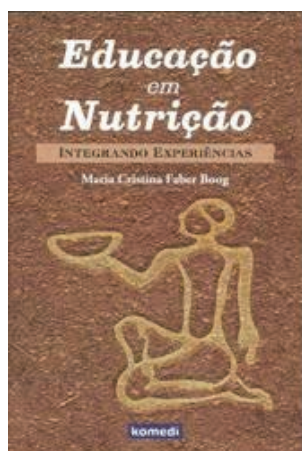


## Eating and nutrition education as social practice



**EDUCAÇÃO EM NUTRIÇÃO:  
INTEGRANDO EXPERIÊNCIAS**  
Maria Cristina Faber Boog. 1ª  
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Thus, the author reiterates the need to situate eating and nutrition education (EAN, educação alimentar e nutricional) in the field of humanities and social sciences, which involves understanding eating habits as social practice - ie, with objective and symbolic elements capable of converting the act of eating on a complete social fact. As such, it connects the individual in one hand, and the physical (or physiological) and psychological aspects on the other<sup>1</sup>.

From this perspective, eating habits become a determining factor in social life, since besides offering objective conditions for its maintenance, it is important to ensure the establishment of relationships necessary for human sociability and social reproduction. Thus, eating behavior is not limited to what, how and with whom we eat. It also includes a social contract of identities by the implicit share in the triad “give, receive, and return”.<sup>2</sup> This social dimension of eating is an important theoretical basis to the field, which Boog objectively brings up, in a clear manner, to subsidize reflections and the effectiveness of educational practices in eating and nutrition.

Another strong point of her work is when she uses Paulo Freire’s teachings to leverage EAN to a practice that is broader than a simple transmission of knowledge of technical guides and recommendations from health professionals to users. Boog masterfully uses the social theories and educational concepts

of Freire to boost reflections in the context of eating and nutrition, and thus devise overcoming strategies of a “pseudo-scientific” aspect of the field, which tends to ignore the relevance of the subjects and their relationship with the world in terms of eating habits.

The author also advocates the importance of human rights to eating as public policy. To this end, health professionals should engage EAN as educators that are committed to change the Brazilian health situation, especially coping with diseases resulting from eating practices. Therefore, the intention is to extend health actions from a more humane perspective at social practices, such as eating, in the institutional health service units and beyond such facilities. According to Boog, it is important to extend the act of eating to where life happens, ie, where eating habits are created and transformed, such as at home, school, community locations, among others.

This manuscript treats EAN as essential for health promotion, given its ability to grasp multiple social determining factors of health, as well as to change eating habits implications in the social production of health.

The book is divided into two parts, each includes five chapters, totaling 268 pages. It is a continuation for the book *Educação Nutricional* (Nutrition education), which is a role model in this field of knowledge, also created by this pioneer of EAN in 1984, at that time in partnership with Denise Giacomo da Motta.

It is important to mention that the book contains structuring theoretical assumptions of EAN in terms of reflections and practices, and it also features a collection of the author’s experiences and examples of educational practices that incite curiosity and the desire to experiment.

In the first part of the book, the author outlines the purposes and meanings of EAN, considering eating habits as a broad and multidisciplinary field. Accordingly, their interventions should incorporate the different meanings of life in society (social, historical, political, economical, etc.), and contain the meanings and expressions that define eating practices in different levels of scope (individual, family, community, regional, etc.).

On Chapter I, “Educação em nutrição: por que e para quê?” (Education in nutrition: why and what for?), the author shows how eating practices are closely related to public policies. Food intake may be considered a key measurer of economic and social policies, and it may also provide for the analysis of the health status of a population. Boog mentions that national surveys on food consumption are important sources to depict the relationship between eating and the living and health conditions of a population. She warns, however, that thoughts on eating practices are not limited to this issue. Thus, she highlights the intimate relationship of eating with human sociability, ie, how to behave and live in society, referring to eating as something natural and pleasurable.

Contrary to her ideas in this sense, disciplinary eating practices have been increasingly valued, ie, they have been framed in excessive dietary standardization and individualization. The author suggests that EAN can resume the human sense of eating as a social practice, embedded with advancements and technical recommendations for a healthier life. She then shows the need to highlight the individual and the family as the focus of the action, due to their role in building healthy habits from childhood.

This phase is important to establish a generational knowledge about eating practices, which can be recollected in adulthood and possibly become a resistance tool to avoid the harassment of the media that imposes a quantitatively excessive and qualitatively inadequate consumption of food. Therefore, healthy eating practices built from childhood can importantly avoid damage to health caused by changes experienced in adulthood.

