

Qualitative Investigation of the *Cooking with Kids* Program: Focus Group Interviews with Fourth-Grade Students, Teachers, and Food Educators

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Focus group (FG) interviews with students and adults were used to obtain a rich understanding of the *Cooking with Kids* classroom experience from the child and adult participant perspectives.

Methods: FG topics included students' cooking experiences at school and home and perceptions of *Cooking with Kids*. Verified transcripts of recorded interviews were entered into NVivo, coded for themes, and confirmed through intercoder reliability.

Results: Twenty-two FGs were conducted with fourth-grade students ($n = 178$), 3 FG with teachers ($n = 17$), and 1 FG with 5 *Cooking with Kids* food educators. Students in cooking interventions described positive experiences with curriculum integration into academic subjects and were more likely to consider classmates friends.

Conclusions and Implications: FG revealed student perspectives to strengthen content and implementation of experiential foods programs. This study provides an example of how qualitative methods can add "student voice" to evaluation of school-based programs.

Key Words: cooking, nutrition, child, program evaluation, New Mexico (*J Nutr Educ Behav.* 2011;43:517-524.)

INTRODUCTION

National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention document that from initial surveys in 1976 to 1980 to later surveys in 2003 to 2006, the prevalence of obesity among children aged 6 to 11 years increased from 5.0% to 12.4%.¹ In response to this growing trend, more and more programs related to health, nutrition, and fitness are being developed for children. Many programs specifically choose to teach these topics through cooking.²⁻⁵ Liquori et al³ found through development and implementation of the Cookshop program that the "actual cooking experiences and eating food with peers, accompanied by cognitive learning, may provide a promising approach to nutrition education, especially for younger children."

However, perceptions of the student participants in this type of program are rarely included as a primary focus of evaluation.

In the review by Contento et al⁶ of evaluation measures used for nutrition interventions, 95% of intervention studies with children measured knowledge and 65% measured attitudes, primarily through multiple-choice format. This review states that these measures were chosen for evaluation because most interventions for school-aged children are based on Social Cognitive Theory and a "knowledge-attitudes-behavior" paradigm. These reviewers also conclude that measurement of the "intervening variables" of Social Cognitive Theory, including self-efficacy, expectancies, social influences, and behavioral intention, is increasingly being used because of the growing use of psychosocial theories of health behavior

change in the development of educational interventions. They also report that the majority of cooking-based nutrition education interventions are evaluated quantitatively, with strategies that measure outcomes such as knowledge, attitudes, behaviors and dietary intake, behavioral intentions, or psychosocial constructs such as self-efficacy and social norms.⁶

School nutrition intervention studies such as those by Bisset et al,² Liquori et al,³ Reynolds et al,⁴ and Stevens et al⁵ explore the value of experiential programs by using quantitative methods. Evaluation of programs of this type may benefit from the addition of qualitative investigation to more fully understand nutrition education program influences, strengths, and weaknesses from the perceptions of participants. Qualitative and quantitative research used together (mixed methods) can produce more comprehensive evidence to inform theory and practice.⁷⁻⁹ Many school intervention studies may benefit from a more comprehensive approach to evaluation.

Cooking with Kids (CWK) is an experiential food and nutrition education program for elementary school students, based on nutrition

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education and food acceptance research and social learning theory constructs.¹⁰ *Cooking with Kids* was designed and implemented in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Approximately half of Santa Fe residents identify themselves as Hispanic or Latino.¹¹ The intervention was implemented in the city's lower-income public elementary schools, which have a citywide average of 65% of students eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.¹⁰ The schools in which CWK was implemented also are frequently bilingual, with classes conducted in English, Spanish, or both.

Cooking with Kids engages participants in developmentally appropriate hands-on learning with culturally diverse foods through a series of 2-hour cooking classes led by trained food educators (FEs) and 1-hour fruit and vegetable tasting classes led by the students' classroom teachers. To assess the effect of CWK, students from 32 fourth-grade classrooms in 11 schools were assigned to one of 3 conditions: cooking + tasting intervention (5 cooking plus 5 tasting classes), tasting-only intervention (5 tasting classes only), or comparison condition.

