

Balancing diets: diverse values shaping sustainable food choices

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Abstract

Purpose – The paper aims to explore how values and knowledge are expressed in student's discussions about food and health.

Design/methodology/approach – Food practices present a complex phenomenon extending beyond biomedical descriptions, including social dynamics of food in families and communities. Contextual conditions of social groups and settings have significant impacts on food choices and practices. Although values constitute a central part of educational goals, deliberate values education remains an often-neglected area, with a tendency in both curricula and educational practice to focus on knowledge and overlook how values intersect with knowledge. The paper utilises group interviews supported by participant observations to study the food and health practices as expressed in students' discussions.

Findings – The paper's findings show how values are expressed together with knowledge as value knowledges around food and health within the social contexts of family, cultural identities and peer relationships. While moving through their lives, students draw on and utilise biomedical, social-cultural and sensory value-knowledges, simultaneously considering the nutrition and taste of foods, the value of connecting with family and peers in cultural settings as well as getting enough food to feel satiated.

Originality/value – The paper presents an original approach around the necessity to consider and integrate cultural identities in discussions and education about food and health to empower students and their communities in a way that is socially just and equitable. This involves shifting discussions of health education away from students as (ir)rational obstacles but rather as partners in co-creating knowledge for sustainable food and health equity.

Keywords: Health education, Education for sustainable development, Social change, Global health, Environmental health