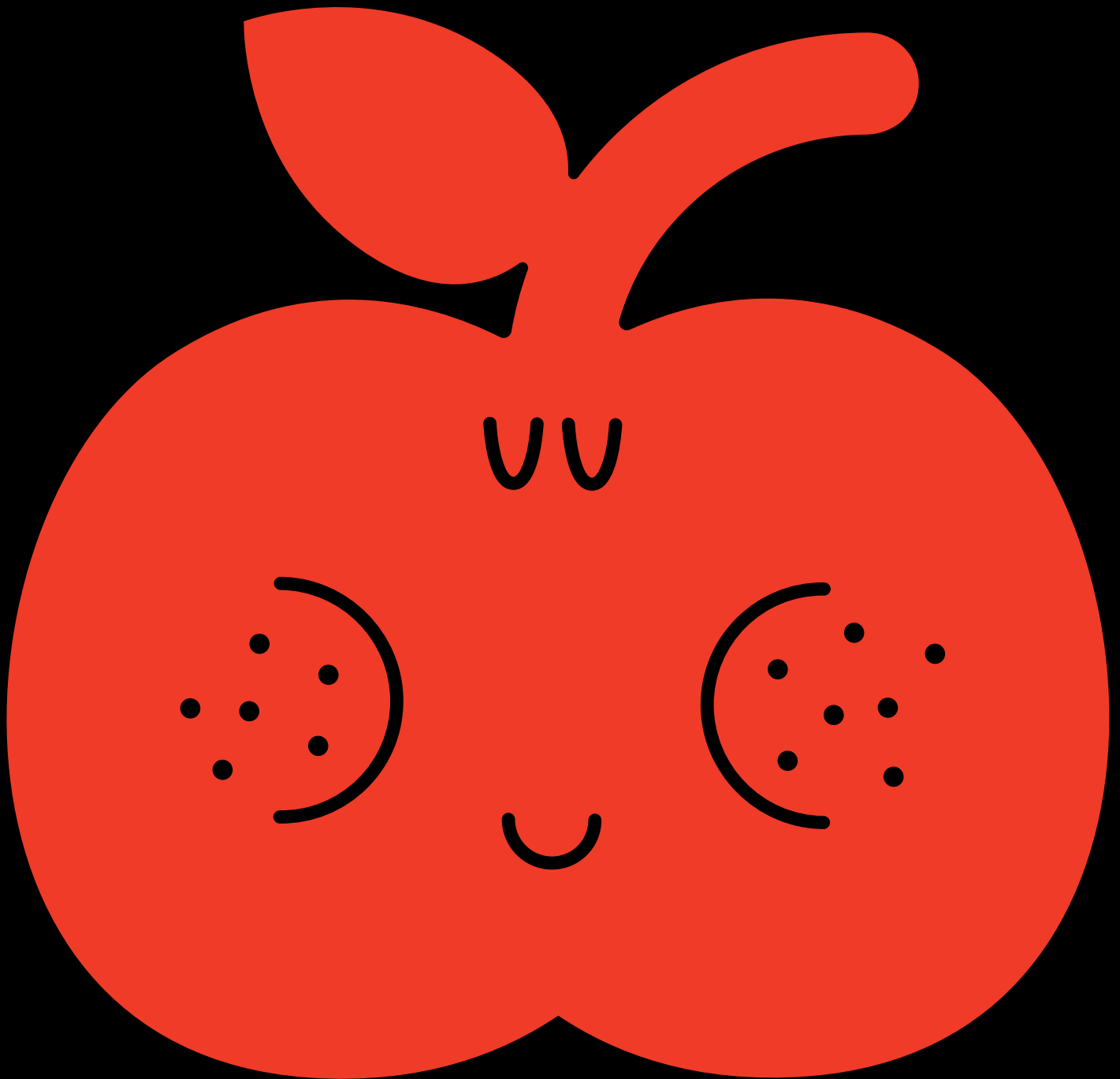


SCHOOLING FOOD



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INTRODUCTION

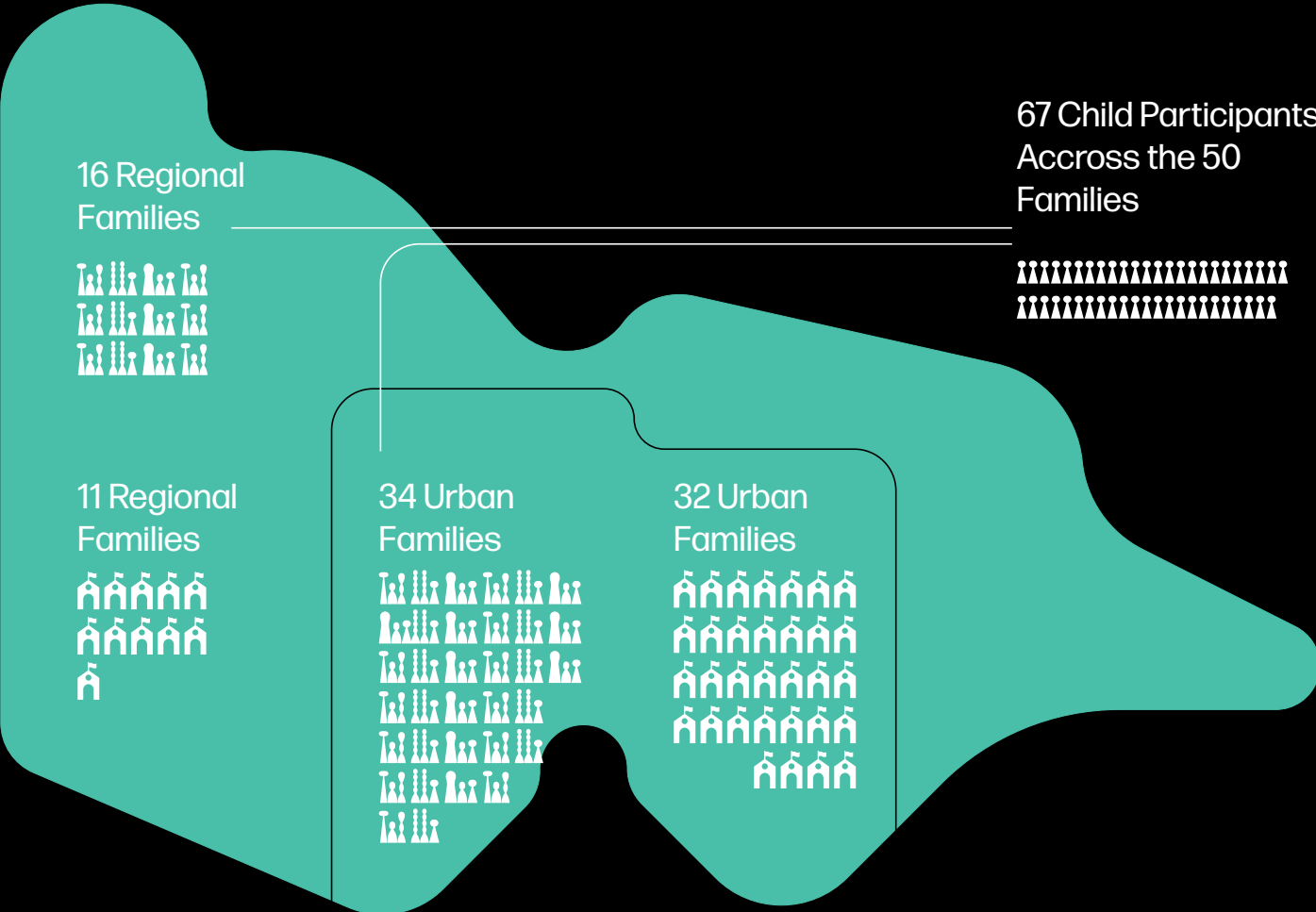
Schooling Food: An Exhibition was developed from research conducted as part of the Australian Research Council project entitled 'Children as health advocates in families: assessing the consequences'. The exhibition was the result of an academic collaboration between the Faculty of Education, Faculty of Arts, Monash University Library and Department of Design (MADA) at Monash University. The main aim of the *Schooling Food* exhibition was to present our research findings differently to the way academic research is usually presented. We wanted to engage the senses playfully as we invited people to think about both school food and family food in ways that take into account the complexities of food in everyday life. After spending time in the exhibition, we invited visitors to help us concoct a recipe for change. This catalogue aims to provide a taste of our *Schooling Food* exhibition.

METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

100
Interviews conducted

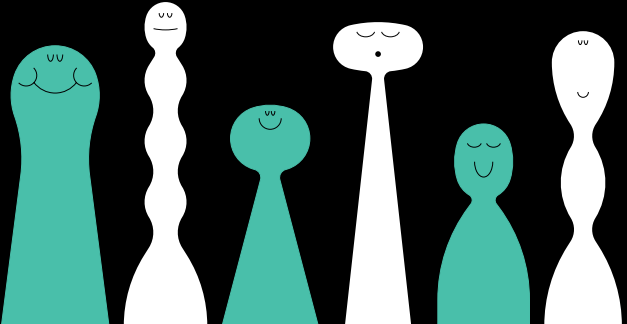
5-12
Child Age Range

29-58
Parental Age Range



In our research we sampled 50 diverse families, including single, same-sex, and heterosexual parents from across Victoria. We spoke to 67 children and their parents. Our participants came from a cross-section of ethnic groups and socio-economic status. In most cases, we found fathers undertook full time work. Mothers worked in multiple ways: at home, or in casual, part and full time employment. Parental occupation and work types were diverse. We interviewed families twice. The first interview was an introductory interview where we met with the family to talk about the project and provide iPads to the children. We asked the children to take photos of 'food moments' that were important. The second interview was more in depth. We spent a lot of time talking about the videos

and photos that the children had taken. We got a lot of photos of the inside of fridges and cupboards as well as breakfasts, lunches and dinners. We also got a lot of photos of lunch boxes. You can see many of them throughout this catalogue and in our online exhibition. Throughout the second interview we spent time talking about school food. The images and conversations form the basis of exhibition.



