

# Cooking in the Classroom with Ms. Erica Lewis

by Sherilynn Johnson Kimble

If you are planning to start a cooking adventure with young children, this story may inspire your efforts. Cooking is a great way for children to build confidence, learn healthy habits, and become adventurous eaters. As children learn the importance of nourishing both body and mind, they become equipped with tools to lead healthier, more empowered lives.

The Caring Center was established in 1982, serving children 8 weeks to 10 years of age. The Center's holistic approach to early childhood development is the cornerstone of its learning objectives. The Center's commitment to fostering the well-being of the child's mind and body is demonstrated through its innovative and comprehensive food program, which helps children learn about and participate in the



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Sherilynn Johnson Kimble has more than 35 years of experience in education, administration, and management. She specializes in early childhood education, providing services as a trainer, consultant, mentor, coach, and technical assistant.

Johnson Kimble is a passionate leader always striving to empower others. She is president/CEO of The Kimble Group, LLC an educational consulting firm. Affiliated with First Up she serves as a senior consultant specifically leading the Action For Early Learning Initiative in partnership with Drexel University and Community and Partnerships

Johnson Kimble is an instructor for the child development associate certificate coursework, she also serves as a PD specialist for the Council of Professional Recognition. She served as an adjunct faculty member at Community College of Philadelphia and Rutgers's University.

Johnson Kimble served on the Professional Development Council of the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs. She has designed and facilitated an educational training series for parents and teachers and a Mentoring Project for Early Childhood Directors and Teachers. She has served and continues to serve on local boards dedicated to community service on women's and children's issues.



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process of growing, harvesting, and transforming fresh foods into healthy, delicious treats.

Ms. Erica has served The Caring Center community for 24 years as food service and hospitality manager, sharing her culinary passion with families and young children. In collaboration with local farmers, their animal friends and Philly's notable, beloved farmer, Ms. Jenny Dunkler, Ms. Erica leads children in learning about the origins of their food—exploring the sources of milk, eggs, and various meats, as well as the origins of staples such as rice, wheat, soybeans, and sugar.

In partnership with The Common Market, The Caring Center sources as much fresh produce and protein as possible from local farmers (including the delicious, local apples Ms. Erica used recently to make "Apple-pie-in-a-cup" with the children). And with the generous support of The Food Trust, Ms. Erica has worked to further expand children's access to fresh, local foods – by growing some herself in the Play Yard garden, strengthening relationships with local growers, and increasing physical capacity to prepare and serve fresh, local produce daily. The Food Trust has helped with financial and logistical support for things like kitchen equipment and cold storage, irrigation for the garden, and educational support from Ms. Natasha Bracewell (herself a former Caring Center teacher!), to help lead cooking classes and food tastings with the children and their families. And, via the MyHomePlateRx program (sponsored by CHOP), The Caring Center helps connect families to free local produce at farm stands and markets in their neighborhoods. These invaluable experiences and opportunities have enriched the children's understanding of their food and the world around them.

The Play Yard Garden gives school-age children an opportunity for hands-on exploration. Offering a beginner's guide to gardening activities, children learn the art of planting, nurturing, and harvesting the fruits of their labor, all connected with the cycle of growth and the cultivation of valuable skills. Ms. Erica helps the children develop responsibility and understanding as they learn to care for plants and soil. Together they see and study biologic principles, cause and effect, and environmental stewardship. The children develop math skills from counting, measuring, and calculating and patience from waiting, anticipating, and laboring. Finally, children experience self-confidence as they achieve their goals and enjoy eating and sharing the foods they have grown. Tomatoes, watermelons, herbs, and sweet potatoes are planted within the Play Yard Garden.

Preschool children love the hands-on activities such as washing fruits and vegetables, stirring ingredients, and making sandwiches. This pre-activity to cooking helps children connect to the foods they prepare, and find joy in the process.

Cooking in the classroom with Ms. Erica, has generated many favorite recipes, including a recent favorite enjoyed by infant and teenagers alike, her famous "Apple Pie in a Cup." ([www.kimlegrp.com/resources](http://www.kimlegrp.com/resources))

## ADVERTISING

The Caring Center has also become renowned for their Grab-n-Go cookies, for sale at the front desk for one dollar. Why cater to the local coffee shop when you can enjoy delicious, homemade breakfast treats from the onsite kitchen! We are thankful that this program has helped develop individual, hidden talents while supporting the community at the same time. Creative and artistic experiences like this make a lasting, delicious difference in the lives of children and their families. Thank you Ms. Erica, for providing such joy and learning.

During the pandemic Sherilynn along with members of AFEL (Action for Early Learning) created a 45-minute Virtual Classroom delivered through Zoom to families, children, and staff featuring Wellness Activities, STEAM/Science Activities, Cultural Moments, a Read Aloud, Yoga and Cooking with Ms. Erica. All activities are simple items found at home. Since April 2020 through June 2023, the Virtual Classroom Team has delivered more than 70 episodes, including 2 onsite at Smith Memorial Playground, the oldest public playground in the country. The teachers and children cook along with Ms. Erica during the session and share the cooking activity with families.

### RECIPE

#### Apple Pie in a Cup

##### Ingredients:

- Sliced Apples
- Graham Crackers
- Pinch of Cinnamon
- Whipped Cream on top
- Cup
- Zip Lock Bag
- Spoon

##### Directions:

1. Place Graham cracker in the Ziploc bag and pound into crumbs
2. Pour crumbs into cup
3. Cut apple into small pieces. Placing cup on top of graham crackers
4. Top with whip cream
5. Enjoy