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Challenging media messages

Strand

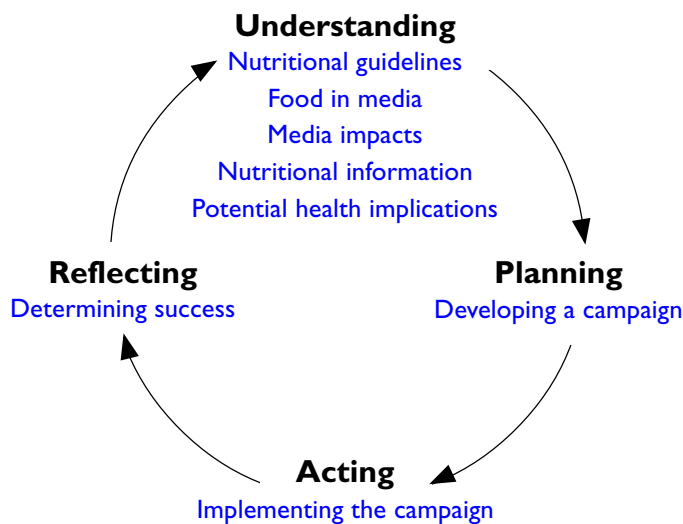
Promoting the Health of Individuals and Communities

Purpose

Students consider the media techniques that influence people's choice of food products, and determine the extent to which personal dietary behaviours are influenced. They also consider what part the media play in delivering nutrition-related health promotion messages. Using this knowledge students work collaboratively to critically analyse media messages. They develop a community campaign to challenge those media influences that may have a negative impact on food choices or support those that have a positive impact.

Overview of activities

Activities in this module are based on a learner-centred approach with an emphasis on decision making and problem solving. As the following diagram shows, activities are sequenced in **understanding**, **planning**, **acting** and **reflecting** phases.



Core learning outcome

Promoting the Health of Individuals and Communities

This module focuses on the following core learning outcome from the Years 1 to 10 Health and Physical Education Syllabus:

5.2 Students devise and implement for themselves and others health-promoting strategies which recognise the influence of a range of factors on personal dietary behaviours, now and in the future.

Core content

Promoting the Health of Individuals and Communities

This module incorporates the following core content from the syllabus:

- factors influencing health, specifically nutrition and society and culture;
- relationship between food, growth and development and health, particularly choosing nutritious foods;
- strategies to promote personal and community health.

Assessment strategy

Promoting the Health of Individuals and Communities 5.2

The following are examples of assessment tasks that provide opportunities for students to demonstrate the core learning outcome identified in this module:

- **Students develop and implement a community campaign either challenging media influences that may have a negative impact on short- and long-term dietary-related health behaviours, or reinforcing media influences that have a positive impact on short- or long-term diet-related health behaviours. They prepare a report to accompany their campaign, outlining how they made use of the data collected.**
 - Can the student explain reasons why the media are factors in influencing personal dietary behaviours?
 - Can the student devise and implement a strategy for promoting short- and long-term health that recognises the influence of the media on personal dietary behaviours?

Background information

Focus of module

The outcome that is the focus for this module requires students to ‘recognise the influence of a range of factors on personal dietary behaviours, now and in the future’. This module explores only one type of factor — the media.

The media and our eating habits

Medical reports noting high levels of cholesterol and other fats, sodium and sugars in Australian diets and the increasing range of diet-related health problems have been well documented. While food technology, changing family structures, time, personal preference, food availability and cultural influences are some of the factors that have had an impact on our personal dietary behaviours, so too have the media. The media are a powerful influence on personal dietary behaviours, both positively and negatively, whether through advertising or providing role models. It is important that students understand the ways in which the media influence dietary behaviours, and develop skills to critically analyse and, where necessary, challenge media messages.

This module is based on the premise that students have a previous understanding of dietary behaviours and how they are affected by multiple influences, including the media. It is also based on an assumed student knowledge of the *Dietary Guidelines for Australians* (NHMRC 1995) as parameters for healthy eating.

Terminology

Activities in this module involve use of the following language in the context of Health and Physical Education:

advertisements	medium, media
diet	nutritional value
food choices	personal dietary behaviours
marketing	target audience

School authority policies

Teachers need to be aware of and observe school authority policies that may be relevant to this module.