FOOD AT HOME

In family homes, we found that food was experienced as both pleasurable and difficult, messy and pragmatic. Throughout our research we joined families at their dinner tables or in their lounge rooms. We heard about families eating food together, or separately at benches, in front of the TV, or in the car on the way to activities – including school. Families said they struggled with the challenges of paid work, commuting and after school activities. Busy schedules and numerous time demands thwarted their best intentions for food preparation and sharing nightly dinners.

Our research revealed the complicated relationship between family life, food and labour. Ethnicity, gender and cultural background shaped family food choices and practices. Mothers continued to shoulder the bulk of labour at home and responsibility for meals. As such, policy makers and schools asking families to make 'healthier' food choices by, for example, eating together and packing healthy lunch boxes, need to be mindful of the complexities that impact on family food choice. Sometimes the 'healthy' choice is not so easy to make and for many, nourishment extends beyond simple nutrition.



FAMILIES AND FOOD

When visiting family homes, we met children proud of the food they eat at home. Families told us about the importance of family dinners and the pleasure of sharing food with each other. We also explored food rituals in family life, such as cakes for birthdays, and treats on special occasions. Parents were mostly pragmatic about these treats. Our interviews present a range of perspectives on family dinners, sugar and celebratory food.

Rachel 10 years old, Robert, father of 3

Rachel: So that was our salad. We usually have a salad. We try to have a salad every night with our dinners. That was fish we caught.

Robert: That was wild trout from the highlands of Tasmania that we caught on a trip there.

Interviewer: Really? That's nice.

Rachel: And then we had it in the freezer and then dad put some butter on it and it was very good. And they were chips, which was sweet potato and potato.

Lisa, mother of 3

Lisa: I always come back to you cannot have all or nothing. It's got to be somewhere in the middle, moderation. It's okay to have chocolate. It's okay to have lollies and chips, but ... how much of your diet is it making up? Yeah. But when we've done the, "No chips," it doesn't last. ... So, yeah, it's moderation.

Lila, mother of 2

Lila: I studied to be a Steiner teacher at the Steiner School, and they believe that it's quite good for you to have cake for morning tea. It's Germanic, I guess.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

Lila: But they believe to bring sugar into morning tea, brings sunshine in, because it's something that's grown in lots of sun.

Interviewer: Oh nice.

Lila: And that it makes you really happy. And I really have taken that on. I think it's important to have a piece of cake or something for morning tea.

Connie, mother of Nicholas 12 years,

Annie, 6 years

Nicholas: This is a Hammer Cake.

Interviewer: And what's this? [Video plays]

Interviewer: That looks magnificent.

Connie: It's pretty, isn't it?

Nicholas: This is the best bit though, don't say, no one say. [at this point the cake is smashed with the wooden hammer]

Interviewer: Oh my goodness. [Count up to Darby's birthday age]

Connie: It has a chocolate shell on the outside and then you open it and when you smack it - it's just got a carrot cake underneath, but you pile lollies, chocolate and Smarties up, and then you swirl your chocolate on the inside of a pudding basin, invert it over that then you stick Smarties. So we had a lot of fun decorating with the Smarties. We ate all that long ago.

Annie: No, not the shell.

Connie: Oh yes, we did, where were you? But we have had so much fun out of smashing that cake, it's just become a family tradition. Ridiculous, all that chocolate.

Interviewer: So you do it for everybody's birthday?

Connie: All kids, every year. We get the Hammer Cake on the day and then whatever cake we have on the party, but it's always the Hammer Cake.

PARENTS ON PREPARING SCHOOL LUNCHES

Many factors influenced what parents packed for their children's school lunch. We found parents made pragmatic choices about food. Parents and carers told us they were limited by factors such as time, money and children's food preferences. Parents wanted autonomy over the care of their children, they knew their child's taste and what they would eat. They definitely did not want their children to feel guilty about their food choices. Some parents reflected on the problematic way 'fat' is stigmatised in schools and how children may be bullied for their lunch box contents and food choices.

Ingrid, mother of 2

Ingrid: I mean in a standard lunch box I would pack a sandwich or a bread roll, a piece of fruit and a treat. And so, yeah, that's basically it. And the treat would be a muffin or a cake that I've made, or, yeah. On Tuesdays that's an issue for the kids. So some are not as evil as others apparently.

Interviewer: Right.

Ingrid: So it's never an issue any other day of the week. And there have been days when I've said, "Look that's all I've got tonight, short of going back to the supermarket to get something else to put in, so perhaps you could say to the teacher, 'That's all mum had, or it's actually a banana and choc chip muffin'. Just make something up." Oh dear. I think we've all got anxiety about the Tuesday lunch boxes around here pretty much. Yeah.

Interviewer: So it is a thing then about packing the Tuesday lunch box?

Ingrid: Yeah.

Interviewer: It's a thing for you and it's a thing for the children.

