

Students' research on healthy eating

Getting children interested in research and in doing their own research can not only be fun for them, but a learning experience for you. **Marian Smyth** reports on a small project with a group of students at a girls' school in Northwood.

The project

Together with a colleague, I was invited to set a short research project using my own area of expertise – marketing. The project we set the students was to design and present a poster for children their own age about being healthy and eating more fruit and vegetables. Before designing their poster they had to think about what should go into it and why. This meant working in teams, researching the subject and incorporating their findings into their design and presenting it to the class.

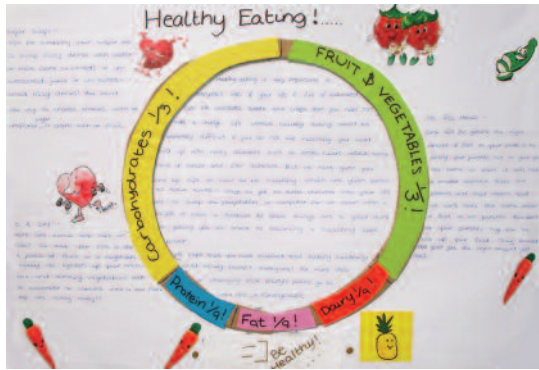
We chose the subject of healthy eating not only because it is covered in the curriculum, but also to help raise awareness of its importance and to help the students become more familiar with how to be healthy themselves. We decided that a poster and presentation was the most creative and fun way to get the students involved in carrying out the research and absorbing what they were actually finding out. It was also a great opportunity to get them to practise their communication skills, teamwork skills, research skills, presentation skills and creativity.

What we asked them to do

In the morning the students were given a handout explaining the project and the stages they would need to go through in order to carry it out successfully. The first stage was starting with the research. They needed to find out why they should eat a healthy diet, what is healthy and what isn't. They also had to think about how to present the information so that people their own age would read it and be interested. This meant thinking carefully about how much text to use, what words to use, which examples to pick out and how to collate it into one poster. They had to think about design – what images to use, what colours to use and what overall effect they wanted to create. All of this had to be done in the morning ready to present their results in the afternoon.



Marian (far right) with colleague, Alice Yorke and Fred, one of the students' posters

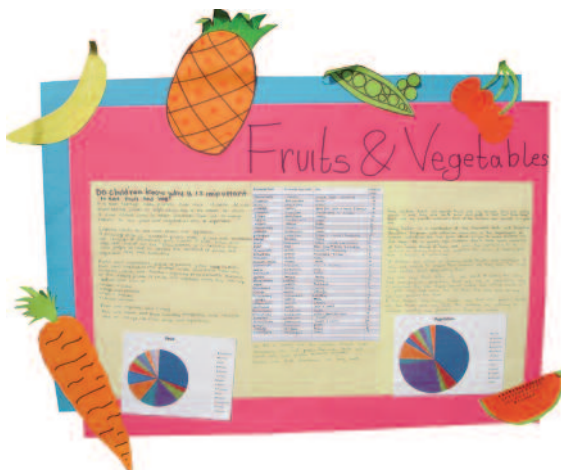


How did they do their research?

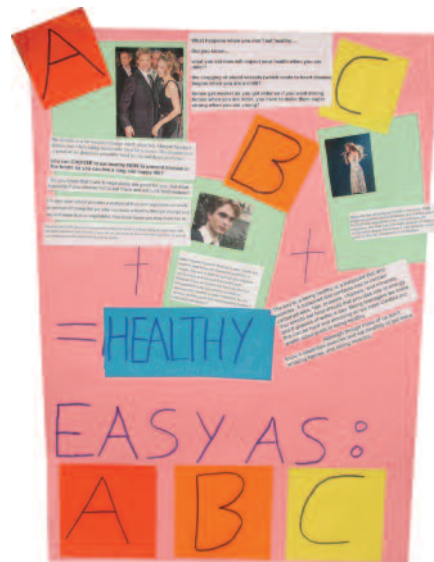
At the presentation session, with the students in the afternoon, many of the groups used PowerPoint to explain how they went about researching the topic of healthy eating. The most popular methods were using the internet, reading magazines, group discussions, virtual learning (blogs to communicate with one another) and surveys amongst their peers.

The results

We were pleasantly surprised by the presentations. The posters and the students' explanations were very well thought out and designed. It was easy to tell that effort, research and consideration had gone into every single one. Altogether there were six groups of three to five students each. Similarities were easily visible, with the use of bright colours, various images and ways of undertaking the research. Most of the groups decided to use A2 paper for their



poster and jazzed it up with images, text and bright colours. However, several groups opted for other original designs and ideas. One group stuck several sheets of A2 together and cut out the silhouette of a child and named it Fred. Fred was then plastered with facts, figures and images all about the research topic and information that they had found out. Another went to the effort of handing out handmade brochures on healthy eating, while another team created a menu filled with healthy smoothie options and individual name badges shaped like apples.



Altogether we were highly impressed with how much each group managed to put together in just one morning and the creativity didn't stop with the posters – their presentations were excellent, too.

Student presentations

During the five minutes that each group had to present their posters, the students explained what they found out about healthy eating, why they used their particular design, what they thought was appealing to their age group, what they would do with their poster and what effect they hoped it would have.



It was clear, not only from their presentations, but also from the blogs they created, that each group worked well as a team. Before we met the students that afternoon, we were shown blog activity that they had been doing all morning to keep in contact with one another – it gave a fantastic insight into how they were undertaking the task and how successfully they were working as a team.

Most presentations were created in PowerPoint, once again using bright images, keywords and strong facts. The girls spoke confidently, clearly and each took a turn to highlight a key point that they wanted to make. Some groups were more confident than others, and one in particular addressed every question they had been given in the morning brief, leaving no stone unturned – so much so that it was hard to find further questions to ask them after their presentation was finished. Those groups that were asked questions addressed them well and listened to tips and advice we had to offer. At the end of the day we gave each one feedback about what we liked and positive criticism on where they could have improved.

Final thoughts

Learning about research can help students feel more independent, help them to understand the importance of gathering facts and knowledge and also help to raise awareness

about the selected research topic. From the group discussion at the end of the day, it appeared that all the girls thoroughly enjoyed the task. Not only did they find it creative, but many said they learnt far more about the importance of being healthy than they thought they would and, in turn, so did we.

Not only did they refer to how healthy eating can help in maintaining a good figure, but they also talked about the importance of exercise, how eating more fruit and vegetables could help ward off cancers and other diseases and how drinking eight glasses of water a day 'could help give you beautiful skin, like Beyonce'. It was great to see such a vast amount of positive issues raised.



Each group also related their findings to the target market they were given (ages 12–13), by coming up with easy tips, school canteen ideas and ways of promoting healthy eating and lifestyles to each other, including advertising at cinemas, bus stops, train stations and in school canteens, and using social media such as school blogs and Facebook.

All the examples and ideas that they offered were appropriate, well thought out and extremely informative, and each team's confidence seemed to grow as their presentation got under way.

We hope that, as marketing experts with no teaching experience, we have helped to

inspire an interest in research and an understanding of why research is important.

What next?

If you'd like our team to come to your school and run a project for a day, please contact the editor on a.lawson@nfer.ac.uk

If your students have done a research project, why not write it up as an article for practical research for education?

Acknowledgements

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About the author

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