Through this analysis, the author highlights the potential for human transformation provided by eating choices, just as it occurs with any other social practice. Moreover, she emphasizes that dietary needs change throughout life. Thus, “teaching to eat” is an activity that goes beyond childhood, it makes part of the entire life cycle. EAN should be a practice oriented to human uniqueness in this cycle, as well as reflective to society itself. Must be based on information drawn from scientific knowledge that produce beneficial organic evidence contextualized in factors of symbolic order, providing meaning, movement, and identity to the body (culture, myths, rites, beliefs, etc.). In other words, the importance of the biological processes in the nutritional field must not be denied, nor should the advancements of food sciences be underused. These should be coupled with an understanding of “eating around the axis of human behavior, as an expression of feelings, of culture, and social practice that unites, confirming and reconfirming, social relations and collective bonds” (p .29).

Moreover, Boog claims that nutrition education is not just a product of scientific knowledge drawn from clinical and laboratory evidence. Nor is it exhaustive information on technical aspects and recommendations produced by the consensus of experts. This field relates to different dimensions of life, thus requiring the effort of designing intervention strategies from multidisciplinary. The binding of the elements above mentioned with the appreciation of the eating culture favors the right to eat well.

In Chapter II, “Contribuição da educação alimentar e nutricional para a promoção da alimentação saudável: conflitos e contradições” (Contribution of eating and nutrition education to promote healthy habits: conflicts and contradictions), the author states the importance of eating habits and nutrition in the scenario of social policies in recent decades, based on founding documents in promoting health, as well as on matters of institutional engineering of the national government, focused on building policies and action plans in the context of eating, nutrition and food security.

In this section, Boog highlights that EAN plays an important role in promoting healthy eating habits in Brazil, but despite the advances, it still faces challenges and conflicts related to the training of workers, its development within the institutional scope of services, as well as its effective consolidation as state policy to be developed on the intersection of the fields of Education and Health.

On the following chapter, “Explorando a multidimensionalidade da alimentação” (Exploring the multidimensionality of eating practices), the author relies on the paradigm of complexity based on authors, such as Edgar Morin, to examine the multiple meanings of eating in people’s lives. Eating practices combines desires, cultural heritage, and needs expressed by eating behavior, which depicts the complexity of the act of eating. In this process, subjects redefine themselves through their eating practices when in collectivity.

According to Boog, the act of eating together, commensality, is one of the greatest expressions of “give, receive, and return”, and it is, therefore, an important foundation for social relations. In this sense, eating practices become an expression of affection, attachment, and care. Therefore, commensality should be considered important when building health care practices, especially in the field of EAN, and in the formulation of government policies that establish rights. Finally, the author poses as the mission of EAN to create an ethical stance that includes all sectors and people involved in the field of nutrition.

On the chapter before the last, “Construindo práticas e valores” (Building practices and values), Boog shows how the topic of eating practices has acquired media evidence. She does add, however, that evidence was gathered from contradictory information that tend to worship and destroy the consumption of some types of food. Such extremes are founded on dilemmas involving the search for healthy, exotic, or even appropriate eating habits for certain aesthetic standards. According to the author, people currently consume too much food and information on food. That is why eating practices have been established as an expression channel of insecurities and diffuse human desires, to enhance physical performance and appearance, among other.

On the closing chapter of this part of the book, entitled “Da necessidade da educação em nutrição à necessidade de formar educadores” (From the need for nutrition education to the need to train educators), the author emphasizes the importance of enhancing the qualification of nutritionists as educators. In recent decades, such role became less evident due to: lack of permeability of knowledge on education in undergraduate courses in Nutrition and graduate courses offered to nutritionists; overvaluation of confronting poverty and insufficient income as the main determining factors of healthy eating practices; and the “belief that the educator’s role is limited to the statement of facts in nutrition science” (p. 94).

Throughout the entire chapter, the author justifies the need for nutritionists to conduct health interventions, basing on the ideas developed by educators and philosophers of education; which are to treat eating and nutrition as attributes of education.

In the second part, Boog provides reflections on the promotion of healthy eating practices and interventions on eating problems as a field of theory and practice. Boog opens this section with the chapter “Iniciando o trabalho em educação alimentar e nutricional: abrangências” (Starting work on eating and nutrition education: comprehensiveness), which deals with the comprehensiveness needed for the practices of EAN conducted with people: individuals, families, or other levels of collectivity.