Ingrid: Definitely. We're a double career household and the last thing you want to do at 8:30 on a Monday night is go down to the shops and buy something that's going to fit the bill for the following day when there's other things that you've got. The other issue for me is how much money I have literally wasted on containers.

Lila, mother of 2, Rose (11) and Eva (6)

Lila: And, all these sort of disaster lunches scenarios, and Rose said, "All right, I'm just going to have a cheese and lettuce sandwich every day," and by grade five, she just said, "I can't eat another cheese and lettuce sandwich." I went, "Oh, my goodness. It took that long."

Nora, mother of 2

Nora: Yeah. I think probably Ella's understanding about junk food, her best friend has been bullied for being fat. So, I think - and she's overweight. But, it's so at grade three, and I think possibly earlier has been bullied, so the kids are - and it's a pretty common - there's a couple of others that have been called out for being fat. And it's a real insult and one that people know that it's going to cause a reaction.



BACK TO THE SCHOOLYARD

Food is without question an integral part of school life. The rhythms of the school day are shaped by eating whether it be in breakfast clubs, at recess, during ‘brain food’ breaks or eating lunch. Given this, it is unsurprising that schools invest time managing children’s food-related behaviour through a myriad of rules about what, when and how to eat. However, our research found that, at times, these rules were ad hoc and contradictory. Many children were also subject to lunch box inspections. These inspections were conducted either by teachers or fellow students. We heard stories about how ‘good’ lunch boxes were rewarded and ‘bad’ lunch boxes were punished.

One of the most pervasive food programs our participants talked about was Nude Food. Throughout our conversations it emerged that this program is characterised by many contradictions. Nude Food encourages the eating of non-processed foods and a reduction of waste. Yet, we discovered that schools implement Nude Food in ad hoc ways. Teachers also used rewards and punishments—some talked about being rewarded with hot chips, lollies and laminated certificates. Punishments included having names written up on the board or having to pick up rubbish. Lunch box inspections and the associated rewards/punishments were not just a feature of Nude Food, though. They were something that schools just did.

Our research was also interested in hearing about what children were learning about food at school. We discovered that formal lessons about food were sporadic, and children found them unmemorable. In a single school, children may have experienced several different programs, initiatives and lessons about food. Each differed in focus and purpose. The messages children received about food were far from clear and parents identified food information as contradictory or partial. We also observed a disconnect between the ways that families and schools ‘do food’. So, we were left with a question: can we develop approaches to food that are nourishing and that transcend the punitive?

NUDE LUNCH BOXES

Nude Food was a feature of our interviews. Nude Food programs are connected to Nude Food Movers, a product range produced by Smash Enterprises, an Australian lunch box manufacturer. In 2010, Smash Enterprises partnered with Nutrition Australia to launch Nude Food Day. Smash Enterprises promotes the program as a way to encourage healthy lunches and minimise waste. Adopted by many of the schools in our study, Nude Food was implemented in different ways. Some schools were Nude Food schools—every day. Some ran the program once a week (Nude Food Tuesday), some once a term and others once a year. Some even held ‘surprise’ Nude Food Days, where children and parents were only told the day before that ‘tomorrow is Nude Food Day’.

