Food education: Bridging the gap between theory and practice

The quality of food provision in Scottish schools has improved but obesity and other diet-related illnesses are still on the increase. This paper describes some of the existing barriers that prevent food education becoming part of the core curriculum and looks at possible solutions.

I nitial studies argue that diet and physical activity patterns are two modifiable lifestyles that need to be influenced as soon as possible, targeting all and not just those who are already overweight.

**Confusion**

It has also been stated that confusion exists among local professionals to the point that they have become overwhelmed by the information. In many instances, food and health campaigns lack leadership and are not structured in a way that can be effective in addressing the challenges.

**Complex and challenging**

Schools are undertaking a wide range of initiatives to improve the health of their students, and the tendency to view food as simply a means to an end.

**Nourishment and health**

There has been increasing awareness of the important link between what children eat and how they learn.

Pre-nataly a mother's diet and nutritional balance during pregnancy can have long-term effects on her child. Rizzolo et al. (1964) have found strong evidence that nutritional problems during pregnancy have a lasting impact on children's physical and mental development. Children who are malnourished in the womb may have a higher risk of developing obesity later in life. It is crucial to address this issue at a young age in order to prevent the cycle of obesity from continuing.

Food education in schools should include topics such as healthy eating habits, portion control, and the importance of balance in a meal. Children need to be taught about the benefits of consuming a variety of foods from all food groups. This can be achieved through interactive lessons, role-play, and hands-on activities that allow students to explore different types of food and their nutritional value.

**Food education**

There is a need for food education at every stage of the curriculum to help raise awareness of the importance of food, which should be taught pre-nataly and beyond. Schools are witnessing a steep rise in the prevalence of obesity and related health conditions, with a significant increase in the number of children and adolescents who are overweight or obese. This is not only a health issue, but it also affects academic performance and can lead to social isolation.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, food education plays a crucial role in promoting healthy eating habits and combating the rising trends of obesity and related health issues. By integrating food education into the curriculum, teachers can help students develop a lifelong habit of making healthy food choices. This will contribute to a healthier and more vibrant community, promoting well-being and prosperity for future generations.
How do Scandinavian counties bridge the food education gap?

A comparative study into the eating habits of pupils in a school in Sweden and one in Scotland gives an insight into what children are eating daily on a basis in both countries (Ferri, 2004). It was clear from the results that young people in the school in Scotland had a tendency to snack throughout the day on crisps, sweets and fizzy drinks high in calories, sugar and salt.

The secondary curriculum in both Sweden and Scotland was also evaluated to establish whether or not it provided the knowledge and practical experience to enable pupils to make better food choices. The Swedish school included food education as part of the core curriculum for all year groups. Practical preparation was seen as a life skill and therefore an essential part of a pupil’s education.

In contrast, the school in Scotland included food skills as a small part of Home Economics in the first two years of secondary education.

Nordic lessons for Scotland to follow

Sweden

Most schools in Sweden, pupils are taught a curriculum, which includes lessons in core, subjects e.g. English, Maths and Science. The compulsory subject taught to all year groups are Domestics Subjects (Home Economics). It was evident that a high level of commitment exists at all levels in the pursuit of good health (Ferri, 2004). This commitment is based on the recognition that where health and well being are a top priority. This commitment to health has now become part of the culture of the country. Sweden expects good health and good care in contrast.

In Scotland, the absence of health education has seen results in significantly more obesity in young people, particularly young girls. The absence of health education and in particular, the lack of food education in secondary school is a major gap in our understanding of how young people can make healthy food choices.

Recent Research: Young Children and physical activity, obesity, the BML, central fat mass, the Activity Hypothesis, diet and gym membership.

Research by Professors Wilkins and colleagues supported the findings of the ‘Activity Hypothesis’ (activity of children following a set point that is individual to the child). Wilkins and colleagues hypothesised that an intervention of thirty-minute sessions per week of enhanced activity would result in reduced body fat.


Conclusions

The key objective of this paper is the inclusion of food education nutrition and food preparation skills on the core curriculum in every stage of secondary school education.

Highlighted how Nordic counties with good nutritional health and education in schools can only strengthen the case for a more realistic approach to developing those life skills within an educational setting.

The evidence presented and the proposals made in the study indicate that diet-related illness in young people in Scotland must encourage the Scottish Executive to provide funding to put those measures into practice in schools.

The way forward is to adopt a holistic or comprehensive approach, that involves changing food habits and providing food education to Swedish schools, which incorporates basic food preparation skills, as part of the core curriculum. The Scottish Executive in Scotland (2004). These practices should be embedded into an educational setting so that it becomes a natural part of life training for young people.

The key to changing the attitude and behavior of our children so that they can make informed decisions about the foods they eat is to expand Home Economics so that it becomes an essential component of the curriculum. Extra time is devoted to food preparation skills for every year group in the secondary section.


The intervention group

The intervention group were involved in an enhanced physical activity programme in nursery school. This consisted of these three minute sessions a week for 24 weeks. The group also received home based health education aimed at increasing physical activity through play and reducing sedentary behaviours. Earlier research showed that pre-school children in Glasgow typically spend around 80% of their waking time sedentary, i.e. with no trunk movement, and less than 30 minutes in moderate-vigorous physical activity.

Conclusion

In relation to the October research, Professor Ferri and colleagues concluded that physical activity can significantly improve motor skills but did not reduce body mass index in young children in this trial.

Responses to the research

The study has generated a great deal of interest and concern about the body mass index (BMI) measurements used in children and young people. The BMI is a simple measure using height and weight which is often used to assess a person’s physique


References


