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The UK School Meals Service 1944–Present: A Sensory and Emotional Experience

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the sensory and emotional dimensions of the UK School Meals Service (SMS) since 1944, arguing that the lived experiences of pupils, teachers, parents, catering staff, and policymakers have fundamentally shaped its history. The study combines archival documentary research with new oral history interviews and ethnographic case studies. It investigates how sensory experiences - such as taste, smell, and sound - have influenced emotional responses, including shame, embarrassment, and pride, particularly in relation to free school meals (FSMs). Sensory and emotional engagements with school meals are deeply embedded in social and cultural contexts, reflecting broader changes in educational policies, family dynamics, and societal attitudes towards poverty and welfare. The article highlights the stigma and resistance strategies which have shaped perceptions of FSMs across generations. It concludes that a more nuanced approach to the history of the SMS can enhance current discussions on social justice and educational equity.

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Introduction

The history of the School Meals Service (SMS) in England, Wales and Scotland is not simply one of rational or cognitive responses to a policy problem. Far from it, indeed, for it has been fundamentally one of lived struggles that are largely sensory and emotional in nature. This article seeks to restore these shared experiences to our historical understanding of this emotive educational and social provision.¹ First introduced on a permissive basis in England and Wales in 1906, it became a more fully national service to be supported by all local education authorities (LEAs) including clear provision for free school meals (FSMs) where needed under the Education Act of 1944, although it underwent marketisation from 1980 to become once again variable in localised settings.

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From this time it also became fragmented into different regimes of provision in England, Wales and Scotland.

The SMS itself has so far attracted relatively little detailed historical attention. It has often been ignored, as is largely the case with the special issue of *History of Education* published in 2007 on education, health and social welfare.² The literature that has been produced has tended to concentrate on its legislative origins and landmarks, especially the formal beginnings of permissive legislation in England and Wales in 1906, and in Scotland in 1908.³ Its record over the longer term has received much less attention.⁴ Simultaneously, much of the extant literature has been scientific or technical in its emphasis, based on statistical analysis of the extent of hunger or discussion of the nature of selective provision as a “science.”⁵

Conversely, broader historical literature has usefully established the overall social context within which the SMS developed. For example, James Vernon’s *Hunger: A Modern History* (2007) charts the rise and development of the awareness of hunger in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including the contribution of the SMS, and shows that “school feeding” was a prime example of the state and local authorities beginning to take responsibility for the problem of feeding hungry children.⁶ The historical relationship between poverty and education has also been explored in some depth.⁷ The development of the welfare state in Britain, coming into maturation after the Second World War, has also been examined in detail, including the history of the School Medical Service.⁸

It is within this broader social context that we can begin to comprehend the provision of school meals from the viewpoint of school pupils, teachers, parents, school lunch staff, and the community at large. From such perspectives, the significance of the senses and a range of emotions comes clearly into view. When emotions have featured in both history of education research and contemporary sociological and ethnographic studies of schooling, it has frequently been in work which has explored the ways in which power operates in schools.⁹ What has received considerably less attention in both history of education research and educational research more broadly are the ways in which children themselves experience different aspects of schooling, including strategies for controlling and managing their emotional responses. The work of Cathy Burke, Ian Grosvenor and others has highlighted the potential of exploring children’s own responses to the aesthetics and physical environment of their schools, both now and in the past.¹⁰ Such work has so far been lacking in relation to school meals and children’s emotional responses to eating in school. Gurbinder Lalli suggests that school canteens and dining halls function as spaces where children can exercise degrees of agency and to engage in forms of social learning which take place alongside and sometimes in opposition to formal classroom learning. It remains necessary to connect such insights with the emotional history of school meals.¹¹

Similarly, sensory history has a great deal to offer in this regard. The senses of taste, smell, sight, touch and sound are clearly relevant to a full understanding of the history of school meals and yet so far there is very little published work that engages with this fundamental theme.¹² Certainly, while these constitute different senses, they are not necessarily separate in terms of their particular manifestations and can co-exist.¹³

At the heart of this project is the concept of a “usable past” as set out by the American historians Larry Cuban and David Tyack.¹⁴ Cuban argues that the understanding of change is crucial to the work of both the historian and the policy-maker:

what historians can do is identify a major educational issue and map out the origins of the policy-making process with its ideological twists and turns, its competing interest groups and their mercurial intentions, and the complex interplay between events, intentions, power, and outcomes as they get played out in educational institutions.¹⁵

It is not just historical analysis of policy formation that is important but also how policy is implemented and adapted by practitioners in schools; and, crucially, how it impacts upon children. Cuban stresses that, for the past to be “usable” by policy-makers, historians must examine not just the “why” and the “how” of policies but also “what happened after the policy was adopted”:¹⁶ how did it affect children’s lives, experiences and perceptions of school? And how does it continue to affect them in the present?

To help us to address this crucial question of how policy (here the SMS) affects children’s lives, we will draw on the analytical lens of the history of experience, which seeks to draw together insights into lived experience gained through pre-existing approaches including the history of emotions and sensory history.¹⁷ In recent years, historians of experience have urged greater analytical rigour in the use of lived experience. Scholars such as Pirjo Markkola and Johanna Annola have argued that experience should not be treated as transparent or self-evident, but rather as historically mediated, socially embedded and culturally constructed.¹⁸ Their work on lived welfare and lived institutions highlights the ways in which individual experiences are shaped by broader policy frameworks, institutional practices and collective memories. They call for closer attention to how structures of power, social norms and historical contingencies frame the possibilities of experience. Without such critical framing, lived experience risks becoming merely descriptive, lacking analytical force or falling into presentism.

Seeking to contribute to this renewal, this article reconstructs the sensory and emotional dimensions of children’s encounters with the School Meals Service and situates these within their broader social, political and policy contexts. By doing so, we aim to show that lived experiences are not isolated or static but are actively shaped by historical conditions and institutional structures. Furthermore, we argue that such experiences contribute to the formation of social memory and policy legacies, offering insights into how welfare provision was not only administered but also felt and remembered by those who experienced it firsthand. In this way, the article seeks to contribute to a broader effort to strengthen the methodological and analytical foundations of the history of experience.

The history of experience itself needs to be understood in two different ways. First is that of children’s everyday experiences in schools, tracing their own experiences, particularly in relation to their sensory and emotional development. Second, and no less significant, is that of historical experience, in this case of the SMS, and how this has affected the shaping of policies for the future. In this regard, memory is also important – both individual memories of school meals and social memory.¹⁹

Traversing time and space in this way is necessarily an interdisciplinary enterprise that makes full use of the methods of history and ethnography. The source materials employed are no less inclusive, ranging from historical documentary records

characteristic of the archive to magazines and journals to interviews with past pupils, parents and other material witnesses, and case studies of contemporary schools still fresh with the aromas of school meals recently consumed.²⁰ In the sections that follow, we look in greater depth at some key examples that highlight the history of the SMS as a sensory and emotional experience.

Methodology

Three different methods were employed in investigating the significance of the sensorial and the emotional in the history of the SMS in Britain after 1944: archival documentary research, oral history, and ethnography.

The history of policies relating to school meals, both national and local, can largely be traced through archival documentary files on the subject at the National Archives in Kew and in local records offices around the country. The files at Kew are particularly full in relation to the period from the 1920s through to the 1980s, after which they begin to be subject to access restrictions.²¹ For the period from the Second World War to the Conservative governments of the 1980s they are therefore especially helpful for an understanding of policy changes on school meals. However, it has often been suggested that official documentary sources create a top-down history that leaves out the accounts of minority groups, pupils, parents and the community at large; that is, the experiences of those seen from below that might highlight the sensory and the emotional.²² This is an issue that the historical experience of school meals might be well placed to examine by looking to other kinds of historical source material.