LUNCH BOX ANXIETY

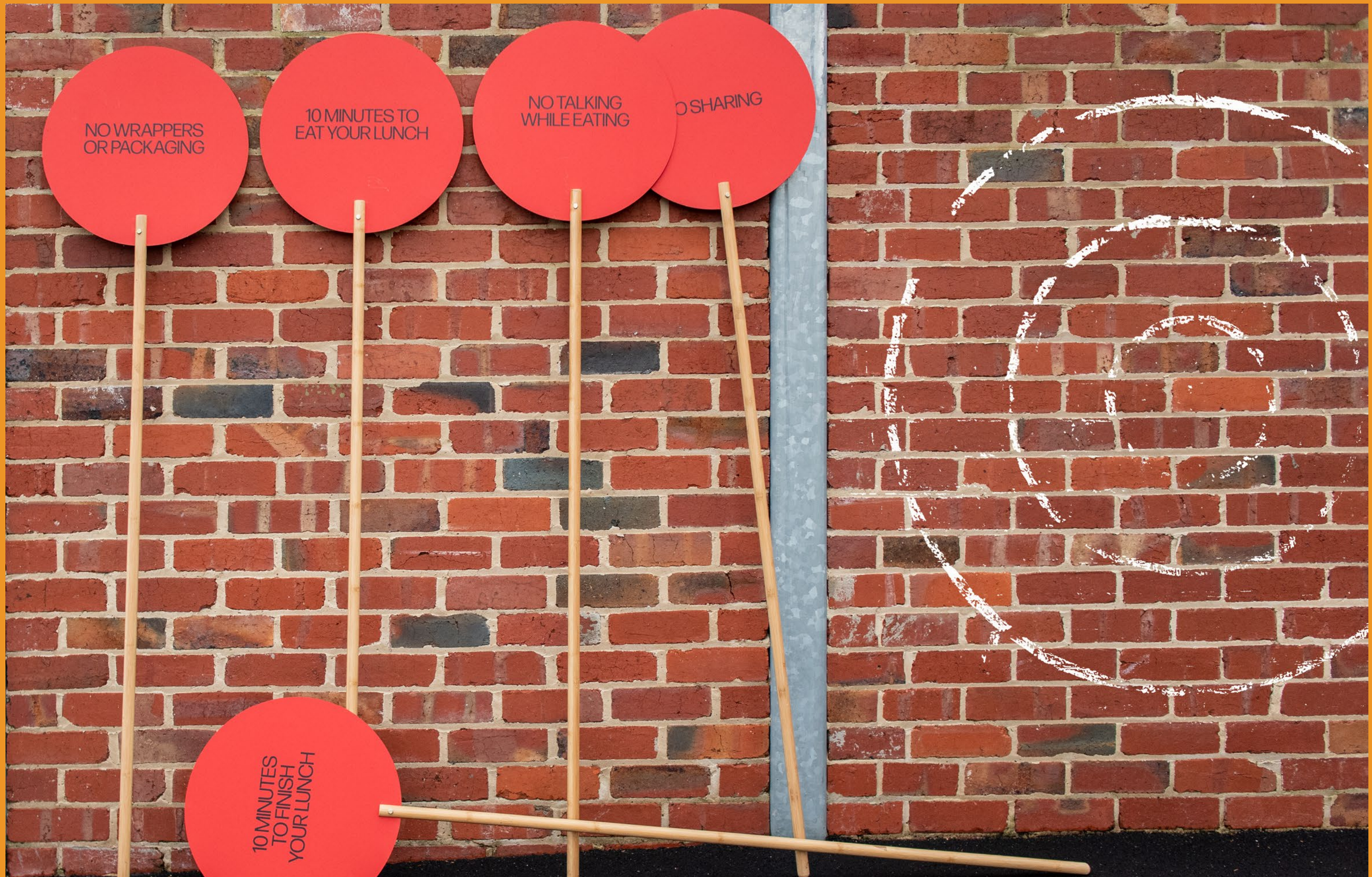
Parents said they found Nude Food lunch boxes useful, with their tiny compartments and containers convenient for ‘brain food’ and snacks. But parents also described the tireless ‘hunt’ for many lost small containers and lids. When components go missing, parents have to replace whole lunch boxes. Nude Food Day sparked anxiety in some parents, spurring trips to school lost property and last minute runs to the grocery store, tearing packaging off at home before packing food into containers in order to meet the Nude Food standards.

A DIFFERENT SET OF RULES?

Whilst families were subject to one set of rules about what food they could pack for school, there seemed to be a different set of rules for many schools when it came to fundraising efforts. Parents and children buy or sell items such as pies and sausage rolls, hot cross buns, sandwiches, and coffee for fundraisers. Food and beverage companies also play an active role. Cadbury chocolates, Subway sandwiches, and products from soft drink manufacturers often appear alongside sausage sizzles and bake sales. Some families talked about school efforts to raise money via the sale of healthier foods but overall it seemed that a different set of rules apply to food at school when funds are sought.

A MUESLI BAR GRAVEYARD

Some children and parents described the fear of turning up to school with food in wrappers when it was Nude Food Day. During our interviews, we met six year old Emily who attends a Nude Food school. When Emily was in prep, her mother packed a wrapped muesli bar in her lunch box. Emily realised her mother’s mistake as soon as she opened her lunch. Terrified that she would be told off, she ran outside and buried the offending muesli bar in the school garden. We heard several stories like Emily’s from other children and families.



THE MANY WAYS SCHOOLS DO FOOD

This infographic visualises the different ways participants talked about how food was addressed in their primary school.

We found that Nude Food, Life Education, and Garden and Cooking programs were prevalent across schools. We also discovered that program offerings and messages vary both across schools, and within schools. This, of course, is to be expected. However, the contradictory messages that emerged as a result of the different programs delivered within schools was not expected. Despite our many discussions about food programs, families reported an overall lack of ongoing formal nutrition or food education.

Families talked about other food events and activities that were an integral part of their school day. Schools hosted themed days that encouraged them to celebrate food from ‘other cultures’. Many schools permitted birthday celebrations, while others didn’t. In schools where birthdays were celebrated, children could bring a variety of foods depending on the individual school or classroom rules. Some schools, for example, allowed cakes; others celebrated with hummus and carrot sticks, while elsewhere it was sushi. At schools where food was not permitted for birthday celebrations, families talked about being allowed to take stationery items as gifts instead of cakes or other celebratory food.

The many differences across programs and the inconsistencies in school guidelines, policies and practices served to confuse children and parents. Many families we spoke to expressed uncertainty about which guidelines to follow and indicated that they were perplexed at the obvious contradictions in approaches to managing food at schools.

Tess and Tania, 9 year old twins
Interviewer: ...are there any things that you’ve learned at school about food that you thought, ‘I have to come home and tell someone’?

Tania/Tess: [pause]

I: It’s okay if you haven’t.