Social justice principles

This module provides opportunities for students to increase their understanding and appreciation of supportive environments. It includes activities that encourage students to challenge or support media messages that are health promoting.

Students with disabilities or learning difficulties may require some activities to be modified to optimise both their participation and their ability to demonstrate the outcomes. Teachers should consult with parents/carers and specialist support staff to determine whether modification is necessary.

Support materials and references

Advertising Federation of Australia 1996, *Advertising the Hard Facts, Not the Hard Sell*, Media Council of Australia, North Sydney.

Davis, D. & Butler, T. 1996, *Health and Physical Education, Book 2*, Macmillan Education Australia, South Melbourne.

Eshuys, J., Guest, V., Lennox, R. & Wilkinson, S. 1998, *Getting it Together 2: Australian Health and Physical Education*, Universal Publishing, Noosaville, Queensland.

McLennan, W. & Podger, A. 1997, *National Nutrition Survey: Selected Highlights Australia 1995*, cat. no. 4802.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.

National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 1995, *Dietary Guidelines for Australians*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.

National Nutrition Education in Schools Project 1996, *Food and Nutrition in Action*, Curriculum Corporation, Melbourne.

Smith, B. & Schmerlaib, Y. 1994, *Food Power*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne.

Activities

Understanding

NUTRITIONAL GUIDELINES

Recalling guidelines for healthy eating and investigating how eating habits of the Australian population compare with those guidelines

- ▶ Students recall the *Dietary Guidelines for Australians* (NHMRC 1995) as a basis for healthy food choices and identify those of particular significance for adolescents.
- ▶ Students examine data from the *National Nutrition Survey 1995* (McLennan & Podger 1997) to determine the food patterns of Australians and compare these patterns with those set out in the *Dietary Guidelines for Australians*. They hypothesise the reasons why there might be inconsistencies.

FOOD IN MEDIA

Identifying how food is portrayed in media

- ▶ Students recall influences on food choices and identify those that come under the banner of 'media'.

Teaching considerations

Influences on food choices could include media, culture, preference, affordability. It will be necessary to define the nature and scope of the terms *medium* and *media* to include magazines, newspapers, billboards and cinema as well as radio and television.

- ▶ Students view a videotaped segment of a popular teenage television drama where food is being eaten.

Focus questions could include:

- How is food used in the segment?
- What messages are portrayed in the segment?
- What other food messages have you seen portrayed in television programs?

- ▶ Students recall jingles used in television advertisements for food products. They analyse the advertisements using criteria such as information conveyed, images presented and effectiveness and memorability of the jingle, and present their analysis to the class.

Focus questions could include:

- What makes you remember the advertisement?
- Which foods are the ones you most often remember the advertisements for?
- What does the advertisement tell you about when and where the food is consumed?
- Does the advertisement motivate you to try the product? Why?

▶ Students investigate other media forms for food-related messages, how these messages are presented and at what audience they are targeted.

Focus questions could include:

- Which food products do you recall being advertised frequently?
- Who are the advertisements aimed at? How do you know this?
- How might these messages influence food choices and health?
- What media forms (for example, television, billboards, magazines) have you seen that have been used to advertise this product?

▶ Students brainstorm the purposes of food-related advertising in the media, and discuss class suggestions.

Focus questions could include:

- What are some of the purposes of advertising?
- Why are some products advertised at certain times, in certain places or on certain programs more than other times, places and programs?
- What impact does advertising have on food-related health behaviour?

Teaching consideration

Media messages aim to:

- promote product sales;
 - persuade consumers to buy new products;
 - inform consumers of new products, new uses or new styles.
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MEDIA IMPACTS

Evaluating the potential impacts of media messages on dietary behaviours and health

▶ Students reflect on occasions when the media have influenced their food choices. They complete and discuss sentences such as: ‘The times that I have purchased or eaten a food product after seeing it promoted in the media are . . .’

▶ Students discuss their response statements related to the media and food. For example:

- Television ‘soapies’ promote good food habits in teenagers.
- Television advertisements encourage good food habits in teenagers.
- Magazines aimed at young girls encourage good food habits.

Focus questions could include:

- Do you agree or disagree with the statement? Why?

Teaching considerations

Most students at this point are hypothesising — they are unlikely to know the answers. They should be aware that they will be given an opportunity to explore these issues more fully in the experiences that follow.