Oral history methods may help us to evaluate alternative approaches in this regard.²³ We conducted over 50 new oral history interviews with 71 participants, using a semi-structured, thematic approach that incorporated individual, paired and group interviews to explore the lived experiences of pupils, teachers, parents and catering staff who have engaged with the school meals service SMS since 1945. In addition, we transcribed and analysed over 70 interviews from archival sources, including the British Library Sounds Archive, Bradford Local Studies Library, West Glamorgan Archives and Strathclyde Oral History Centre. Life writing materials such as memoirs, autobiographies and diaries further contextualise these narratives. The approach is informed by critiques of traditional oral history methods, which have historically reinforced power imbalances and issues of coercion, ownership and agency.²⁴ Instead, a decolonial framework is adopted, emphasising accessibility, participant agency and co-construction of narratives.²⁵ Adaptations to interview techniques were made according to individual needs, with ongoing critical reflection on the implications of such adjustments for embedded interviewing practices.²⁶ In line with best practice, all oral history interviewees have been anonymised through the use of pseudonyms. This methodology ensures that a diverse range of voices is represented, offering a nuanced and ethically grounded understanding of the history and lived experience of school meals in the UK.

A third methodological approach included a set of targeted ethnographic case studies, taking place in four schools across the UK, in West Yorkshire, London, Glasgow and Cardiff. These locations were selected to allow the project to gauge the experience of the SMS across both northern and southern England, Wales and Scotland. Bradford in West Yorkshire is where school meals were first

championed for a wider audience,²⁷ and so a school located close to the city was selected. All four partner schools are located within or close to post-industrial cities with high levels of socio-economic deprivation and diverse cultural and ethnic communities. It is particularly in cities and urban locales like these that school feeding has become a flashpoint for societal anger and frustration over wider issues of poverty and inequality. An ethnographic multi-site case study approach was adopted to design the study and collect data. A one-week long residential period was spent in each school in the 2022–23 or 2023–24 academic year, to observe lunchtimes, snack times and breakfast clubs in various dining spaces, “hanging out” and eating with pupils, and participating in formal and informal food education sessions alongside pupils and staff.²⁸ In total, 119 interviews and focus groups were conducted with over 166 participants across the four partner schools.

Overall, then, a combination of archival documentary, oral history and ethnographic methods was used to assess the extent to which sensory and emotional experiences were part of the history of the School Meals Service in Britain, with an emphasis on the period after 1945 when school meals were a mandatory national provision. The advantages and limitations of each approach could be observed as the research progressed, together with the differences and potentially the complementarity of their contributions. With this in mind, the next section focuses on the sensory dimensions of teachers and pupils and the SMS in particular in the national phase of provision between 1944 and 1980.

Sensing the School Meal

We first turn to the policy archive, looking at how the task of lunchtime supervision produced a new kind of schooltime sensorium — how pupils and staff were expected to experience and respond to sensory aspects of lunchtime routines — that led to protest on the part of teachers seeking to renegotiate their post-war duties. The archival documents analysed here highlight the interactions among teachers, schools and the officials of the State in setting the terms of this sensory regime. We then proceed to a discussion of how new kinds of lunchtime sensory regimes shaped power relations among teachers, pupils and lunchtime staff, using new oral history interviews. We conclude this section by discussing how the sensory regime of the school dining hall remains significant in shaping the experiences of pupils in schools today, as well as the ways in which pupils and staff may work together to resist challenging sensory lunchtime experiences. Methodologically, this section shows how different approaches can be complementary in supporting each other to provide a fuller understanding of sensory and emotional dimensions in the SMS after 1944.

In August 1948, a London-based teacher by the name of Dorothy Green wrote to the Ministry of Education in a letter that criticised the compulsory supervision of school meals by teachers – a clause that had been introduced in the Milk and Meals Regulations accompanying the 1944 Education Act. This was a common complaint by teachers, some of whom expected to be reimbursed for this activity. In her letter, Green reflected on the fact that her LEA told her that her lunchtime supervision was needed

because teachers are the only people who are capable of keeping discipline! What a dismal confession! And what a reflection on the rest of society! I think the reason is more likely that you prefer to employ unpaid labour.²⁹

In a separate letter to the *Woman Teacher*, the organ of the National Union of Women Teachers (NUWT), she again lamented her retirement due to the stress caused by lunchtime supervision. “I was,” she wrote, “denied the simple human right of eating my mid-day meal in peace and quiet, and having an adequate rest before starting the afternoon’s work.”³⁰ Dorothy Green was not alone. Numerous letters to the Ministry of Education in the post-war period cited the physical and emotional fatigue caused by supervising school children during lunch time.³¹ Both individual and collective responses to lunchtime supervision demonstrate clearly how the sensory, emotional and experiential dimensions of lunchtime supervision could negatively impact teachers. Beginning from the assumption that the domain of the cafeteria or school dining-hall was an extension of the classroom space, and that meals were educational as well as nutritious, we consider the sensorium of the feeding space as it pertained to teachers’ feelings of strain. These “teacherly bodies”³² were confronted with new sights, smells and sounds of cooking and eating, all of which elicited a specific emotional response that could then be used to mount objections to the SMS itself. The acoustic dimensions of school feeding were a particular objection on the part of teachers such as Dorothy Green’s need for “peace and quiet” (see above). But one might also consider the sound of dinner trolleys going past an office, a criticism voiced by one headmistress of a London school in 1946.³³ With feeding spaces often situated near classrooms, one inspector in London in the 1960s wrote that “badly sited” feeding spaces “have an adverse effect on teaching or school organisation (e.g. because of disturbance by noise from cooking, washing up or furniture moving).”³⁴ Elsewhere, the popularisation of classroom dining, which was a legacy of improvised wartime feeding conditions, produced lingering smells of cooking long after the lunch period had ended. In a response to a Ministry of Education survey in 1955, one headteacher at a Sheffield school complained how the “stench of long-cooked cabbage hangs about the classroom – gravy and custard may be dropped on books or floor.”³⁵ A particularly emotive response to the olfactory dimensions of school feeding came with a 1958 letter to a South of England Member of Parliament stating that “the great majority of teachers wish to see a fully staffed ancillary meals service so that we do not have even a sniff of the cabbage, or of the revolting manner in which much of it is lost to sight!!!”³⁶ Feelings of disgust directed towards the sensorium of school feeding were also reflected in more official, collective responses to the problem of school supervision: A statement issued by the NUWT in 1946 complained that “where the food is cooked in improvised kitchens and served in classrooms or halls, the atmosphere is over-charged with the smell of food for the major part of the day.”³⁷

Negative reactions to the newly reconfigured sensorium of the school canteen or classroom thus provided ammunition to those teachers who protested the intrusion of the SMS into their daily working lives. Yet they were not alone. As we will now discuss, different groups involved in the SMS, whether as teachers, parents, pupils or catering staff (and often individuals had experience of several of these roles), could and did experience different kinds of emotional responses to the various sensory aspects of school feeding. Understanding how childhood agency was negotiated and

renegotiated in the school feeding space is critical here. Kristine Alexander, Stephanie Olsen and Karen Vallgård warn against too easily accepting the “ideology of adulthood” and its rendering of adults and children as distinctive subjects, with research and sources concerning the former considered with more critical scepticism than the latter.³⁸ Our oral history research has shown that children and adults are not binary actors following distinct and opposing agendas in narrated experiences of school meals. Instead, interviews have revealed evidence of cooperation and collaboration alongside punishment. This is not a straightforward story of children’s deployment of agency and resistance to a sensory regime imposed by adults, but rather one that emphasises the possibilities of school mealtimes as spaces for negotiation between different historical actors.