Tania: Not really.

I: Not really.

Tess: Yeah, not really.



HOW DID WE GET HERE? A HISTORY OF SCHOOLING FOOD

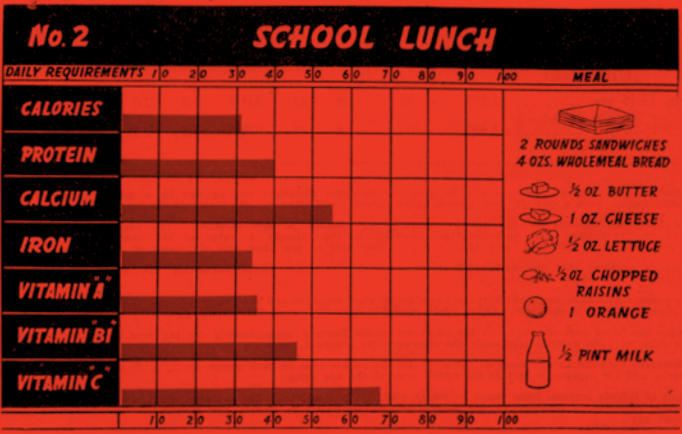
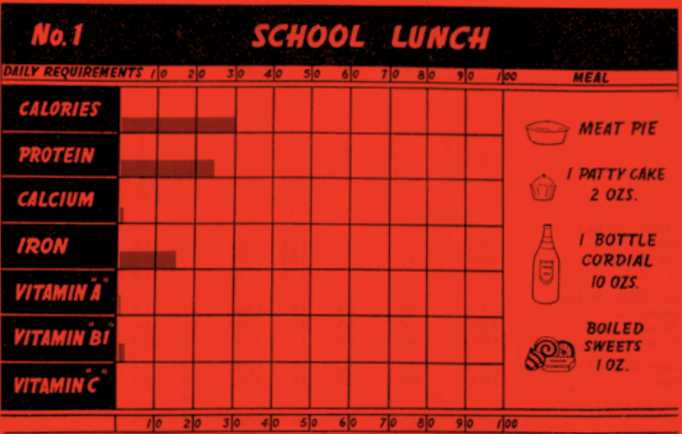
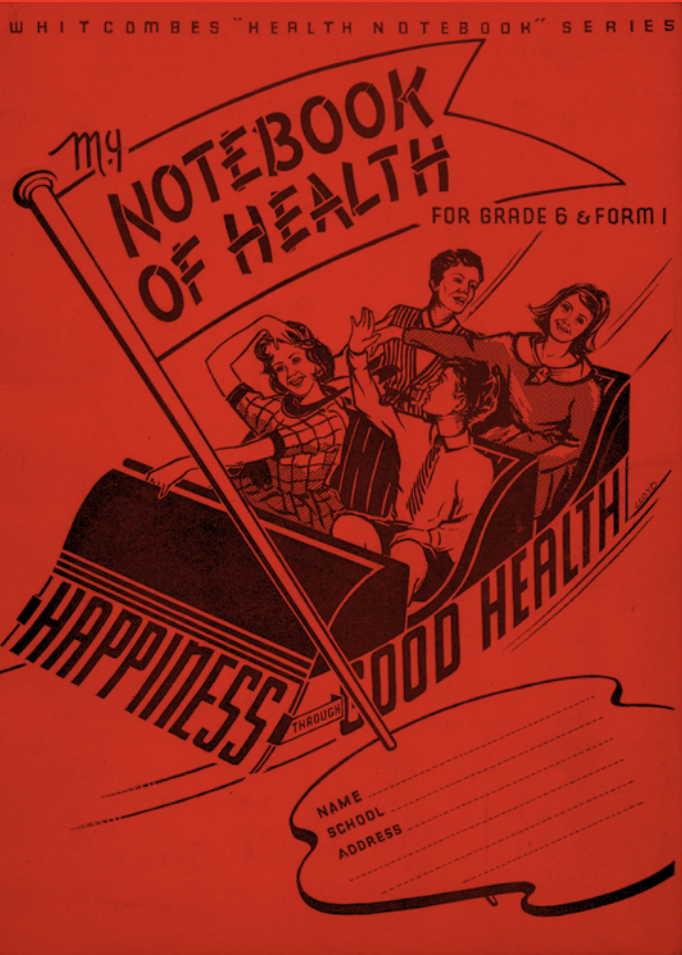
School programs and initiatives targeting food, health and families are by no means new. They have long been part of public health agendas. New programs therefore enter into a set of already existing programs and approaches and this has implications for how new programs are taken up and enacted in schools. It is important for us to know about how public health authorities have promoted health messages and tried to manage the population's health previously? How have messages about nutrition, food and health changed over time? How have they stayed the same?