This study gathered qualitative data about cooking and the CWK classroom experience from fourth-grade students, teachers, and FEs in the form of focus group (FG) interviews. Previous evaluation activities focused on student intake of and preference for fruits and vegetables, cooking experiences, attitudes and self-efficacy, and adult experiences with the program, primarily with surveys.¹²⁻¹⁴ The main objective of this study was to obtain a richer understanding of the CWK classroom experience from the child and adult participant perspectives in comparison to their cooking experiences at home. An additional request by program implementers was to explore participants' perceptions of the integration of CWK content into other curriculum subjects. Main research questions were:

1. What is the CWK classroom experience like?
2. What do participants perceive as the effect of CWK?
3. How do student perspectives about cooking with family compare with cooking with friends?

4. What are the perceived influences of home and school environments on cooking attitudes?
5. What connections do students make between CWK and academic curriculum topics?
6. What other experiences related to cooking, tasting new foods, or information about health, nutrition, or food have students had that could confound CWK influence?

METHODS

Student FG interview guides were developed according to analysis of previous years' student survey results and the input of CWK program directors. They were designed to be understandable at a fourth-grade level and limited to approximately 6 to 8 questions, as suggested in the recommendations by Krueger and Casey¹⁵ for conducting FGs with young people. Specific guides were developed for each condition (cooking + tasting, tasting only, and comparison). Primary interview questions were followed with specific probes to elicit additional relevant information consistently across all groups. Additionally, teacher and FE FG interview guides were developed to complement student FG interview guides. FG interview questions and probes are found in Table 1.

All interview activities were conducted by an external research team. A moderator and comoderator were used for each FG. Moderators were assigned to FGs across all conditions to randomize the effect of moderator personality on outcomes. FG moderators were trained as a group with an FG protocol based on the recommendations by Krueger and Casey¹⁵ for conducting FGs with young people. These guidelines include reacting in an encouraging way to all student responses to affirm the value of their opinions and being explicit about the rules students should follow during the FG, such as being respectful of others. FG moderators were also instructed about the intent of the project and the purposeful design of the FG interview guides. The study received exempt status from the Colorado State University Institutional Review Board, and child assent was obtained.

Maximum variation sampling was used to select classrooms for FG interviews, including schools from all 3 conditions, at least 2 classrooms selected per condition, 2 FGs from each classroom, boys separate from girls when possible, and a representative number conducted in Spanish and English. Most interviews were conducted separately from a CWK class to reduce bias in student recall because of immediacy of the CWK classroom experience. Separate teacher and FE FGs were conducted at times convenient to participants.

Student FGs were conducted between January and May 2009, and teacher and FE FGs were conducted in May 2009. FG interviews were audiotaped, professionally transcribed, and then verified by an evaluation team member present during the FG. Review of the content and flow of the first audiotaped student interview indicated to moderators and researchers that the line of questioning was appropriate and that students answered all questions in ways indicating comprehension. Verified transcripts were imported into NVivo 8 (version 8, QSR International, Cambridge, MA, 2008) and initially coded by interview question. Intercoder reliability of the coding structure was confirmed by 2 researchers. Results were then summarized for each condition, compiled in response to project research questions, and used to form response themes based on frequency and intensity of comments.