These are not unmediated perspectives. Oral history participants shared memories of childhood retrospectively shaped by social and moralistic understandings of disciplinary approaches in school dining spaces. Laurissa’s testimony, for example, demonstrates multiple sites of negotiation, from the physical act of drawing and redrawing boundaries around what she would and would not eat at lunchtime as a child in Southport in the late 1960s, to playfully testing those limits with her lunchtime supervisors, to revisiting the memory to express empathy with staff members from an adult’s perspective:

Isabelle Carter: What would happen if you didn’t finish your food, do you remember?

Laurissa: Well, you had to put your hand up and you had to ask a dinner lady if you were allowed to leave that, and she would look at it and you’d look at her and she’d look at you. And sometimes they’d say, “Go on then, that’s fine.” And other times they’d say, “No, you need to eat that much,” and they drew a line with the knife, and you knew you had to eat that bit. And of course, you’d try it on again, you’d put a bit of meat from that bit, let it join the other meat that you’d already left. It was a game, basically! And I’m sure that the teacher that – now I’m an adult myself – I realise those poor teachers, you know, what a thing to have to decide! But they were never that, they never seemed cruel or horrible, it was just the way things were done in the ‘60s and ‘70s.³⁹

Just like the children she taught, Lisa, born in Leicester in 1969, struggled to follow some sensory aspects of discipline at a primary school in Leicester in the early 2000s. As a teacher, Lisa enjoyed eating lunch alongside the children and used it as an opportunity to reinforce lessons around nutrition, but socialisation proved more troublesome, as she explained:

In one of the schools I taught in, eating with your hands was really popular so encouraging them to use a knife and fork was full on. Full on task . . . So culturally, hand-eating was the way forward. And I understood that fully because I’d been living out of Britain in a culture that did use their hands to eat a lot. So, to transfer back to British culture by using a knife and fork was quite difficult. And I sometimes did slip back into using my hands and then go “oh! No, no, no, no! Get your knife and fork out. Use your knife and fork.”⁴⁰

This interview raises important questions about the consolidation of a new sensory regime of touch in schools. The existence of such a regime is evident. Lisa would not show such a strong preoccupation with ensuring that both herself and the children (re) learned to eat with utensils otherwise. That she struggled to follow its tenets despite the expectation that she would reinforce them challenges notions of who is able to wield authority in these spaces and how.

Does this suggest that the sensory regime in schools changed over time, with the cultural and educational context of the 1960s and 1970s rendering Lisa's experience different to what came later? Angela's impression of the school dining experience from her perspective as a catering manager working in Leicestershire in the 1990s/early 2000s certainly suggests that things had changed considerably by this time:

Those children – you [addressing the interviewer] were perhaps of that generation where you were more used to eating processed food. And you know, we tried pre-CCT [compulsory competitive tendering brought in by the Conservative government in the late 1980s] to introduce what we called healthier eating and that was quite difficult because, you know, kids had by that time expectations and they didn't want things made with wholemeal flour. You know, they wanted things to be smooth and not have bits in it and that sort of thing.⁴¹

Angela's interview, moreover, reveals that she perceived a significant shift in children's attitudes towards food, from a general (if not universal) compliance in the 1970s and 1980s to a much greater likelihood of expressing their own food preferences by the late 1990s. With it came a weakening in the efficacy of the sensory regime of the school dining space:

I think there was a shift. There was certainly a shift in eating. Between me leaving school and going back to school for work. Quite a big change. And I guess that, you know, basically the world had moved on. It was, what? Probably 15 years. [Pause] Yeah, it was about 12 or 15 years between me leaving school and going back for work and in that time things had moved on, yeah.⁴²

This sense of a profound shift having taken place is further reinforced by Eve's and Jordan's assertion that children of their generation, growing up in the 1960s and 1970s in Edinburgh and London, respectively, experienced a very different school culture from what they perceived to be the case today, that shaped their emotional and sensory experiences of school meals:

Eve: You got what you were given.

Jordan: You got what you were given and you didn't have all these kind of, "Oh well, I want that. I want that. Choice, choice, choice, choice" [imitating child], you know. It's kind of, it was the '70s. '60s and '70s. So late '60s for me. And it was, you know, Britain was still very [pauses] what's the word?

Eve: Uniform.

Jordan: It was the post-war settlement, wasn't it? It was still the welfare state. It was pre-bloody [Margaret] Thatcher and all that stuff. And you know, turbo-charged capitalism. So it was all kind of, you know, it was pretty regulated in some ways, wasn't it?

Eve: It was. It was, yeah.⁴³

This might indicate children in the 1960s and 1970s doing as they were told or acquiescing to "you get what you're given," or equally that children's negotiation of adult expectations has taken different forms at different times. Perhaps resistance is articulated in different ways across generations, and this influences how children with more recent experience of school meals interact with the sensory/emotional environment in a culture of wider choice and variety.

While a general shift is clearly visible in the sensory regime operating in schools, from a one-size-fits-all approach in the immediate post-war decades, to a greater degree of choice in the type of food, albeit much more highly processed, our oral history interviews reveal how strong sensory experiences deeply shaped pupils' engagement with school meals, often influencing their resistance to, or compliance with food-related discipline. Even during what James described as the "post-war settlement," when "you ate what you were given," interviews reveal that an insistence that all food be finished, regardless of personal preference, sometimes led to outright defiance. Upon being served liver again, Dennis, who attended a state junior school in southwest London in the late 1970s, recalled:

I think I was sick actually! And that was, I think, the last time I had school dinners. I just went home and said, look, you know, "I don't care if the teachers tell me off, I don't care" . . . I'm not gonna eat food that I don't [like].⁴⁴

In Dennis's interview, the coercive atmosphere, combined with the sensory discomfort of the meal, overpowered disciplinary pressures from the teachers. His refusal to eat school dinners any more highlights how, even at a young age, the sensory experience of eating can override concerns about punishment.

An interview with Joanne, born in Dorking, Surrey in 1962, reinforces this point, with students' distaste for school milk leading to a widespread rebellion in her second year at grammar school in the early 1970s. She explained, "I never liked school milk either because in winter it used to be frozen. And we used to put it . . . on these pipes to thaw out. And we used to say: 'It's ice cream' and oh, it wasn't." She added that the taste was horrible, and the "stale smell of the milk after the bottles were empty" disgusted her. Despite their collective resistance, however, we once again see not a straightforward case of defiance of authority but rather a more nuanced situation of negotiation and compromise between the children and their teacher. Joanne reported that their form tutor, Mrs. Millman, explained the nutritional importance of milk, leading them ultimately to comply: "And she really gave us, not a nasty lecture, she was a nice teacher, but she explained it all and from then onwards every single one of us drank our milk. Well, at least in her year, I don't know whether we did when we moved into new forms."⁴⁵ This illustrates how sensory discomfort can be tempered by authoritative intervention, even if the sensory aversion persists.

