Addressing Barriers to Dietary Variety by Boosting Conceptual knowledge about Food in Preschoolers

The rise of obesity in childhood is a concern in both Europe and North America. Among the factors contributing to the global epidemic of obesity, food neophobia, a propensity to avoid new foods, has been identified as an important psychological barrier to healthy eating at the preschool age. Prior work has demonstrated that food neophobia is associated with poor conceptual knowledge about the food domain in preschoolers, thus improving preschoolers’ cognitive comprehension of the food domain could boost their dietary variety. The general ambition of the BEETROOT project is to investigate preschoolers’ conceptual development in the food domain and how it underpins multiple facets of food behaviors. Eventually, we aim to design an evidence-based program capitalizing on preschoolers’ incipient knowledge about food to promote healthy eating behaviors. This project will set up an interdisciplinary collaboration between The Markman Lab at Stanford University and Lafraire’s Research Group in Cognitive Science at Institut Paul Bocuse Research Center, Lyon, France. The BEETROOT project thus provides a unique opportunity to merge the work independently conducted by both American and French research teams into a joint evidence-based food education intervention aiming at fostering dietary variety in preschoolers.