The range of books and pamphlets in our rare books collection tell us some of the back story to contemporary school food initiatives—a story characterised by both continuity and change. Our rare texts range from the late 1800s to the 1960s, when governments intensified their efforts to manage the population's health through disease prevention and health promotion. Good health and nourishing the nation were key to the government agenda. Then, as now, schools were involved in realising this agenda. As governments focused on the diet of schoolchildren, other stakeholders saw opportunities in the education sector. For example, Cadbury and other food and beverage companies provided branded texts for school projects. Today, Nestlé and other commercial interests are involved in developing resources for nutrition and food education.

Various organisations also began to instruct the public, particularly mothers, on caring for families. Government, not for profit, commercial and media organisations all produced health resources. 'Advice to mother' publications offered menu ideas and advice on children's diets. These gendered texts addressed mothers alone, and public health campaigns continue to use similar language today.

So, questions emerge. How effective have school food campaigns been over time? Who should be responsible for this work? And how far have we really come?

Images from Monash University Special Collections: (top left) Whitcombes "Health Notebook" Series, *My Notebook of Health For Grade 6 & Form 1* Melbourne: Whitcombe & Tombs, 196 (top right) National Dairy Council, *Food for school boys and girls*: National Dairy Council, 191? (bottom left) Australian Red Cross Society, *Good health from balanced meals*. Australian Red Cross Society, 1948 (bottom right) Anthony Hordens, Children's menus. Anthony Hordern & Sons, 1957





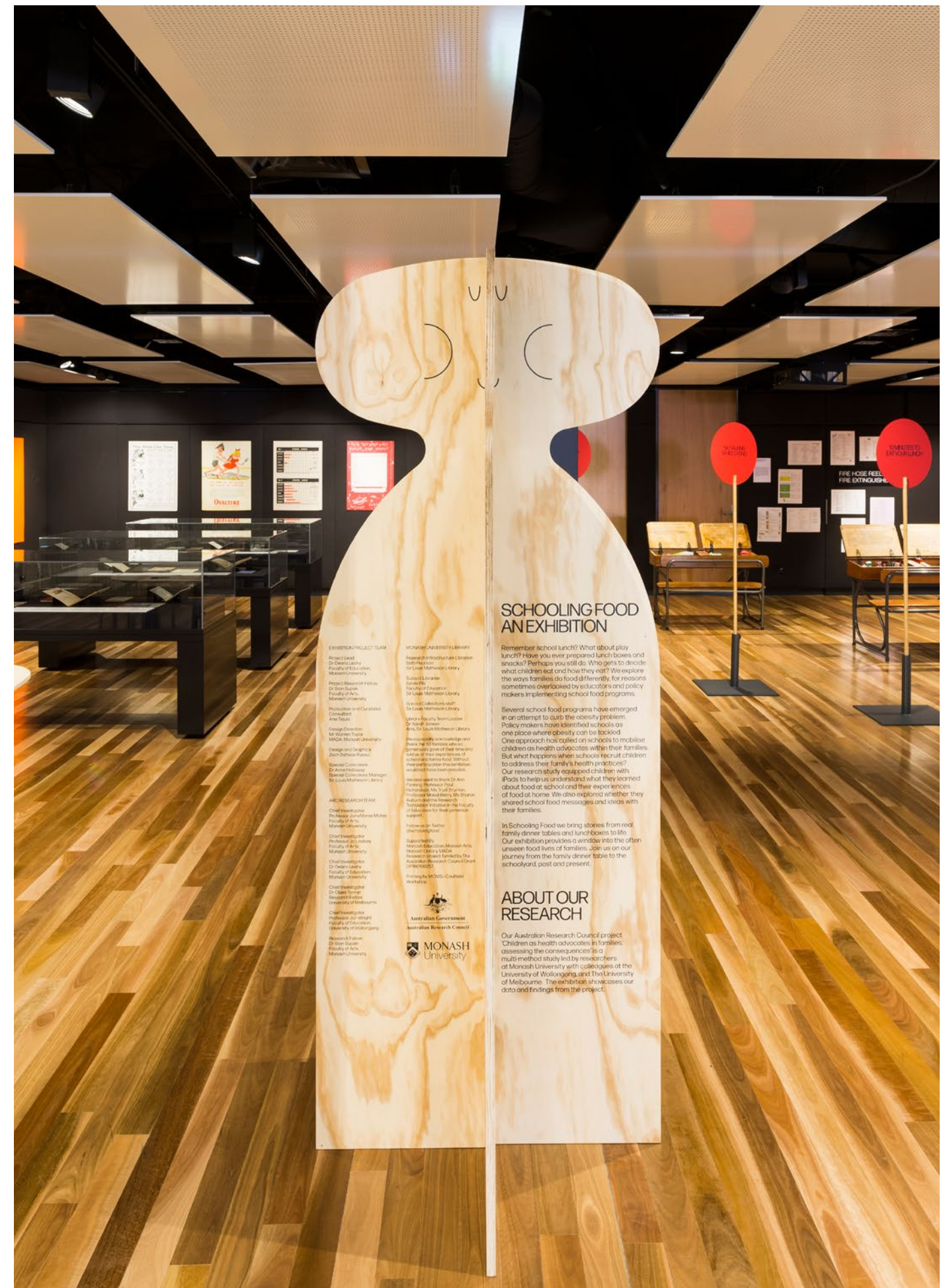
THE MANY WAYS SCHOOLS 'DO FOOD'

This infographic visualises the 'everyday' food work and activities that took place in primary schools. Each numbered segment represents a single family and the school food programs and events they experienced.