The sensory aspect of school lunchtimes has also played a crucial role for neurodivergent pupils. Even with the shift to a more diverse, choice-based system of school meals in more recent years, a clear sensory regime, in terms of rules around how, how much and what to eat remained tangible for these pupils. Lauren, born in Bolton in 1994 and diagnosed with autism at the age of 21, reflected on the discomfort of losing control over food choices in their primary school in the early 2000s: "It's kind of hard being told, 'This is how you need to eat,' 'This is what is correct,' while also not really having much control over what you eat."⁴⁶ As well as experiencing a loss of agency and control, other former pupils reported feeling overwhelmed due to the combination of smells, sights and sounds in the school dining space. Ella, born in Rotherham in 1992 and later diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), described the "sensory overload" she experienced:

I remember . . . carrying my tray. I felt very aware of my bodily movement with my tray . . . And then couple that with the fact that it's loud and there's a lot going on . . . and then you have to make a decision as to what you eat and then you had to carry your tray, you're all quite like, "Oh god."⁴⁷

These testimonies reflect how sensory overload, particularly in noisy, chaotic environments like the school dining room, can intensify the stress associated with school meals and render decision-making much more difficult in an environment where children have more choice over what they eat.

The multisensory⁴⁸ impact of the canteen could, at times, be challenging for many children. Isaac, born in 1983 in Wortley, near Leeds, recalled how the sights and sounds of others eating disturbed him: "Lots of kids were eating with their mouths open and . . . flicking food at each other . . . it was too much for me." The sensory overload extended beyond the taste of the food to the overall dining atmosphere: "You could hear the catering staff . . . clattering with all the food and plates . . . you could smell it as well." For Isaac, the noise and smell of the canteen, combined with the behaviour of other children, contributed to his refusal to engage with school meals.⁴⁹

In the present-day context, emotional responses and resistance by pupils to sensory experiences of school food, lunchtimes and the dining hall remain prevalent.⁵⁰ Through ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with various actors (such as pupils, staff and parents) in our research project, pupils displayed resistance to eating particular foods served due to unpleasant sensory experiences around texture and taste by refusing to eat. In an ethnographic interview, Mrs. Rosser, a deputy headteacher at a school in Cardiff, spoke about the reaction of her own child, who attended another nearby primary school,⁵¹ to the texture of a food item served as part of the school meal:

"It was a different cheese. It was like that plastic cheese," she says. I said, "What did you eat then?" She went, "Well, nothing." I said, "Well, didn't anybody offer you something else?" "I just wasn't hungry by that point."⁵²

Refusal to eat is a frequent practice employed by pupils to express resistance to the highly controlled school lunchtime experience,⁵³ often due to not liking the food served, with pupils refusing to eat labelled as "picky eaters."⁵⁴ In this example, refusal to eat constituted a form of resistance to a particular sensory quality of an ingredient, and because it had changed from what was typical or expected.⁵⁵

Whilst refusal to eat as a form of resistance to unpleasant sensory experiences has also been exemplified in past decades, as we have seen in our oral history interviews, the reaction of, and potential punishment by, staff has changed in the present-day context. Punishment for not finishing a school meal was not observed or reported in interviews with pupils currently in education in the UK. Hence, children, like Mrs. Rosser's daughter in Cardiff, are more able to resist eating due to difficult sensory experiences without fear of punishment. On the other hand, Fozia, a parent from West Yorkshire who went to school in the 1980s, explained how children were forced to finish their meal or were physically hit if they did not comply:

They were very strict, we had one particular dinner lady . . . if you didn't eat your food, she stood over you and she forced you to eat it . . . I think the fact that you couldn't throw it away . . . you'd get the cane, so they'd have to go to the headmaster's office and they'd actually get hit on the hand for not finishing their dinner.⁵⁶

These very different experiences across time periods no doubt reflect the wider changes in school policies and practices, such as those around safeguarding, banning corporal punishment in schools and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in the UK in 1992.⁵⁷

As we have seen, resistance to eating and negative reactions to sensory experiences of the SMS have taken place throughout its history and have been positioned as acts of agency or rebellion by pupils against the background of the highly regulated lunchtime experience.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, in contemporary contexts, pupils and staff, including teachers, caterers and lunchtime supervisors sometimes cooperate to resist sensory expectations of school lunchtimes. Both pupils and staff complained of the noise levels in the dining hall being too loud or overstimulating, as these interviews evidence:

Megan (pupil, Cardiff): It is very loud and it makes me have a headache.⁵⁹

Mrs Townsend (lunchtime supervisor, London): Our lunches are big and they are noisy places. Some in nursery find that quite overwhelming.⁶⁰

Complaints concerning noise levels frequently cite the poor acoustics of dining halls or children loudly chatting during lunchtime because “everybody has a lot to talk about, and they don’t talk about it at playtime because they play at playtime” (Saffa, pupil, West Yorkshire).⁶¹ Rather than punish children for making noise whilst socialising in the dining hall, Mr Hassan, a deputy headteacher from West Yorkshire, described how pupils and staff have negotiated a more agreeable sensory environment at lunchtimes:

Sometimes it’s guys, turn your volume down, he’s only sat next to you, she’s only sat opposite you. You do not need to scream across the table . . . It’s just the noise level unfortunately can get really loud . . . it’s just trying to keep that happy medium. We don’t want children to just feel like they have to sit down and just be quiet, like the Victorian days and just eat and regimented . . . So what me and Miss [headteacher] have said is yeah, when you go to a restaurant you do socialise and you do talk, so you know we have to, we do account for that.⁶²

In this example, pupils and the senior leadership team at the school worked together and compromised to create an environment in the dining hall where children can socialise, one of the key features of school lunchtimes,⁶³ without it being too sensorially overwhelming and, also, to imitate a restaurant environment. Replicating wider dining experiences outside of schools is one of the key socialisation aims of the SMS today.⁶⁴ Pupils and staff working together to question and adjust sensory expectations in the dining hall, particularly around acceptable noise levels and behaviour, calls into question the extent to which resistance and agency can include cooperation between “opposing” actors.⁶⁵ This instance also highlights the perception of historical experiences of school lunchtimes, making comparisons with pre-SMS Victorian times (although the SMS was instituted in 1906) as being more regimented and strict compared with today.⁶⁶ It also indicates that the general perception of stricter lunchtime rules, which allow for less social interaction between pupils, is negative, further reiterating the contemporary value placed on social experiences at school lunchtimes.⁶⁷

Further examples of cooperative resistance to challenging sensory experiences of the dining hall refer to meeting the sensory needs of neurodiverse pupils. The following

ethnographic fieldnote based on a conversation with Mr. Jones, a teaching assistant from Cardiff, as well as observation in the dining hall, exemplifies this:

Mr. Jones from the resource base [for pupils with SEND/ Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities and who are not educated in mainstream lessons full time] accompanied three pupils into the hall for lunch, the pupils were wearing ear defenders. He said he is trying to get the pupils integrated into the dining hall. He comments that the hall is very loud for them and it is partly the echoiness that is the issue. One of the pupils sat at the end of one of the tables on a chair rather than on a stool attached to the table.⁶⁸

In this example, the sensory environment of the dining hall, in terms of noise levels, seating arrangements and the feelings around these, was overwhelming and uncomfortable for the neurodiverse students chaperoned by Mr. Jones. To help make the dining hall more inclusive, Mr. Jones supported the children to make adjustments and interventions to the sensory environment to suit their individual needs and requirements. Whilst this is an example of resistance to the neurotypical sensory regime of the school dining hall, as with the previous example from the West Yorkshire school, this resistance involved collaboration and cooperation between pupils and staff. This further raises the question of whether an act is truly resistance if it involves cooperation and who, or what, is being resisted.⁶⁹

Together, these extracts from archival sources, oral history interviews and contemporary interviews and ethnographies reveal that school meals were not and are not just about nutrition or routine; they are sensory experiences that often trigger strong emotional responses. From taste and smell to sound and touch, these sensory stimuli could provoke rebellion, discomfort or negotiation, with pupils and teachers frequently pushing back against the disciplinary structures imposed on them. Whether due to the taste of unpleasant milk, the oppressive noise of the cafeteria or the rigid rules about how much food to eat, the sensory environment has been and remains central to shaping pupils' and teachers' relationships with school meals.

