



TEACHER BACKGROUND INFORMATION: PACKAGED FOODS

This document extends the research findings and activities outlined in Media Literacy and Food Marketing I. This research stems from a project jointly funded by Alberta Innovates Health Solutions (AIHS) and the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency (ALMA), and supported by the (CIHR) Canada Research Chairs program. The research conducted to inform this project included 16 focus groups with students (Grades 1-9), and an in class survey interrogating children's understanding of packaged foods. Media Literacy and Food Marketing I and II collectively draw from the input and perspectives of over 600 Canadian children.

The Media Literacy & Food Marketing Lesson Plans seek to help expand children's critical capabilities when it comes to understanding food packaging and labelling.

THE ALBERTA CURRICULUM: FOOD AND NUTRITION OUTCOMES

Table 1 outlines the food and nutrition outcomes defined by the Alberta Education Health and Life Skills Curriculum. Activities in the Media Literacy and Food Marketing II Lesson Plan build upon and extend these outcomes in light of the packaged food environment.

Grade 1	Students will recognize the importance of basic, healthy, nutritional choices to well-being of self; e.g., variety of food, drinking water, eating a nutritious breakfast
Grade 2	Students will classify foods according to C... F... E..., and apply knowledge of food groups to plan for appropriate snacks and meals
Grade 3	Students will apply guidelines from C... F... E... to individual nutritional circumstances; e.g., active children eat/drink more
Grade 4	Students will analyze the need for variety and moderation in a balanced diet; e.g., role

THE ALBERTA CURRICULUM: SOCIAL STUDIES

Table 2 lists the Social Studies outcomes detailed by the Alberta Education Curriculum.

Media Literacy Skills: “Media literacy skills involve accessing, interpreting and evaluating mass media texts such as newspapers, television, the Internet and advertising. Media literacy in social studies explores concepts in mass media texts, such as identifying key messages and multiple points of view that are being communicated, detecting bias, and examining the responsibility of citizens to respond to media texts” (Alberta Education, Alberta, Canada).

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<p>Finding 3 Children's decisions about what is a healthy packaged food are based on product names, health symbols and other claims.</p>	<p>RESEARCH FINDING: HEALTH SYMBOLS AND OTHER CLAIMS</p> <p>Health symbols, seals, and emblems give product credibility according to students regardless of their understanding of the claims, and of the category of food featured.</p> <p>Moderator question: What makes that a healthy choice?</p> <p>(C . . .)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 health symbols on the corner. (G6) • It has the green seal. (G3) • A green box with a sun on it on the side. (G3) <p>(C . . .)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It has the whole grain symbol on it. (G3) • It says sensible solutions. (G5) • Also it has the sensible solutions. (G6) <p>Moderator: Wonderful. What does sensible solutions mean to you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It just means that it's a healthier choice. That's what it means to me. <p>(: D)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Check. (G3) • And the health check. (G3) • It has a checkmark. (G3) • Healthy label. (G3) • Says health check. (G3) • It has a health check on it. (G6) • It has Heart and Stroke Foundation health check symbol. (G6) • Healthy choice checkmark. (G6) • It has a health check on it. (G6)
<p>Finding 4 Children remain unclear on how apply and evaluate calories, however they are still influenced by the numbers.</p>	<p>RESEARCH FINDING: CALORIES ON PACKAGES</p> <p>In focus groups, children do not present a single way to interpret information about calories, whether on the front of packages or on the Nutrition Facts table. Conversations about calories as "good and bad" in grade three, transition to calories as "too much" in grade four. In grade five, children volunteer decisions</p>

RESEARCH FINDING: SUGAR AND SODIUM: A LITTLE OR A LOT?

Sodium

Children consistently noted that the amount of sodium in a product is important to making a healthy choice. Their quantity concerns are vague, “low sodium” (3B), yet include an acceptance of salt as a nutrient: “I think salt is kind of healthy, just if you don’t eat too much” (3G). Students across the grades did not know how much sodium was acceptable, and did not know how to pursue further information about sodium on the box.

Moderator: What do you think makes a packaged food healthy?

- Low sodium, low fat, low sugar. (3B)
- I think salt is kind of healthy, just if you don’t eat too much. (3G)
- That one’s got salt. (4G)

Moderator: Is that bad or is that good?

- We c ec ç ! t ° f

Finding 5

Children are confused by the quantities of sugar & sodium, and how to measure what is an acceptable amount.

Table 4: Research Findings: Children & Packaged Foods. (2B=Grade 2 Boy; 2G=Grade 2 Girl)

<p>Finding 5 Children are confused by the quantities of sugar & sodium, and how to measure what is an acceptable amount.</p>	<p>Sugar Sugar is a complex entity in foods for children. Children's lack of ability to explain choices for healthy or less healthy quantities of sugar, their value judgements for different types of sugar, and their common impression that they should not eat too much—but know that they love sugar—are fundamental conflicts in their choice of healthy packaged foods. For both girls and boys, sugar was the most frequently mentioned ingredient in choosing healthy foods. Children described two challenges in their analysis of sugar that are dealt with in these learning activities: (1) deciding how many grams of sugar are acceptable; and (2) navigating different types of sugar.</p> <p>Moderator: How much sugar is a lot of sugar?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10,055g. (1G) • 2g only. (1G) • Maybe 10 or 15. (1G) • 15. (1G) <p>Moderator: 15g in a day?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some« 1G)
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Table 4: Research Findings: Children & Packaged Foods. (2B=Grade 2 Boy; 2G=Grade 2 Girl)

<p>Finding 6</p> <p>Claims like “a source of”, “a good source of” and an “excellent source of” influence children’s perception of packaged food, although they remain unclear on what fibre, vitamins and minerals do.</p>	<p>RESEARCH FINDING: FIBRE, VITAMINS & MINERALS: DIGGING DEEPER</p> <p>The healthiness of fibre, what it is at all, is confused across the early grades. By grade four, children notice</p>
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