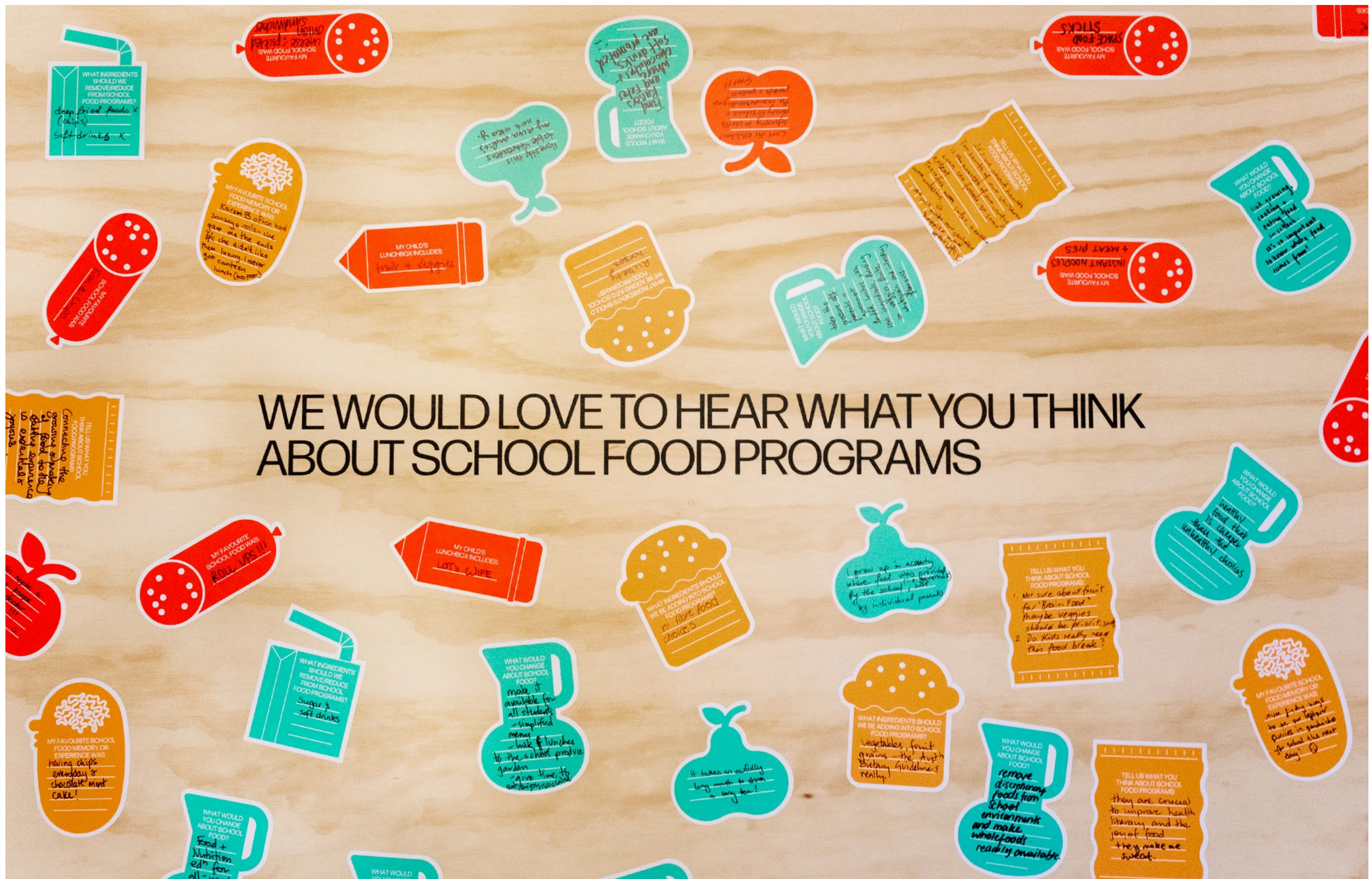
Programs vary across schools, but also within schools. Nude Food, Life Education, Garden or Cooking Programs are prevalent across the schools. But each school varies in the way it implements these programs. For example, Nude Food, one of the most popular programs, is a daily occurrence at some schools, or run less often: weekly, monthly, by term or year. Despite the variety of programs, there was little or no ongoing formal education about food.

Other food events and activities are an integral part of the school day. Families talked about themed days that encouraged them to celebrate food from 'other cultures'. Many schools permit birthday celebrations while others don't. In schools where birthdays were celebrated children could bring a variety of foods. Where birthday celebrations couldn't include food, students could bring stationery.

Differences in programs and inconsistencies in school guidelines, policies and practices confused children and parents. Many families we spoke to expressed uncertainty about which guidelines to follow.









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