In this context, such practices should be based on the exchange of results, knowledge, and experiences intended for the restoration, preservation and comprehensive promotion of health. Therefore, she suggests that the term “eating and nutrition counseling” is more promising than other applied for the same meaning. This is justified by the fact that the former is a “aid relationship supported by the theories of counseling, which prioritize empathy, listening, understanding of the problems faced, assessment of coping strategies applied to changes undertaken and results, whether positive or negative” (p. 110). Boog then highlights the role of different actors involved in the field, given their potential to transform their own eating practices, and of others, besides their influence on replicating and modifying acquired knowledge.

Boog reaffirms the convergence of this work perspective to the Freirian thought. Thus, the author relies on the writings of Paulo Freire to develop EAN within the active, participatory, interactive and dialogical educations with aspects of social reality. Therefore, such practices must be applied in the community in different locations, such as schools, health units, businesses, among other.

Boog believes that, while the National Policies on Eating and Nutrition step into different social locations, they tend to incorporate different collectivities and point to more effective actions, beyond those socially acceptable.

In Chapter II, “Pesquisar para compreender, compreender para interagir” (Researching to understand, understanding to interact), Boog shows the importance of the search for scientific, popular, and mystic knowledge, among others, to understand the space of intervention. She also states that “EAN does not advocate passive obedience to diets” (p. 115). This suggests that individuals and their daily lives are involved in this dynamic space.

Moreover, the author emphasizes that educational actions must move people, relate to their feelings and certainties, and, thus, they should be developed considering the psychological, social and cultural elements embedded in the technical aspects of nutrition. This should occur in order to (re)formulate values, opinions, representations - in short, attitudes that are consistent with the reflections on eating practices.

In addition to an undivided attention, EAN practices also require that economic, social and cultural elements be addressed, from reference groups of each person, with the purpose of considering aspects related to production, availability and acceptance of food well-valued in nutritional guidelines. Boog suggests that EAN practices should be preceded by an educational diagnosis, in order to learn about the subject of intervention and value the subjectivity of people, combined with vital indicators and anthropometric methods commonly used in the nutritional sciences.

The author also highlights that the field of qualitative research is an important source for extending research in the field of nutrition, which used to be recently restricted to traditional food surveys. "Qualitative research allows us to grasp the multidimensionality of a phenomenon and have access to how such phenomenon presents itself to people's consciousness" (p. 119). This makes it possible to understand, besides what and how much one eats, the reasons why people act and how they act - ie, aspects of their eating behavior. Boog suggests that it is important to learn about and value approaches that capture and are able to produce a reflexive knowledge to the experienced problems and to the interventions proposed by professionals. Finally, she states that the assumptions built in the field of EAN in the light of qualitative methodologies are promising to clarify the development of educational programs in local, regional or national terms.

As for Chapter III, "O que o educador ensina sem perceber que ensina" (What the educator teaches without realizing it), the author focuses on the different nuances of the learning process of professional and users involved in this field. Educational practice should always give priority to the educational, philosophical, and emotional bond, among other dimensions of the relationship established between the educator and the student. This is not only made from the development of methods and strategies, it requires an ideological position that values qualified listening, construction of horizontal power relations, as well as an open attitude that encourages conversation.

That is why the educator must pursue what moves people towards reflection and action. To highlight the intrinsic relationship between the practices of EAN with education, the author exposes the thoughts of some classical authors that inspired different approaches to the educational process, such as Skinner, and Carl Rogers, among others. In a particular item, she shows how such approaches can support singular analysis and interventions in the field. However, it is from Paulo Freire that she finds substrate to develop EAN practices. Thus, she takes *Educação como prática*

*da liberdade* (Education as practice of freedom) as basis to propose an operational systematization to the development of educational practices. To this end, Boog brings about the questionings of Freire and the reflection on ways of teaching, educating, knowing how to listen, and, mostly, understanding within EAN.

Finally, in Chapter IV, entitled “Vamos começar a agir” (Let’s start acting), the author deals with the practical field. Based on EAN problems, the theoretical possibilities and paths listed for submission, the author encourages the reader to action. To do so, it is necessary to give up the arrogant and authoritarian attitudes that come along with the “white coat” - a symbol of power and distinction - that require obedience to diets and prescriptions by nutritionists, doctors, nurses and other health professionals.

As precaution, the author resumes the debate that EAN practices cannot be limited to diet prescriptions, for one should constantly seek personal autonomy. Besides that, such practices require time to rebuild, give meaning, and integrate the information given by the professional in people’s everyday life. Based on these assumptions, she proposes steps to develop EAN activities, briefly: (a) learning about the eating behavior, in order to be aware of the intervening and determining factors; ( b ) critically analyzing these factors in the light of multidisciplinary fields; ( c ) sharing perceptions and possibilities of changing eating practices; ( d ) integration and matching of such values to new behaviors.