RESULTS

Twenty-two FGs were conducted with a total of 178 students, with 5 to 12 students per group. Participants included a total of 86 girls and 92 boys. Four student FGs were conducted in Spanish and the remaining 18 were conducted in English. Ten student FGs were conducted in cooking schools, 8 were in tasting schools, and 4 were in comparison schools. Additionally, 3 FGs were conducted with a total of 17 teachers (3-8 per group) from both intervention conditions and 1 FG with 5 of 8 CWK FEs. All adult FGs were conducted in English. Student FG data make up the majority of the results presented here, and FG results from teachers

Table 1. Focus Group Interview Questions

Research Question	Condition	Relevant Student Interview Guide Questions	Related TE or FE Interview Guide Questions
What is the CWK classroom experience like, overall?	C, T	Tell me about a time when you did CWK. What do you remember about it? How are tasting classes different from cooking classes? What do you/don't you like about CWK?	Tell me about your experiences with the cooking classes. (TE) Now tell me about your experiences with the tasting classes. (TE) What is the CWK classroom experience like, from your perspective? (FE)
What do participants perceive as the effect of CWK?	C, T	What do you think are the reasons that schools do CWK? Has CWK changed anything about cooking at home? Has CWK changed anything you do about cooking with your friends or classmates? When you think of CWK, how does it connect to your learning in school? How does it connect to your life outside of school?	Is there value for teachers in participating with CWK overall? Value for students? Value for parents? (TE) What do you see as its goal? (TE, FE) How would you define its success? (TE, FE) What is its effect on student attitudes toward food, nutrition, or cooking? (TE, FE)
What are students' perspectives about cooking with family compared with friends?	C, T, X	Tell me about a time when you cooked at home. What does "cooking with your family" mean to you? Can you tell me about a time when you cooked or made food with your friends or your classmates?	NA
What are the perceived influences of home and school environments on cooking attitudes?	C, T, X	Is cooking at home different than cooking at school? If so, how? What does it mean to "cook with your friends"? What does it mean to "cook with your classmates"? Are these the same thing or different?	NA
What connections do students make between CWK and academic subjects?	C, T	When you think of CWK, how does it connect to your learning in school? How does it connect to your life outside of school?	Please describe any experiences you have had integrating CWK into other subjects. (TE) From your perspective, how do you see CWK fitting into the overall curriculum? (FE)
What experiences related to cooking, tasting new foods, or exposure to information about health, nutrition, or food are students exposed to at school that could confound CWK quantitative results?	C, T, X	Tell me about a time when you cooked or made food in school besides CWK. Tell me about a time when you tried new foods in school besides with CWK. Tell me about a time when your teachers talked to you about food, nutrition, or health in school besides with CWK. How was that different than CWK?	What role does CWK play as enrichment? Nutrition education? Other? (TE)

C indicates cooking + tasting interventions; CWK, *Cooking with Kids*; FE, food educator; NA, not applicable; T, tasting-only interventions; TE, teacher; X, comparison condition.

and FEs are included to the extent that they enrich understanding of student results.

Student FG data, such as that collected for this project, commonly present the researcher with special

challenges because of the young age and limited developmental ability and communication skills of

participants. Often, the compilation of transcripts as a whole provides a deep understanding of the shared student experience, but because of some children's limited language skills and constant interaction with one another during the group interviews, statements from individual students are rarely comprehensive enough to represent their related theme. For this reason, concise quotations are not available to illustrate every major point of the results. However, systematic and thorough analysis of the complete transcript text was used to ensure that each theme was based soundly on both frequency and intensity of student responses. An analysis of student FG themes is presented in Table 2.

Students were asked to respond to questions about both location (home vs school) and others (family vs friends) in relation to their cooking attitudes and experiences. Questions were specifically targeted toward identifying students' feelings toward those present while cooking and the location in which they were cooking. According to consistency of responses and themes throughout separate lines of questioning, our analysis revealed that students did not, in fact, differentiate between location and others present. Thus, for the purpose of discussion, cooking with family and cooking at home will be discussed as one concept, and similarly, cooking with friends and cooking at school will be referred to as one concept throughout the "Results" and "Discussion" sections.

Major themes were identified according to frequency, intensity, and extensiveness of comments.¹⁵ Four broad categories of information emerged from analysis of the FG data: perceptions of cooking at home and with family, cooking with friends and classmates, teaching approaches integrating CWK into curriculum topics and using hands-on learning, and other food experiences in the classroom.