Shame and the Free School Meal

We will now move on to a discussion of feelings of shame and embarrassment and how these were made manifest in school feeding spaces in the past. As an emotion particularly associated with free school meals (FSMs), we begin with an analysis of how policy-makers became aware of and reacted to issues surrounding feelings of shame and the stigma of receiving FSM. We then proceed to discuss how our oral history interviewees articulate their own and others' memories of shame and embarrassment when eating at school, before concluding with a discussion of how these feelings both remain and have evolved in UK schools today due to changes in SMS policy and practice. Again, in methodological terms, the different research strategies employed are complementary in putting together a fuller picture of the issues involved.

"I simply would not wish to have them humiliated."⁷⁰ In this way, a Scottish housewife addressed the British prime minister, James Callaghan, in a letter sent in 1977. In the letter she specifies how, despite her husband being occasionally out of work, she had never claimed FSMs for her children due to fears that they would be made to feel emotionally uncomfortable or, in her words, "humiliated." Through such individual

letters and other channels, policy-makers were attuned, and to a degree responsive, to the issue of shame and FSMs, particularly in the post-war period. Research by the Ministry of National Insurance in 1966 showed, alarmingly, that only half of those eligible for FSMs were claiming them.⁷¹ A subsequent 1967 circular from the Department of Education and Science (DES) to all LEAs in England and Wales wrote how “at least in some areas fear of embarrassment plays a considerable part especially when money is collected in the classroom,” and advised LEAs to “review existing arrangements so as to ensure that everything possible is done to safeguard children taking free school meals from being identified.” The Scottish Education Department (SED) issued a similar, but more specific, circular against the use of coloured tickets for identifying FSM participants.⁷² Elsewhere, policy-makers deployed emotive language and affective logic to try to compel parents to take up FSMs.

An example from Scotland shows how, in 1968, a leaflet was circulated to all parents advising them of the possibility that their child could be eligible for FSMs. This was in part a response to a scheduled price rise. The SED deployed emotive language to compel parents to apply: “your children depend on you to claim their rights. Make sure you do – for your sakes.”⁷³ In devising the leaflet, the aim was

to try and remove deterrents which at present exist, such as a feeling of “charity,” segregation in the schools, [and] lack of information. The issue of one million leaflets will be necessary so that ALL children can be given leaflets to take to their parents – this in turn removes any feelings of embarrassment by selecting apparently less fortunate children.⁷⁴

A similar UK-wide campaign took place in 1970, the result being that, by 1987, the number of children taking up FSMs had more than doubled since 1967.⁷⁵ However, despite such successes, local systems of administering FSMs through the ubiquitous free dinner ticket or through the direct collection of money persisted. A 1977 report by the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), entitled “Free School Meals – the Humiliation Continues,” detailed numerous instances of the resulting shame and stigmatisation that occurred through such everyday practices, although later sections of the report were said to be exaggerated.⁷⁶ Despite the best intentions of central policy-makers, idiosyncratic local practices by LEA administrators, teachers and catering staff could lead to the perpetuation of certain negative emotional experiences associated with claiming FSMs. As a key feature of what Pertti Haapala, Minna Harjula and Heikki Kokko have termed “the lived welfare state,” FSMs in the British context, therefore, produced a degree of both individual and collective insecurity when faced with the emotional frontier of the dining hall.⁷⁷

Nor were the policy-makers themselves immune from the shame and embarrassment so often associated with their policies. Free school milk had already been abolished for secondary school pupils by the previous Labour government and, in 1971, Margaret Thatcher, then the secretary of state for education and science, stopped free milk for primary school pupils over the age of seven. This act led Thatcher to become widely notorious as the “milk snatcher.” According to her biographer John Campbell, “she was hurt to find herself presented as an unfeminine monster who stole milk from the mouths of babes and sucklings.”⁷⁸ From this time on, she tried to avoid any further steps in this direction. Such was her reluctance that several years later, when prime minister, she warned her new education secretary,

Mark Carlisle, to take heed of her own experience. In a private meeting, according to the official note, “the Prime Minister said that her experience over the ending of free school milk was etched on her mind,” and she did not want Mr. Carlisle and his colleagues to follow suit “unless it was absolutely vital.”⁷⁹ She preferred LEAs to take on the responsibility for determining charges for meals and making their own arrangements for FSMs so that they rather than the Government would take the “odium” of making these decisions.⁸⁰ Indeed, even in 1990, shortly before being ousted as prime minister, Thatcher sharply resisted a proposal by the then secretary of state for health, Kenneth Clarke, to end free welfare milk for children in day care. Thatcher’s response was conveyed in a characteristically brusque note: “NO [Double underlined] – this would cause a terrible row – all for £4 million. I know [underlines in original] – I went through it 19 years ago.”⁸¹ In this case, the personal experience of embarrassment combined with the social memory of the shame attached to FSMs to make such a development politically unacceptable. The prime minister’s advice was heeded and, as was gleefully reported to her, the health secretary “retired hurt.”⁸² These were the discreet emotions whispered by the politician and the civil servant, no doubt, but emotions nonetheless.

These references to shame and embarrassment found in the archive are further strengthened at the other end of the sensory scale by evidence from our oral history interviews. Jim, born in Bradford in 1953, recalled the visceral experience of having it discovered that, aged around 8, he was in receipt of FSMs while at junior school due to his father being out of work:

But for those of us who occasionally had free meals, the ticket said on it “admit one free meal” in very bold letters. Now, this was a source of great embarrassment to me on one occasion when my father was out of work because of some medical condition he’d had and we became entitled to a free school meal. But, you know, and I tried to keep this ticket hidden. I collected the tickets in for the rest of the table and they were placed at the head of the table, but I was discovered on one particular occasion by this boy . . . who exclaimed very loudly: “Who’s got the free meal then?” [imitating child shouting], much to my shame and embarrassment.⁸³

Notable here are the lengths to which Jim went to conceal his FSM entitlement, volunteering to collect the tickets from the other children on his table so he could “hide” his free ticket among the others. It is also significant that it was another child who tried to embarrass Jim for receiving FSMs. In an email exchange with Jim, he elaborated on this memory calling it “this excruciatingly embarrassing experience.” He described his decision to volunteer to collect the dinner tickets from the children at his table as a “ruse” that was “foiled” when he was “exposed by a nasty oik, a boy I disliked intensely, who exclaimed loudly, ‘Who’s got the free meal?’”⁸⁴ This example shows the potential that eligibility for FSMs contained to aggravate existing power differentials and bullying experiences within schools. Nevertheless, the impacts on individuals varied. Another interviewee, Frank, was born in Lambeth in 1950 and grew up on a large council estate in southeast London. While he does not remember his being in receipt of FSMs having “any real impact” on him personally, he did recall in his junior school that “the free school meal kids were at the end of the register. So the people who will have been bringing their money in were at the top of the register, and so there was a bit of scapegoating I thought there.”⁸⁵

Around the same time, three women from Glasgow, Mavis, Irene and Joyce, recalled their experience of receiving FSMs in their inner-city infant schools in the early 1960s:

Mavis: I thought that was quite embarrassing actually. Thinking about it now.