Throughout the chapter, the author discusses the intrinsic aspects of each possibility of professional experience in the field of EAN, including:

- (i) *Counseling*: individual aid to eating problems, especially the “aiding” role of the professional who is faced with the eating fact immersed in the field of complexity. This requires using knowledge that do not exactly belong to the field of nutrition, which allow us to grasp details from the informant’s speech in order to understand the presenting problem and guide the professionals in a holistic and integrative perspective of knowledge.
- (ii) *Approaches in groups*: the author suggests different methods from group dynamics to boost EAN practices guided by the spirit of affection, solidarity, sharing of experiences and thought. Later she outlines the steps to approaches in groups, and presents different techniques applied by educators in the field of eating and nutrition. Thus, Boog suggests working with eating reminiscences (diet-related apparel memories); sharing positive experiences ; using the technique of free associations, from voiced words or phrases by the participants; eating experiences with the recovery of the senses (touch, taste, smell , sight and hearing); and techniques to learn the expectations and demands of the group, by using various audiovisual resources.

When discussing the use of each technique, she also proposes a specific theory to justify their use. After offering the reader several possibilities, Boog says these techniques should not be an end in itself, but enhanced in the creativity of educators and encouraging to the interest of learners.

- (iii) Educational programs with community comprehensiveness: this section, according to EAN practices, must be guided to the strengthening of community action as a presupposition of Health Promotion, besides boosting social participation, enabling the expansion of intervention scenarios, encouraging partnerships of different actors and strengthening of empowerment. Encouraging community participation is a huge concern to the author for the development of nutritional intervention, and also a precondition for the establishment and smooth running of government public education programs.
- (iv) education via the media: the author highlights that the media or mass communication must not be neglected by educators in the field of eating and nutrition, but should be considered legitimate means of spreading information, although sometimes they induce undesirable eating behaviors. However, she adds that this reinforces the need to bring the mass media to the debates held in the field of eating and nutrition. Therefore, she suggests the use of the media and its power to enter into different homes and infiltrate the life of the subjects as a channel for EAN practices, especially in public stations and community channels. These could become resources used by professionals to broaden public actions to promote health. Moreover, Boog proposes the use of marketing with social focus. That is, the communication of messages of social aspects to a large audience, applying the attractive ( and seductive ) marketing techniques, in order to encourage healthy behaviors oriented by sectors committed to health and human well-being ( government ministries and civil society organizations).

When questioning whether media and education can effectively become convergent for a social interest, the author highlights some important points for discussion, such as: the reach of the media, the necessary caution in disseminating educational messages, the implicit accountability in partnerships and, above all, the necessary search for the support of professionals from the field of Media, and also the field of law.



In the last chapter, “O que queremos fazer? O que conseguimos fazer?” (What do we want to do? What we can do?), the author addresses the underlying eating practices intentionality and therefore the need to assess and validate certain intentions by analyzing outcomes. These can overcome what was expected initially, or even prove insufficient for the goals outlined at that moment. Even negative results are important evaluation data and should not be taken as a failure, but as weak points that require analysis to establish goals, content and methods used, or even point to the need to find a new diagnosis to the problem .

Thus , she stresses that the assessment of nutritional practices require very different procedures from those used in formal education, depending on the specificities of EAN and educational practices in health. The author emphasizes that the assessment should eventually enable the reworking of the goals of the intervention and improving of the work of the educator.

Although she discusses the evaluation phase of the interventions, the book does not dwell on this aspect, leaving an open discussion about the pact of changes and , consequently , on the participation in the process of the different actors involved in a given intervention, such as individual care, community practice, among others .

Another important point , but as the first , can not overshadow the brilliance of the work, lies in the fact that the manuscript lacks a critical analysis of eating practices as a reflection of socioeconomic factors producing social inequities with impact on health.<sup>3</sup> Eating practices may constitute mechanisms of social distinction that encourage inequality, or even, reflect cial que fomentam a desigualdade, ou ainda, refletir inequities that have historically pressured eating practices as a universal human right. The reflection on social justice and the fight against inequities in health is one of the foundations of the discussions conducted by the World Health Organization.<sup>4</sup> Including eating practices in this debate is today a significant and necessary subject.

To conclude, it has been a pleasant and dense reading. It is an important work for professors, social educators, nutritionists, nurses, doctors - in short, to all professionals who primarily value human dimension and the social importance of their practices.

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