Perceptions of Cooking at Home and With Family

Students in all 3 conditions described positive and negative aspects of cooking at home with family. Positive

opinions (compared with mixed opinions about cooking in the classroom described below) shared by students across all 3 conditions included having the freedom to experiment, having access to a greater variety and quantity of foods than those provided in the classroom, and the cozy, fun environment of cooking at home with family members. For example, "Cooking means to me that, um, where everybody gets together in my family and it's a happy time because everybody's working together and having fun" (FG 5, boy 3, cooking + tasting intervention).

Conversely, some students in the tasting-only and comparison groups thought that cooking with family was similar to doing chores such as washing dishes or was associated with cooking out of necessity, such as in a family with 2 working parents, in which the child needed to help with meal preparation. However, this opinion was not expressed by students in the cooking + tasting schools.

Intervention students could not describe any direct or specific effect of CWK on their home environment or any other out-of-school setting. Most students could not respond to questions about any changes they made at home, with family, or with friends as a result of CWK.

It hasn't changed [anything] because it's the same as being at home, because we are with an adult and the adult can teach us to cook, so that someday we are able to cook by ourselves (FG 9, girl 1, cooking + tasting intervention).

However, teachers and FEs believed changes did occur for students outside of school as a result of participation in CWK. They reported hearing from students or their parents that students were making CWK recipes at home, had increased their willingness to try new foods, and were more likely to ask their parents to purchase new foods. Students were also teaching family members (eg, younger siblings) what they learned in CWK and had a greater awareness of where the food they eat comes from. These teacher and FE observations were not specifically asked for in FG interviews but arose naturally during discussions.

Cooking With Friends and Classmates

From the student perspective, classmates are associated with rules, structure, and restrictions, whereas friends are associated with having fun and freedom.

With your classmates it's kind of like, not that much fun because you have to behave and everything, and cooking with your friends you can mess around and everything. Have a food fight or something (FG 18, boy 3, tasting-only intervention).

However, in contrast to the commonly shared opinions about cooking with family, students in the 3 conditions differed in their opinions about cooking with other children. Students in the cooking + tasting condition did not make a clear distinction between classmates and friends in the same way that children in the other 2 conditions did. This distinction between classmates and friends was strongest in the comparison groups, slightly less emphasized in the tasting groups, and absent in the cooking groups who seemed to consider their classmates as friends.

The only complaint cooking + tasting intervention students raised about their cooking classes (besides those that are expected in the classroom environment, such as having to follow directions) was that cooking in front of friends can at times be embarrassing or stressful. This did not seem to detract from the generally positive feelings these students had about their classmates or the classroom cooking experience, however.

Teaching Approaches: Integration Into Curriculum Topics and Hands-on Learning

Both the CWK cooking and tasting classes were described favorably by intervention students. They reported enjoying specific portions of the lessons, such as reading about and discussing other cultures and geography, participating in hands-on cooking tasks, and trying new foods. In addition, they were enthusiastic about the hands-on nature of classes and having shared the experience with their peers.

Table 2. Research Questions and Related Student Focus Group Themes Discussed by Intervention Condition