This activity could be done by students indicating their position along a continuum from ‘agree’ to ‘disagree’ and then justifying their position.

► In small groups, students select a target market they believe to be the object of food-related advertising — for example, children, teenagers, mothers. They collect data to identify the most heavily promoted foods for this market (for example, television or magazine advertisements, or foods eaten in television ‘soapies’) and predict their impact on health.

Focus questions could include:

- Which foods are most heavily targeted for this group? Why?
- What influence might this advertising have on the dietary behaviours and consequent health of the target group?

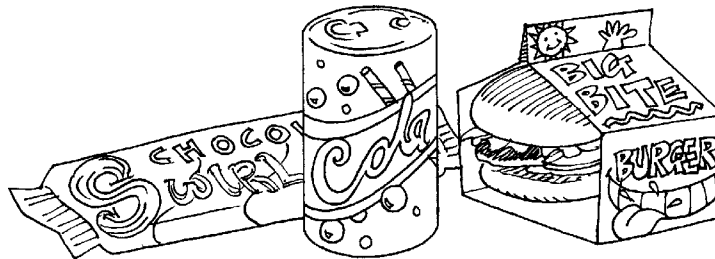
Teaching consideration

Messages that are supportive of the dietary guidelines can be found in the media. For example, one research study showed that the food messages in the television program ‘Home and Away’ were generally health promoting with the exception of snack food. It is important that students recognise the value of the media in supporting health-promotion messages as well as in promoting behaviours that run counter to good health.

► Students determine the relationship of heavily advertised products to healthy eating guidelines — for example, the Healthy Eating Pyramid, *Dietary Guidelines for Australians*.

Focus questions could include:

- Which food group(s) are most heavily advertised?
- What target groups are these products aimed at?
- What recommendations are made in the *Dietary Guidelines for Australians* or the Healthy Eating Pyramid in relation to this food group? Why?



► Students survey the target market to find out the popularity of the advertisements for these heavily promoted foods, and the popularity of the foods themselves.

Focus questions could include:

- Who is the target market?
- What techniques are used to advertise the product?
- How effective are the advertisements in encouraging you to purchase the product?

Teaching consideration

Students may not have the expertise to develop a survey. It may be appropriate to develop one as a class that the students could then administer in small groups.

► Students draw conclusions about the relationship between the popularity of advertisements and the popularity of the food in the diet of the target market.

Focus questions could include:

- What were the most popular advertisements?
- What are the most popular foods eaten?
- What does this tell you about the effectiveness of the advertisement?
- What is the impact of advertising on food habits of the target market in the short term? In the long term?
- How do the most popular advertisements compare with the *Dietary Guidelines for Australians*?

Teaching considerations

Highly processed foods which are often low in fibre and high in fats and sugars are the most profitable for manufacturers and hence the most heavily advertised. Products like fruit and vegetables have a low profit margin and producers often cannot afford to advertise them.

Advertising for highly processed foods (that is, the 'eat least' ones in the Healthy Eating Pyramid) are often targeted at school-aged children and adolescents.

► Students examine a range of articles that discuss the impact of the media on personal dietary behaviours and compare the results of their own survey with the information in the articles.

Focus questions could include:

- Is the information presented in the articles consistent with class findings? Why?

Teaching consideration

A range of articles could be gathered from sources such as newspapers, journals, the Internet and magazines.

NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION

Analysing media messages to determine nutritional information

► Students identify popular food advertisements and analyse the nature of media messages and the nutritional information provided.

Focus questions could include:

- Who is the target audience?
- Which messages are presented about the product and about people using the product?
- What and how much nutritional information is presented about the product?
- Why do you think this is so?
- What do you notice about the type of food in the most popular advertisements?

► Students analyse labels of the advertised food to determine the nutritional value. They compare this with the nutritional information in the media messages and discuss the reasons for, and the implications of, any differences.

Focus questions could include:

- What nutritional information is provided on food labels?
- How does this information compare with media messages?
- Why do you think these differences exist?
- What might be the implication of this for food-related health behaviours?

POTENTIAL HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Summarising the potential impacts of media messages on health

► As a class, students summarise the impact media messages may have on the health of individuals influenced by those messages. Students summarise findings according to food investigated, its food group, the main media messages, target market and food-related health implications. They draw conclusions as to the nature of messages for different foods and target markets.

