. The project will result in seven international peer-reviewed articles, a PhD-thesis and one Danish/English peer-reviewed monograph. In addition, the project will organise three practice-oriented seminars and a number of dissemination activities during the project (cf. enclosure).

Total budget: see enclosure.

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