Research Question	Response Theme Discussed	Cooking + Tasting	Tasting Only	Comparison
What is the CWK classroom experience like?	Culture, history, and geography	X	X	NA
	Experiencing new things	X	X	NA
	Social and tactile experiences	X		NA
	Curriculum and lesson plans	X	X	NA
	Classroom rules	X		NA
	Food variety, choice, and amount	X	X	NA
What do participants perceive as the effect of CWK?	Connections to other subjects	X	X	NA
	Cooking/kitchen/safety skills	X		NA
	Experiencing culturally diverse or new foods	X	X	NA
	Nutrition and health	X	X	NA
	Asking for CWK foods at home		X	NA
What are student perspectives about cooking with family compared with friends?	Necessity or helping family members	X		
	Association of cooking with chores		X	X
	Spending time with family		X	X
	Freedom to experiment	X		
	Food selection variety	X		
	Learning to cook at home		X	
	Comfort of environment	X		
	Holidays or special occasions		X	X
	Differentiation between friends and classmates		X	X
	Learning with friends	X		
	Having fun with friends	X	X	X
What are the perceived influences of home and school environments on cooking attitudes?	Necessity or helping family members	X		
	Association of cooking with chores		X	X
	Holidays or special occasions		X	X
	Freedom to play	X		
	Food selection variety	X		
	No clear effect of CWK on home	X	X	NA
What connections do students make between CWK and academic subjects?	Awareness of new fruits and vegetables	X	X	NA
	Fractions and mathematics	X		NA
	Safety	X		NA
	Health and nutrition	X	X	NA
	History and geography	X		NA
	CWK cafeteria meals	X		NA
What experiences related to cooking, tasting new foods, or exposure to information about health, nutrition, or food are students exposed to at school that could confound CWK quantitative results?	Classroom cooking experiences related to lessons	X	X	X
	Food/nutrition information from the National Dance Institute	X	X	
	Food/nutrition information from the school nurse	X	X	
	Food/nutrition information from the classroom teacher	X	X	X
	Trying new foods in non-CWK lessons		X	X

CWK indicates *Cooking with Kids*; NA, not applicable.

Aspects of cooking classes that cooking + tasting intervention students did not enjoy included what

might be expected: having to follow classroom rules, the structured format of the curriculum, the adult expecta-

tion that they strictly follow recipes, and the design of the lesson plan to include just 1 snack-sized sample per

student to taste rather than a meal-sized portion.

... [I don't like] that we're not free to experiment with different stuff, and we always have to follow the recipe, or always listen to what the teacher says, and you have to do exactly what the recipe says. We can't, like, put extra ingredients [in] to make it taste better or something (FG 5, boy 3, cooking + tasting intervention).

Students responded to questioning regarding the connections they make between the CWK curriculum and academic curriculum topics with a wide range of comments. These included CWK activities connecting to mathematics, such as graph making and fractions, learning more about social studies through reading CWK lessons and classroom discussions about geography and cultural aspects of food, and general increased awareness of the variety of available fruits and vegetables.

The comments of teachers and FEs on CWK integration into core subjects included these topics but also included its relationship to science topics such as observation and inference making, plant anatomy and growth, and states of matter as observed during cooking with heat. CWK lesson integration into the academic curriculum was strong in both tasting and cooking classes, but cooking + tasting condition teachers reported spending more time extending CWK lesson concepts throughout the school day or week surrounding a cooking or tasting class and seemed much more committed to the concept.

When cooking + tasting school students were asked what they thought the purpose of participating in CWK was and what effect it might have on their lives, the strongest themes to emerge seemed to be the integration of CWK to academic curriculum topics and that the purpose of CWK is to teach students to cook as a life skill. They responded very strongly to questions about integration as described above. They consistently responded that the purposes of CWK included the importance of learning to cook, knife skills, kitchen safety, health knowledge, and awareness of a variety of foods.

... Because if we didn't know how to cook, that would kind of, like, that we couldn't make our own foods, so that's why we have CWK, so that way we could try new things and eat interesting foods (FG 7, boy 3, cooking + tasting intervention).

[I like] that we get to learn how to like cook with different ingredients, and, I don't know, we're learning how to cook for when we're big, we know how to cook (FG 5, boy 3, cooking + tasting intervention).

Other Food Experiences in the Classroom

To document and assess the possibility of factors in the school environment that could confound the effect of CWK, students in all 3 conditions were asked to recall experiences with food, cooking, health, or nutrition in their classroom and school besides CWK. Students in all schools recalled experiences related to actual cooking, tasting new foods, and exposure to information about health, nutrition, or food at school. Cooking experiences were usually associated with either a lesson or book being discussed in class or with a holiday or special occasion being celebrated. Experiences of trying new foods in school usually occurred along with these cooking experiences. Major sources of food, nutrition, or health information included the school nurse, the classroom teacher, or the dance program teacher.