Irene: It was terrible. I mean, 1960 and they were still doing it because I got up about 1960.

Mavis: And I remember the teacher would call out people's names, say "right come out" and just give them the dinner tickets. So some were free, some were paid.

Joyce: Our teacher stood, she got everybody that paid and then she went "come out the frees!" [imitating teacher's call]. And you had to, the walk of shame, swear to God.⁸⁶

More than twenty years later, in the mid-1980s, things do not seem to have changed substantively. While she did not receive FSMs herself, Rachel, born in 1970, described the system she remembered at her Portsmouth-based secondary school for those who did and what she perceived as the feelings of embarrassment it engendered. There was, she explained,

no attempt to kind of cover up – not that you should be covered up – but no attempt to make it not embarrassing for the people on free school meals. I seem to remember that there was a system and it was very obvious who was and who wasn't . . . in the . . . dining room, I think they had to go to a different desk or a different something. So there was no kind of regard for their feelings, I would say, in how that worked.⁸⁷

Sarah, born in Rotherham in 1977, had similar memories of her state junior school in Wakefield in the 1980s and early 1990s. "At my school," she recalled, " . . . I always remember we had about three in the class and it were [sic] really embarrassing for them because when they were ticking off the register, the teachers used to say something to the effect of 'free school meal'." She remembered, in particular, her "friend Kirsty" who "was always on free school meals because she came from a single-parent family and she hated it because they made it commonly known that you were on free school meals." "[I]n infant and junior school," she continued, "they used to read it out in a morning! [disbelieving] Like it didn't matter, you know?" Reflecting on her subsequent professional experience as an education researcher, Sarah commented on the profound effect she believes such behaviour has on even very young children:

And now, from the work I've done with kids that are experiencing food insecurity, even really, really young children are aware when the parents can't feed them. So I always think back now; how did these children feel having it announced that they were on free school meals? And then even in high school, when you're even more aware of things, you know, being given a different colour token to everybody else?⁸⁸

An interview with Naomi, born in Birmingham in 1981 into a family of Jamaican heritage, revealed how being eligible for FSMs could exacerbate existing racial discrimination within schools. She described her mother's decision to pay for her lunches throughout primary and into secondary school despite being eligible to receive free school meals as follows:

A lot of it was pride, but also 'cause of later on, when I went to secondary school, she was concerned that we might get picked on if we're having free meals. Also, once again, there weren't many Black kids in my school and so she didn't want to . . .⁸⁹

Alongside changes to both policies and the food served since the SMS's inception, lived experiences of the SMS and the emotions attached to these experiences have evolved over time. Feelings of shame and embarrassment discussed in archived policy documents and by oral history participants may remain but were much less obvious during visits to partner schools and in the associated interviews today. This probably reflects the impact of particular changes in policy and practice around FSMs in recent years. There has, for example, been a significant shift to online pre-ordering and payment systems such as ParentPay which launched in 2002 and was used by all of the schools in our project,⁹⁰ with the aim of reducing food waste, making schools cashless and making school lunchtimes smoother.⁹¹ Such systems hide who is and is not paying for school meals and allow parents to support their children in choosing from the menu. Mrs. McCoy, a Glasgow deputy headteacher, discussed the system changes at her school:

Mrs. McCoy: It used to be ... you have a free school meal, you get a blue ticket. Thank goodness we've got rid of all that.

[Ellen Bishop]: There's that stigma around it?

Mrs. McCoy: Oh, it's awful, really awful. Like you are P1 but you're also a free school meal ... and it's just that nonsense of "which colour ticket did you get?" or "do you get a ticket?" ... it's awful. So one of our headteachers very quickly was like no tickets nonsense ... it was just a case of counting up how many we had and things. Now thankfully it's all moved online, which is now a year. So nobody needs to know who's free and who's not. It's just you're having pizza, you're having pizza next to your pal, nobody knows who's paid and who hasn't.⁹²

This excerpt highlights how technology-aided systems for ordering and paying for school meals may mask the FSM status of individual pupils, making feelings of shame, embarrassment and stigma around receiving FSMs less salient. The rollout of FSMs across different age groups in England, Wales and Scotland, with some level of age-based universalism in each nation, may have also lessened such emotions as FSMs become normalised with every pupil being offered them at some point in their education.⁹³ The quality of school meals may also affect feelings of stigma, shame and embarrassment. If the food is viewed as desirable, children and families feel lucky to have an FSM. Tasneem, a West Yorkshire pupil beyond the age-eligibility for FSMs, stated that "if it was me then I would have school dinners. But it's more money," expressing a feeling of envy towards those who were still eligible for FSMs based on familial socio-economic conditions.⁹⁴ On the other hand, feelings of anger and sadness around receiving FSMs can manifest if the food or lunchtime experience is not viewed as good quality. Mrs. Meredith, a teaching assistant and lunchtime supervisor from Cardiff, expressed frustration around the way that free school meals were served:

This is where they're learning. They're learning how food should be served, and should it be served in a polystyrene thing with a wooden knife and fork and should it all be piled on top of each other on a trolley? No. It shouldn't.⁹⁵

This excerpt also highlights the perceived socialisation effect that school meals can have on children in the future, teaching them about healthy eating, food preparation and how to serve food,⁹⁶ although the attention paid to these priorities is limited.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, feelings of pride amongst parents around being able to

provide food for their children remain, perhaps reflecting the historic stigma attached to the receipt of FSMs. Upon being asked whether they thought school meals should be free for everyone, Bushra, a parent from a West Yorkshire school, said:

No, I don't think they should. I think that, as a parent, that's your responsibility, you should have the choice ... I think if you can afford it ... they should – they should feed their own children.⁹⁸

Such extracts illuminate questions concerning whose responsibility it is to feed children at school, whether it should be parents or the State.⁹⁹ As policies around FSMs continue to evolve, emotions expressed by different stakeholders concerning the receipt of FSMs will also evolve. If FSMs were universalised across the UK as discussed in a recent feasibility study,¹⁰⁰ and as many charities and activists have been calling for,¹⁰¹ feelings of shame, embarrassment, stigma and pride might well be less potent as FSMs would be perceived as a right, rather than a form of charity.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to reframe the history of the UK SMS around questions of sensory and emotional experiences. In this way, we can begin to tell the story not just of shifting policy intentions and legislative changes over time, but also, and, crucially, for the first time, of how these policies were experienced by those involved in the SMS: pupils, parents, teachers, catering staff and wider communities. It is vital that such work is not simply historical in nature but also engages with the lived experience of children, families, schools and communities in the present day. In turn, it is crucial for current developments to be considered and evaluated within an awareness of past changes and continuities. It is this that we might describe as a usable past.

