

Evaluating youth food literacy development through a cooking program utilising photovoice methodology

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Background:

Adolescence is a time where dietary patterns are developed to support lifelong healthy food habits. Secondary schools provide an accessible platform for fostering healthy dietary behaviours among students, with food literacy education being vital for promoting food literacy knowledge, skills, and behaviours. However, a comprehensive understanding of student engagement with food literacy education is lacking in the literature. This study explores 1) the food literacy knowledge, skills and behaviour secondary students develop during a six-week cooking program integrated into the class curriculum and 2) Photovoice as a food literacy evaluation method.

Methods:

Employing a mixed methods design, the study evaluated secondary school student food literacy development (n=11) on the Gold Coast through a six-week cooking program. Utilising Photovoice methodology, participant pre and post surveys and reflections from the cooking program facilitator, the study explored participant food literacy experiences and perceptions. Thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo software to analyse and triangulate data to develop themes.

Results:

Eleven participants completed the cooking program: with six participants completing both pre and post surveys. Ninety-three images and six weekly facilitator reflections were captured over the six-week program. Thematic analysis yielded three themes (1) Developing self-efficacy and confidence, describing participants believing in their own cooking skills ability and their capacity to prepare meals, (2) Developing learning behaviours, describing the implementation of food literacy knowledge and skills and (3) Uniting and connecting with others, where participants gained food literacy knowledge and self-efficacy through social connection and engaging collaboratively. Photovoice evaluation was deemed a useful participatory evaluation tool, illustrating participants food literacy development.

Conclusion:

This study highlights the importance of youth active participation and self-determination for food literacy development. Photovoice was a valuable tool for evaluating youth experiences. Experiential learning approaches and social connections appear essential for fostering long-term food literacy development in secondary schools.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

None

Biography presenting author

Louise van Herwerden, PhD, is an Assistant Professor and public health nutritionist specialising in youth nutrition and participatory research. Her work explores food literacy development in secondary schools. She leads national initiatives to enhance holistic care with youth, through innovative methodologies, including photovoice and community-based cooking programs.