



Adding to Food Literacy?

Primary teachers' perspectives on food education in the curriculum

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Background: Defining Food Literacy

‘Food literacy is the scaffolding that empowers individuals, households, communities or nations to **protect diet quality through change** and **strengthen dietary resilience** over time. It is composed of a collection of inter-related knowledge skills and behaviours required to **plan, manage, select, prepare** and **eat** food to meet needs and determine intake’

(Vidgen & Gallegos, 2014)

‘Food literacy is the capacity of an individual to **obtain, interpret and understand** basic food and nutrition information and services as well as the **competence** to use that information and available services that are health enhancing’

(Government of South Australia, 2010)

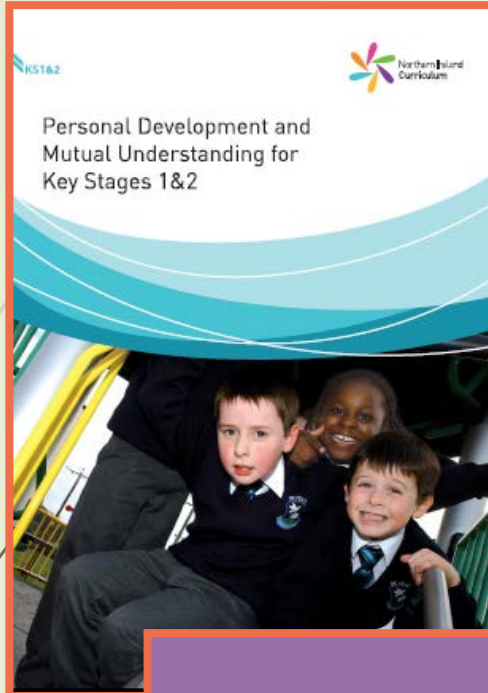
Background : Healthy Eating and Children

- It is important to establish healthy eating in early life (*WCRF, 2015*)
- The eating habits of children on the Island of Ireland (IoI) are less than desirable
- Schools are an ideal setting to promote nutrition and develop a positive attitude towards food (*FAO, 2015*)
- Formal education (the school curriculum) plays a key role in developing food literacy among young people (*Pendergast et al., 2011*)
- Food literacy is encompassed within the primary curriculum in both Northern Ireland (NI) and the Republic of Ireland (RoI)



NI Curriculum:

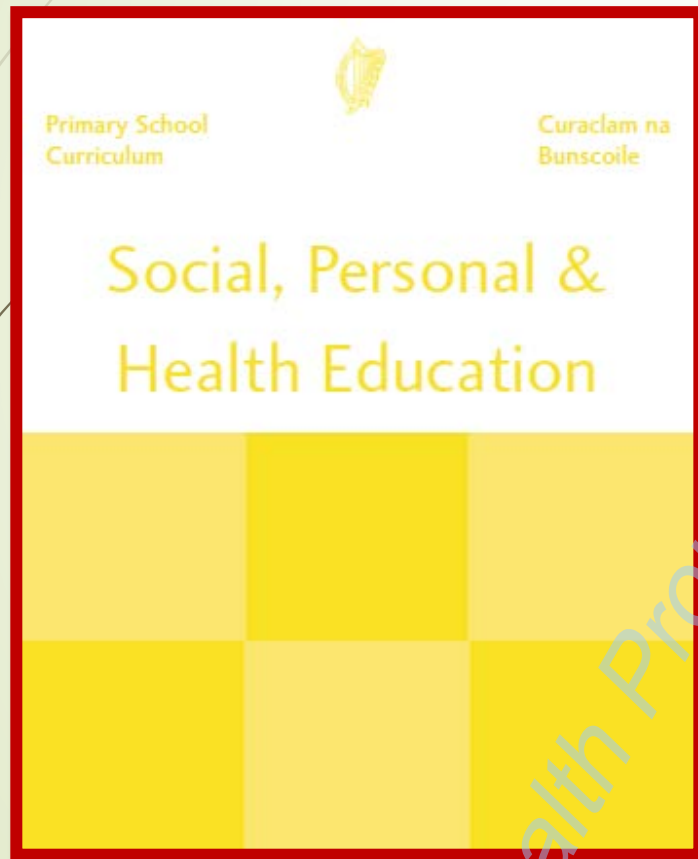
Personal Development & Mutual Understanding (PDMU)



- One of 6 areas of learning
- Implemented 2007/08
- Delivered through 2 interconnected strands:
 - 1) *Personal Understanding & Health*
 - 2) *Mutual Understanding in the Local & Wider Community*
- 'Health, Growth & Change' is one of 9 themes of PDMU, and is covered at all stages of primary

RoI Curriculum:

Social, Personal & Health Education (SPHE)



- One of 6 areas of learning of RoI primary curriculum
- Implemented in schools 2003/04
- 3 strands: *Myself, Myself & Others, Myself & the Wider World*
- Food, Nutrition & Healthy Eating is covered in *Myself* strand in the section "Taking Care of My Body"
- Developmental & Spiral approach over 8 years of primary schooling