Focus questions could include:

- Which foods are heavily promoted in the media?
- What is the nutritional value of these foods?
- What will happen to the short- and long-term health of people in the target group if they are influenced to eat large quantities of these foods?

Teaching consideration

Very few foods in Australia are ‘unhealthy’, that is, are contaminated and can cause ill health. Foods that are considered ‘unhealthy’ (for example, chocolate, high-fat fast foods) are only ‘unhealthy’ when people eat them often and in large quantities. Students should not be made to feel guilty because they eat these foods. They can contribute to health in different ways — for example, by promoting social and emotional health.

Planning

DEVELOPING A CAMPAIGN

Developing a community campaign to support health-promoting food behaviours

► Students develop a community campaign either challenging media influences that have a negative impact on short- or long-term diet-related health behaviours, or reinforcing media influences that have a positive impact. For example, students may decide to campaign for health-promoting food behaviours by:

- developing a petition and sending it to a television station, food company or magazine, advocating media messages that support health promotion;
- redesigning a food-related advertisement and presenting it to the relevant food company with a letter explaining how the proposed changes are more health promoting;
- presenting recommendations for changes to food advertising to the relevant food company or medium, outlining the influence on health now and in the future.

Focus questions could include:

- What is it that we would like to change about food-related media messages?
- Which food-related messages should be retained in the interests of health promotion?
- What kind of campaign can our class implement to challenge or support media messages related to food?
- What is a realistic and achievable campaign which challenges or supports media messages?
- Whose interests will be served by this action?

Teaching consideration

Students can take collaborative action to advocate for health-promoting messages in media.

- ▶ Students identify possible ways of implementing their campaign goal(s) and barriers they might come up against.

Focus questions could include:

- What factors do you think will assist the achievement of your goal(s)?
- What factors do you think will hinder the achievement of your campaign goal(s)?

Teaching considerations

Ways to implement their goals may include seeking assistance from others, using library resources or the Internet, or approaching the school parents organisation.

Barriers could include students not knowing how to organise a petition nor how to write formal letters or what recommendations they should be making.

- ▶ In groups, students develop a plan of action to achieve their campaign goal(s).

Focus questions could include:

- What additional information do you need to develop your campaign?
- Have you collected sufficient information? If not, where can you obtain it?
- What will your plan be to achieve the goal(s)?
- Who will carry out each part of the plan?
- What steps will you take to capitalise on the supporting factors identified?
- What steps will you take to overcome the barriers identified?
- What are the timelines for the completion of each part of the plan?
- Whose support do you need to achieve the goals?
- What resources do you need to implement the plan?

Acting

IMPLEMENTING THE CAMPAIGN

Implementing the community campaign to challenge or support media messages and reviewing and revising the implementation of the plan

► Students take action to implement their plans. Following implementation they identify changes that could be made to make future implementation more successful.

Teaching considerations

At the beginning of each lesson, students should identify the current stage of their plan's implementation.

Implementation plans could include presenting their campaign to the relevant community groups, sending letters or petitions or creating advertising brochures or posters.

Reflecting

DETERMINING SUCCESS

Reflecting on the success of their campaign and any influence it may have had on promoting healthy food messages

► Students discuss their campaigns as a class group. Individually, they reflect on the degree of success achieved in challenging or reinforcing media messages and record their reflections at the end of their campaign plan.

Focus questions could include:

- What impact did the class (community) campaign have?
- What influenced the degree of success achieved?
- How responsive were the media to being challenged or supported?
- How has your knowledge or attitude to media messages changed?
- How effective was the process implemented?
- How have challenging media messages influenced your attitude to food consumption?
- How has your action as an advocate for positive health messages benefited the community?

► Students revisit earlier statements they made on the impact of the media on their dietary behaviour and indicate whether they now agree or disagree with them.

Focus questions could include:

- What have you learnt that justifies the position you have taken?
- Has your position changed as a result of this analysis of the influence of media messages on dietary behaviour and health?

This sourcebook module should be read in conjunction with the following Queensland School Curriculum Council materials:

Years 1 to 10 Health and Physical Education Syllabus

Years 1 to 10 Health and Physical Education Sourcebook: Guidelines

Health and Physical Education Initial In-service Materials

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