In reconstructing this history, we have made use of a range of methods in an enlarged qualitative research project. We have shown how archival documentary sources highlight the policies and debates around the state apparatus, but also the interactions among schools, parents, the wider community and the State. Anxious letters from parents to the Minister of Education are often as telling as policy memoranda. Oral histories provide a rich set of memories around the experiences of pupils, teachers, parents, catering staff and the community. Ethnographic case-studies remind us of the enduring, but also changing, practices of school meals. Together, these sources are complementary in helping us to recapture the experiences of the senses and emotions attached to the SMS. In light of our findings, we call for more scholarship which connects historical research with contemporary critical debates to ensure policy decisions are meaningfully informed by past experience. How, for example, did policy-makers engage with, and utilise, their emotions and past experiences in their decision-making, as the example of Margaret Thatcher suggests? This is a recent and fresh area of inquiry across different disciplinary contexts, which all suggest that we need to interrogate the role that emotions play in complex policy processes.¹⁰² Themes of universality and FSMs continue to dominate political

discourse alongside the question of who is responsible for feeding children. For reformers, the social memory of “hungry children” that had motivated agitators early in the twentieth century continues to exert influence in the twenty-first. The senses and emotions of the past speak with feeling to us still as we continue to explore the contested terrain of the SMS.

Notes

1. This is part of a larger study of the school meals service generously funded by the ESRC. Award Number ES/X000737/1.
2. See e.g. Crook, “Education, Health, and Social Welfare,” 651–770.
3. Education (Provision of Meals) Act (1906) An Act to make provision for Meals for Children attending Public Elementary Schools in England and Wales <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1906/>. Andrews, “The School Meals Service,” 70–5; Finch, “Food for Thought: The Origins and Implementation of the Education (Provision of Meals) Act, 1906”. PhD diss. King’s College London, 2020.
4. A useful exception is Finch, “The Provision of School Meals since 1906” <http://www.historyandpolicy.org/policy-papers/papers/the-provision-of-school-meals-since1906-progress-or-recipe-for-disaster>.
5. E.g. Gazeley, Newell, Reynolds and Rufrancos “How Hungry were the Poor in 1930s Britain?,” 80–110; Durbach, *Many Mouths: The Politics of Food in Britain from the Workhouse to the Welfare State*, chapter 5.
6. Vernon, *Hunger*.
7. See e.g. Vincent, *Poor Citizens*; Harold and Sarah Silver. *An Educational War on Poverty: American and British Policy-Making 1960–1980* and Tyack, David, Robert Lowe, Elizabeth Hansot. *Public Schools in Hard Times: The Great Depression and Recent Years*.
8. Timmins, *The Five Giants*; Harris, *The Health of the Schoolchild*.
9. See e.g. Pike, “An Ethnographic Study of Lunchtime Experiences in Primary School Dining Rooms”. PhD diss., University of Hull, 2010; Lalli, “School Mealtime and Social Learning in England.” 57–75.
10. Lawn and Grosvenor (eds) *Materialities of Schooling*.
11. Lalli, *Schools, Food and Social Learning*.
12. See e.g. Smith, *Sensing the Past*; on the early development of this literature, see Grosvenor, “Back to the Future or Towards a Sensory History of Schooling,” 675–87.
13. See e.g. Turner, “Intersensory Experiences of the Plague in Seventeenth-Century London”, 42–61, on these intersensory dynamics.
14. Cuban, “Policymaking and the Uses of History,” 200–205 and Tyack and Cuban, *Tinkering toward Utopia*. See also e.g. McCulloch, *The Struggle for the History of Education*.
15. Cuban. “Policymaking,” 202.
16. Ibid., 203. See also Rothblatt, “Supply and Demand,” 627–44.
17. Ellis, “Corporal Punishment in the English Public School in the Nineteenth Century,” 14–46; Ellis, *Masculinity and Science in Britain, 1831–1918*; Kivimäki, Suodenjoki and Vahtikari (eds) *Lived Nation as the History of Experiences and Emotions in Finland, 1800–2000*.
18. Markkola, “Education as Lived Welfare,” 5–20; Annola, Lindberg and Markkola. “Experience, Institutions, and the Lived Welfare State,” 1–24.
19. See e.g. May, *“Lessons” of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy*; Cubitt, *History and Memory*.
20. The wide range of sources and methods involved are discussed in, for example, McCulloch, *Documentary Research in Education, History and the Social Sciences*; Lalli, “The School Restaurant,” 48–57; Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*.

21. For discussion of using official archival records on educational policy changes, see e.g. McCulloch and Richardson, *Historical Research in Educational Settings*.
22. See e.g. Richardson, "Method in the History of Education," 48–64, for a general discussion of historical sources.
23. Ethical approval for this research was granted by the University of Sheffield Research Ethics Committee (School of Education), reference number 054931. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, including child participants and their parent or guardian, in accordance with institutional guidelines.
24. Scanlon, "Challenging the Imbalances of Power in Feminist Oral History," 639–645.
25. Isola, "Intergenerational Social Exclusion, Silences, and the Transformation of Agency"; Turner-King, "'Listen! We Have Something to Say!' Researching Collaborative Co-creation with Youth Using Oral History and Devising in a Disunited Kingdom," 47–66.
26. Henry, "Power, Politics, Possibilities," 89–99. See also Carter and Ellis. "Control, Resistance, and the Senses," 1–26 and Ellis and Carter. "School Meals Stories."
27. Laybourn, "The Issue of School Feeding in Bradford, 1904–1907," 30–8; National Archives "School Dinners"
28. Delamont, *Key Themes in the Ethnography of Education*; Earl, *Schools and Food Education in the 21st Century*; Lalli, "The School Restaurant," 48–57.
29. Letter from Dorothy R. Green (August 26, 1948). The National Archives (TNA) ED 50 490.
30. "School Meals" (correspondence), *The Woman Teacher* (November 26, 1948): 52.
31. For more of these letters see TNA ED 50 490.
32. Page and Sidebottom. "The Sensorium and Fleshy Schools," 773.
33. Inspection report for Ensham School, Wandsworth (November 20, 1946). TNA ED 123 304.
34. Survey by HM Inspectors on a Survey of the School Meals Service in Hampstead, Paddington, St Marylebone, St Pancras and Westminster between September 1964 and April 1965. TNA ED 123 473.
35. Return – Stand House County – n.d., c. 1955. TNA ED 123 398.
36. Letter from George Cowie to Martin Maddan, MP (March 5, 1958). TNA ED 50 742.
37. Statement by National Union of Women Teachers, "Education and the Social Services" (January 1946). TNA ED 50 488.
38. Alexander, Olsen and Vallgård. "Voices and Sources: Lessons from a History of Childhood."
39. [Laurissa], born 1963, Southport, interview with Isabelle Carter, October 6, 2023, SMS2-2023-10-06-a01.
40. [Lisa], born 1969, Leicester, interview with Isabelle Carter, December 8, 2023, SMS2-2023-12-08-a01.
41. [Angela], born 1956, Leicestershire, interview with Isabelle Carter, November 29, 2023, SMS2-2023-11-29-a01.
42. Ibid.
43. [Eve and Jordan], born 1958, Adelaide, Australia and 1963, London, respectively, interview with Isabelle Carter, February 13, 2024, SMS2-2024-02-13-a01.
44. [Dennis], born 1972, Peckham, interview with Isabelle Carter, December 13, 2023, SMS2-2023-12-13-a01.
45. [Joanne], born 1948, Birstall, near Leeds, interview with Isabelle Carter, 13 October 10, 2023 November 2023, SMS2-2023-11-10-a02.
46. [Lauren], born 1994, Bolton, interview with Isabelle Carter, September 27, 2023, SMS2-2023-09-27-a02.
47. [Ella], born 1992, Rotherham, interview with Isabelle Carter, October 4, 2023, SMS2-2023-10-04-a01.
48. By adopting the term "multisensory" we are proposing a multimodal approach to the senses, one that recognises the complex interplay between the embodied senses of touch, taste, hearing, vision and smell.
49. [Isaac], born 1983, Wortley, near Leeds, interview with Isabelle Carter, September 27, 2023, SMS2-2023-09-27-a01.