Aim:

This lol study investigated the perceptions, knowledge, attitudes and experiences of Primary School Teachers in their teaching of healthy eating and food related issues

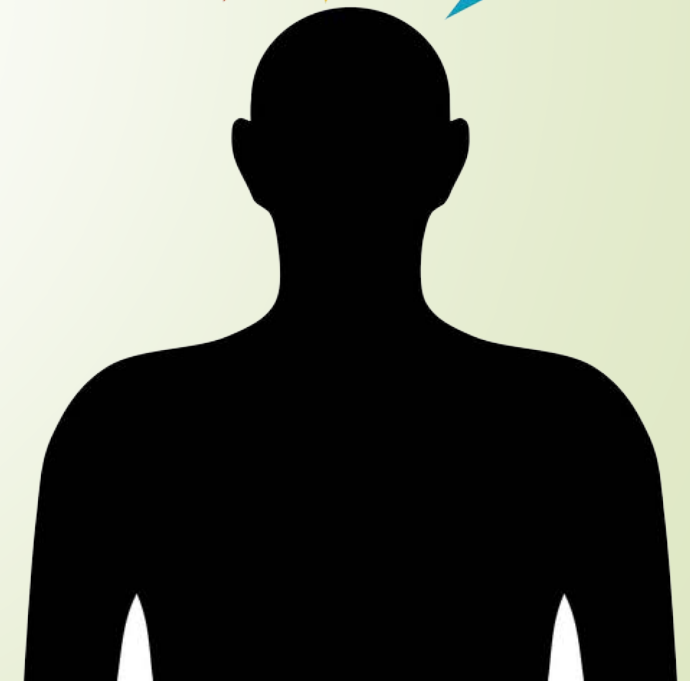
Objectives

- comparative study of nutrition education
- how the syllabus translates into practice in the classrooms
- teachers' experiences of teaching healthy eating and nutrition
- supports required by teachers for enhanced teaching and learning of food and nutrition



Methodology

- Mixed method approach
- Questionnaires (n=162) were completed by primary teachers across the Iol
- Snowball sampling
- Data Analysis: SPSS Version:17
- Follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with primary school teachers in both NI (n=5) and the Rol (n=5) to obtain a more in-depth account of teachers' experiences.



Results

Teachers' Knowledge vs Self-Efficacy

- ▶ 14% (n= 22) of Teachers rated their personal knowledge of food issues as "Excellent" & 57.5% (n=92) rated it as "Very Good"
- ▶ However, the majority (67% n= 105) rated their experiences of teaching food issues as "Moderate"
- ▶ Many (n=67) teachers are relying on their initial teacher training for their subject knowledge of the food & nutrition component

*With initial teacher training I have to be honest, I don't know how much focus is put on nutrition. I think teachers at that stage are more concerned with learning the literacy, the numeracy, the basics, all the pedagogy and possibly it isn't until that it becomes a bit more embedded that you think how you can do that creatively and address nutrition (**Interview NI 4**)*

Results

School Policy & Practice

- The majority (93% n=148) of schools had a Healthy Eating Policy in place but very few (25% n=40) had funding to support the delivery of the Policy
- Similarly qualitative comments indicated that having healthy eating formalised in the curriculum had heightened awareness of the issue in the wider school environment

"I think its more focused on when they start school. Its not focused on as much as they go up the school because its expected of the parents that they understand the rules and regulations because its been implemented that much and pushed on them from junior infants on but its not pushed as much as they go up the school, definitely not"

(Interview ROI 1)

Results

Teaching & Learning

- The majority (75% n=118) of teachers stated that the food, nutrition and healthy eating elements of the curriculum were very relevant to the lives of their students
- 70% (n=110) of the teachers used Active Learning Methodologies in the teaching of food, nutrition and healthy eating
- Most of the schools (76% n=120) have taken part in a nutrition intervention such as "Food Dudes" or "Incredible Edibles"

"very important skills and knowledge are taught in a fun way with positive incentives" (RoI T44)

Results

Resources & Support

- 76% (n=120) of the teachers did not have a specific textbook or teaching resource pack for teaching food, healthy eating and nutrition issues
- Approximately half (49% n=77) of teachers had the opportunity to execute food practical sessions with students in the classroom setting. However, it was apparent that due to lack of cooking facilities these sessions were limited in scope

"last year we did a salad day because we had grown lettuce, scallions and tomatoes in the school tunnel" (Interview Rol 4)



Conclusions

- Because of the changing nature of nutritional information more on-going professional development is required
- Due to the lack of prescribed textbooks primary teachers require Subject Specific Resources
- To enhance effectiveness of the teaching of this area it would be beneficial to provide primary schools with cooking facilities
- New interventions that promote food literacy are urgently needed
- For these interventions to be successful funding, facilities and detailed educational resources will also be required

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