

Food Mythbusters for Kids - Proposal Report

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Introduction

The aim of our project is to support the Gordon Neighborhood House (GNH) in helping increase the food literacy skills of children in the downtown Vancouver area. The GNH offers a variety of programs that incorporate food, which they believe can act as an outlet for community-building and bringing people together. They follow a set of principles they call their 'Food Philosophy', and we have chosen to focus the aim of our project on their dedications to working toward increased access to food for those who are nutritionally vulnerable and to providing opportunities for increased food literacy (GordonHouse.org, 2017).

Significance

An article published in the Journal of Nutrition Education and Behaviour stated that only 3% of Australian children aged 4 to 8 are consuming adequate vegetables in their diet (Whiteley & Matwiejczyk, 2015). Since Australians and Canadians have similar socio economic status (NationMaster), we are interpreting this statistic to show a lack of food security the Australian children, and assuming this will also prove true of the children attending GNH. In an attempt to improve food literacy skills in children, and in turn improve this statistic, a program was developed and implemented in Adelaide, Australia in 2011 and 2012. This program, Veggie Fun For Everyone, encouraged children to eat a variety of vegetables, and in turn develop a more positive attitude towards vegetables. Each week, children were taught about 3 new vegetables and they were able to bring the vegetables home, along with recipes containing these vegetables that they were able to share with their families. To introduce the vegetables, this program focused on sensory experiences, creativity, and taste. This program focused on teaching children that "eating vegetables builds healthy bodies, makes them strong, and gives them energy to play" (Whiteley & Matwiejczyk, 2015).

By implementing a similar program using the concept of sensory experiences and creativity, we hope to engage children in the after school program in 2 interactive workshops involving cooking and food-science. We hope to use this concept of sensory experiences in learning to teach the children about food security and food literacy through cooking. In our workshop, we hope to incorporate new foods that the children have not previously been exposed to, as well as teach the children why it is so important to choose healthy food. With better food literacy should come a better understanding of nutrition, and overall improved health. Our definition of food literacy includes understanding the impact of food choices on the environment and the economy (Cullen et al., 2015). We will be focusing mainly on the impacts of their food choices on their bodies.

We hope to directly address some of the major gaps related to food security, food literacy, and knowledge about food science that impact the children at the GNH. As we are unaware of the details of our participants individual health and food security status, it is a challenge to determine the best approach for this group of children, in order to maximize long term benefits. But we know that in a Food Action Initiative Plan made for Vancouver Coastal health it stated that 22% of children from low income homes in Vancouver experience food insecurity (Kurbis, et al., 2006). This statistic shows us that food insecurity is an issue in Vancouver that needs to be addressed, especially with children, and that the achievement of food security is identified as being an ongoing challenge (GNH, 2014). GNH provides a multitude of services, with a primary focus on those emphasizing food security and diet (GNH, 2014). Because of this emphasis it can be assumed that a gap in food security does exist in the West End of Vancouver, and thus

amongst our target demographic. Additionally, we want to be able to introduce the idea of a healthy lifestyle as a goal for everyone. As the kids vary in age, we do not know the extent of their individual knowledge regarding food literacy and whether they are aware of the impact their food choices make on their health. The living standard of each child is unknown so we must approach the children with methods that will be optimal for everyone that they can apply with their own families. We are aware most of the kids come from single parent homes and could not be eating nutritionally adequate meals at home due to a variety of reasons. Therefore, our goal is to be able to apply basic food science principles that will provide a fun learning experience with children that will aid them in making a conscious decision about their food choices. We want to help build a sound skillset that is practical and cost friendly, so the children can implement these in their daily lives and even teach friends and family. We are hopeful that our workshops will work to help close these gaps in the community.

Objectives + Inquiry Questions

Our objective is to increase food literacy amongst the children attending the GNH After School Care Program. We will do this through planning and executing engaging food-science themed workshops for kids ages 5-10 who attend the program. The demographic of children we will be working with come from lower income, and some single parent families (City of Vancouver, 2012). Our intention is not only expose children to engaging food science experiments, but additionally to help them to develop a solid base of cooking skills. We hope that the skills the children gain from our workshops are utilized in their everyday lives. This will not only address food literacy, but their future abilities to promote food security within the community. This project will address the ability of these children to retain and apply food literacy skills learned in after school programs, specifically are recipes learned in the program being used at home? Does exposure to a variety of healthy food options increase amount of consumption of those healthy foods by children? The answers to these questions will be obtained predominantly through both qualitative and quantitative observation and survey, to be discussed further in methodology.

Methods

Our methods will include conducting 2 workshops with the children at Gordon Neighbourhood House and 1-2 of their staff members. During these workshops, we will try to increase the food literacy skills of the children through conducting food science experiments, as well as introducing some basic cooking skills. We will monitor their increase in food literacy through an informal interview process, whereby children are asked to respond to questions about workshop teachings to determine how much information they retain from session to session. We will record these responses and qualitatively analyze and categorize them to come to a conclusion on their learnt food literacy skills. Children will also respond through a show of hands if they utilized a recipe at home, and/or if they felt comfortable teaching and cooking the experiment with a family member. Ethical considerations would be the use of non-triggering language, awareness and sensitivity towards differing family situations (same sex parents, single parent households, potential abusive situations). No assumptions about the nature of each individual child's familial relationships shall be made. As a REB review will not take place, it is our responsibility to ensure participants are not exposed to unnecessary or avoidable risks, as a whole our programs potential benefits outweigh any foreseeable risk, and that our research proceeds in accordance with the core principles of TCPS (CIHR, 2010).

Budget

Our budget has yet to be determined, as we are still in the process of planning the activities and experiments to be performed in the program. However, we do know that there are resources available to us at the GNH that we will be able to use, which should cut our overall costs down.

References

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