

Pupils brainstorming about food

CASE STORY

Young Minds: Pupils brainstorming about food and nutrition in a virtual classroom

Venka Simovska, 2002

Classes from four European countries, Denmark, the Czech Republic, Scotland and the Netherlands, took part in the Young Minds project, in which ICT and the Internet were used as a communication and collaboration platform for pupils and teachers to work with different health issues*. The main approach employed in the project was the IVAC approach: Investigation, Vision, Action and Change.

In each class, the project work started with a brainstorming session, with the aim of enabling the pupils to operationalise and outline the overall issue, identify specific aspects of it, prioritise these aspects and select a few to be explored in greater detail.

Below is the summary of the pupils' brainstorming session in the four classes, which provided the basis for them to plan further investigation, vision, action and change as part of the school project. The brainstorming reflects the multidimensional concept of health, also suggested for the Shape Up approach.

Summary of the brainstorming session in Denmark, the Czech Republic, Scotland and the Netherlands

1. Food and nutrition

- What is healthy eating?
- What the human body needs
- Food advice

2. Production of food

- Diseases such as salmonella
- Animal welfare
- Food additives

3. Food and culture

- Habits and traditions of each country
- Junk food and fast food
- Food in the family

4. Food and social life

- Media and advertisements
- Eating disorders
- Obesity and the ideal body

5. Food and environment

- Sustainability
- Ecology

6. Aesthetics and food

- Does it matter how the meal looks?
- The importance of good ingredients
- A well-set table; how does it look?

7. Food at school

- The school canteen or buffet
- Do we have to eat to learn better?
- What does school teach us about food?

* JENSEN and SIMOVSKA, 2005.



The pupils mainly focused on the social and cultural aspects related to food and nutrition, for example, they discussed a typical Scottish or Czech meal, traditions in terms of diet related to different holidays, the changing cultural customs over time, and predominant eating patterns in families.

Later in the project, pupils used a variety of **investigation** methods to explore these aspects, such as surveys and questionnaires, interviews with experts in the local community, as well as cross-cultural interviews, personal narratives and essays.

Then, following the IVAC participatory structure, they developed **visions** about the possible future alternatives (e.g. an ideal school canteen, a dream menu, an alternative food pyramid, pupils in charge of the school cafeteria, etc.).

Last but not the least, the pupils, guided by their teachers, developed action plans and took actions to bring about positive **changes** in relation to the problems they had identified in their investigations.

The idea of these actions was to bring the reality closer to the pupils' visions. Examples of actions include establishing a breakfast club with healthy breakfast in one of the schools; an interview with the mayor in the local community of the other school and lobbying for a policy to introduce canteens in every school in the municipality; the presentation of a joint alternative food pyramid to policy makers at a conference organised by the Council of Europe entitled "Eating at school - making healthy choices", in Strasbourg, France**.

The research linked to the project showed that one of the important project outcomes was that the pupils gained more comprehensive knowledge about health and nutrition, as well as a sense of ownership and empowerment in relation to health and wellbeing. Pupils learnt not only factual knowledge about what is healthy and what is not, but reflected on a broader concept of health, food and culture, and developed skills, competence and motivation to do something, together with others, to improve the conditions for healthy eating in their schools/communities/societies.



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Young Minds-Netherlands focusing of health: Things that Dutch students find the most important about meal: 1) Taste. 2) Eating in social environment. 3) Vegetarian or biological food. 4) Healthy food, etc.

** See *Alternative food pyramid*, case story, on page 61.

Use the casestory's topics as a frame for discussion in a group of children:

1. Food and nutrition
2. Production of food
3. Food and culture
4. Food and social life
5. Food and environment
6. Aesthetics and food
7. Food and school

It is important that the teachers facilitate the discussion and guide the children to develop action plans and to take action.