“A multiliteracies approach to adolescent nutrition education”

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At the core of education is the need to provide students with the skills and capabilities to construct meaning and knowledge, and thus successfully navigate life. Literacy pedagogy has traditionally been seen to play a key role in achieving this. However, its value in today’s 21st century has been questioned due to its heavy reliance on teaching learning through reading and writing in a monolingual and monocultural manner (Barry, Haynes, Muller & Peters, 2015; The New London Group, 1996). With the expansion of globalised societies, a growing presence of information and communication technologies and the influence of these on student learning processes, the notion of a ‘pedagogy of multiliteracies’ was coined by the New London Group in 1996.

Multiliteracies refers to a “type of pedagogy that acknowledges the need for a broad view of literacy” (Henderson, 2016, p. 22) and integrates consideration of a wide range of text types, including multimodals and hybrid texts. In recent years, several frameworks have been conceived which integrate a multiliteracies approach, due their capacity to challenge traditional pedagogies and how students engage with the learning process. However, little is known on how such multiliteracy frameworks can be adapted to a nutrition education context to facilitate student learning.

Current Australian research has investigated this area and developed a multiliteracies based nutrition education lesson planning framework relevant to the early adolescent years. A generic qualitative research approach was employed throughout this project and comprised of three sequential phases. The first phase involved an extensive literature review, establishment of a project reference group and qualitative protocol development. The second phase included a series of student focus groups (n=59) and teacher interviews (n=10) across six Western Australian non-government schools. Using thematic data analysis, focus group and interview transcripts were analysed which resulted in the development of a series of interconnected key themes. These data analyses, coupled with literature review findings, informed phase three; the development of the framework. This framework was then reviewed and refined by the project reference group and led to the finalised Multiliteracies approach, Engagement focused, Adolescent specific Lesson planning (MEAL) framework.

The MEAL framework is the first of its kind and contributes to public health and education research by connecting three distinct yet interrelated research areas—pedagogy, engagement and nutrition education. Specifically, the MEAL framework embeds the concept of a multiliteracies pedagogical approach. The pivotal focus on ensuring the MEAL framework is practical, aligns with the Western Australian curriculum, integrates current education research and was informed by both Western Australian teachers and students means it will provide teachers with the confidence in knowing their developed nutrition education lessons are relevant and engaging to students. Moreover, through the implementation of the MEAL
framework, teachers have the capacity to contribute towards a positive change in how nutrition education is planned and delivered in the contemporary school environment and contribute to the overall health and wellbeing of adolescents.

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Further reading