50. Oncini, “‘It’s the Noise of the Snacks!’ School Meals on the Fringes and Frail Food Pedagogies,” 1–22.
51. Primary schools in the UK educate children aged 4–11 years old.
52. [Mrs Rosser], deputy headteacher, Cardiff school, interview with Ellen Bishop, September 20, 2023.
53. Pike, “‘I Don’t Have to Listen to You! You’re Just a Dinner Lady!’: Power and Resistance at Lunchtimes in Primary Schools,” 275–287; Lalli, “Can Culinary Capital be (Re)produced in School?,” 125–142.
54. Sahota, Woodward, Molinari and Pike. “Factors Influencing Take-up of Free School Meals in Primary- and Secondary-School Children in England,” 1271–1279; Trofholz, Schulte and Berge, “How Parents Describe Picky Eating and Its Impact on Family Meals,” 36–43.
55. Oncini. “School Meals on the Fringes.”
56. [Fozia], parent/ mother, West Yorkshire school, interview conducted by year 6 pupils as part of a project outreach event, June 26, 2024.
57. UNICEF (2024), “How We Protect Children’s Rights with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.”
58. Oncini, “School Meals on the Fringes”; and Pike, “Power and Resistance.”
59. [Megan], female year 3/4 pupil, Cardiff school, focus group consisting of five pupils in year 3 and 4 with Ellen Bishop, September 20, 2023.
60. [Mrs Townsend], lunchtime supervisor and former teaching assistant, London school, interview with Ellen Bishop, June 29, 2023.
61. [Saffa], female year 6 pupil, West Yorkshire school, focus group consisting of eight year 6 pupils with Ellen Bishop, June 20, 2023.
62. [Mr Hassan], deputy headteacher, West Yorkshire school, interview with Ellen Bishop, June 19, 2023.
63. Lalli. *Schools, Food and Social Learning*.
64. Ibid., Andersen, Sidse Schoubye, Lotte Holm, and Charlotte Baarts. “School Meal Sociality or Lunch Pack Individualism? Using an Intervention Study to Compare the Social Impacts of School Meals and Packed Lunches from Home,” 394–416.
65. Pike. “Power and Resistance.”
66. Lalli, Gurbinder Singh. “A Review of the English School Meal: ‘progress or a recipe for disaster?’.” *Cambridge Journal of Education* 51.5 (2021): 627–639.
67. Lalli. *School Meals and Social Learning*. Andersen et al. “School Meal Sociability.”
68. Ethnographic fieldnotes written by Ellen Bishop, Cardiff school, September 18, 2023.
69. Oncini. “School Meals on the Fringes”; Pike. “Power and Resistance.”
70. Letter to James Callaghan from Elizabeth Paul (November 24, 1977). National Records of Scotland (NRS) ED 52/892.
71. See the reference to a report by the Ministry for National Insurance, “Circumstances of Families” (1966) in London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) ILEA/S/CS/10/025.
72. Quoted in Field, Frank. “Welfare in Action – A Child Poverty Action Group Report – Free School Meals: the Humiliation Continues”. November 1977. NRS ED 52/892.
73. Press advertisement copy, c. 1968’, NRS SOE 12/48.
74. Memo. “Draft for Sponsoring School Meals Leaflet” (December 8, 1967). NRS SOE 12/48.
75. Report. “Education Catering in the ILEA” (September 1987). LMA ILEA/S/CS/10/025.
76. Field, “Welfare in Action.”
77. Haapala, Perti, Minna Harjula and Heikki Kokko. “Introduction,” *Experiencing Society and the Lived Welfare State*, 1–14, 12.
78. Campbell, *Margaret Thatcher*, vol 1, 232.
79. Note of meeting at 10 Downing Street (October 15, 1979). TNA PREM 19/2648.
80. Prime Minister, note, (October 5, 1978). TNA PREM 19/2048.
81. Clarke, memo to prime minister, with handwritten note by prime minister (May 25, 1990). TNA PREM 19/2648.
82. Private office note to prime minister (June 14, 1990). TNA PREM 19/2648.

83. [Jim], born 1953, Bradford, interview with Isabelle Carter, October 4, 2023, SMS2-2023-10-04-a02.
84. [Jim] born 1953, Bradford, to Isabelle Carter, Email September 15, 2023.
85. [Frank], born 1950, Lambeth, interview with Isabelle Carter, February 15, 2024, SMS2-2024-02-15-a01.
86. [Mavis, Irene, Joyce], born late 1950s, Glasgow, interview with Isabelle Carter, Heather Ellis, Laura Newman, February 26, 2024, SMS2-2024-02-26-a01.
87. [Rachel], born 1970, Portsmouth, interview with Isabelle Carter, October 4, 2023, SMS2-2023-10-04-a03.
88. [Sarah], born 1977, Rotherham, interview with Isabelle Carter, February 19, 2024, SMS2-2024-02-19-a01.
89. [Naomi], born 1981, Birmingham, interview with Isabelle Carter, November 29, 2023, SMS2-2023-11-29-a02.
90. For more see < <https://www.parentpay.com/about-parentpay/> > (Accessed September 27, 2024).
91. Sahota et al. "Factors Influencing Take-up of Free School Meals in Primary- and Secondary-School Children in England."
92. [Mrs McCoy], principal teacher, Glasgow school, interview with Ellen Bishop, September 5, 2023. Classes are typically numbered differently in Scotland compared with England and Wales. Children in P1, or primary 1, are in the equivalent age group to those in reception elsewhere in the UK.
93. In England, FSMs are offered to children up to year 2. In Wales and London, all primary aged children are eligible for FSMs. In Scotland, children in P1–P5 are eligible. Outside of these age groups, some regions and schools across the UK may have their own policies and familial socio-economic conditions are also used to assess for FSM eligibility.
94. [Tasneem], female year 4/5 pupil, West Yorkshire school, focus group consisting of six pupils in year 4 and 5 with Ellen Bishop, June 20, 2023.
95. [Mrs Meredith], teaching assistant and lunchtime supervisor, Cardiff school, interview with Ellen Bishop, September 21, 2023.
96. Akihiro, Mizue, and Kyoko. "Preparing On-site School Lunches Improves Adolescents' Eating Habits," 263–273.
97. Hart, Caroline Saronjini and Abigail Page. "The Capability Approach and School Food Education and Culture in England: 'Gingerbread Men ain't Gonna Get Me Very Far'," 673–693.
98. [Bushra], parent/ mother, West Yorkshire school, interview with Ellen Bishop, June 22, 2023.
99. Goldthorpe, Epton, Keyworth, Calam, and Armitage. "Who Is Responsible for Keeping Children Healthy? A Qualitative Exploration of the Views of Children Aged 8–10 Years Old."
100. Jessiman, Carlisle, Breheny, Campbell, Jago, Robinson, Strong, and Kidger. "A Qualitative Process Evaluation of Universal Free School Meal Provision in Two London Secondary Schools."
101. CPAG (2024) "Learners Take Universal Free School Meal Call to the Scottish Parliament."
102. In the realm of healthcare policy see, for example, Arnold-Forster, Agnes, Michael Brown, and Alison Moulds, "Health, Policy, and Emotions," 389–393.

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