We have to do, like, groups of, like one was making tortillas, 'cause we were reading in groups, we were reading books, we were in groups of, like, 5 or 4, and we were reading the book and we had to act it out, like, do what the book says, and some made tortillas, some made recipes and posters (FG 5, boy 1, cooking + tasting intervention).

In kindergarten, for I think a week, they had a new food every day (in the cafeteria), and it would be the colors of the rainbow, and they would check off the color that we tasted. Like, red was the first color,

so they would have red bananas or red pears, or strawberries or something, and then the red bananas I didn't taste [had never tasted before], and that was the first time I tasted them (FG 18, girl 1, tasting-only intervention).

Our NDI [National Dance Institute] teacher, he tells us don't drink Coke, and only water for 1 week, and we have to eat vegetables and fruits, and then to drink water all you can, and then exercise a lot (FG 13, boy 6, tasting-only intervention).

Most students seemed to have relatively strong impressions of these experiences, as evidenced by the amount of detail they recalled or remembering events from several years ago. Teachers and FEs were not asked to specifically address this issue.

DISCUSSION

From the student perspective, CWK's strongest effect was in helping students learn school subjects and in developing future cooking skills and attitudes, but not on changing the family and home cooking environment. Bisset et al² reported similar findings from their elementary school cooking intervention, stating that "program participants had greater experiences in tasting less common foods but they did not report more experience with food preparation at home." It may be possible that food choice and preparation behavior changes resulting from CWK changing students' knowledge and attitudes were just not apparent to students in this age group. They were, however, apparent to teachers and parents, as reported in the teacher and FE interviews. For program impact purposes, it may not be necessary for students to perceive these behavior changes for them to actually occur. However, student beliefs that CWK has some level of importance or value to them personally may support, along with the element of fun and exploration, keeping students actively engaged in the program. In the Social Learning Theory-based program called the High 5 Project, developed by Reynolds et al,⁴ motivation, including measures of outcome expectancies,

were one factor in promoting behavior change in this age group. Other researchers have reported outcome expectancies as one of the most significant predictors of fruit and vegetable intake.^{16,17} Students' beliefs that CWK has some significant purpose or value for them may have increased its influence.

Students in the 3 conditions reported differences in feelings about cooking at home and with family, which suggests that students in cooking + tasting schools may be less averse to cooking-related "chores" at home as a result of positive cooking experiences in the classroom. This is a potentially positive outcome of the CWK intervention that would not have been detected without qualitative exploration of the topic. To our knowledge, this concept has not been described elsewhere in the literature.

Another FG result was the distinction that students in the noncooking conditions made between classmates and friends. In contrast, students in the more intense cooking condition did not distinguish between the 2 as clearly, which may indicate that CWK cooking experiences help students to become more comfortable with their classmates and consider them more strongly as friends in a social cooking environment. The teachers and FEs confirmed this concept, noting that CWK encourages students to treat each other respectfully and to practice the social skills of working together to prepare a meal and then eating together. Current national education emphases include promoting student mastery of skills essential for workforce readiness, such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity.¹⁸ Cooking in the classroom, as described by student and adult participants in the CWK program, may be a practical mechanism to promote health and educational skills to better prepare students for adulthood.

When students were asked about any connections they made between CWK and academic curriculum topics, the ideas they generated may indicate a higher level of understanding in these areas as a result of integration with the CWK curriculum. Because the cooking groups reported a wide array of topics they thought were cov-

ered in CWK and integrated into their academic curriculum topics, it may be likely that they are not only receiving exposure to these subjects beyond regular academic curriculum instruction but also understanding the topics better because of the hands-on examples being used to teach them in their cooking lessons. This effect was reported to a smaller extent in the tasting classes because these students connected the topics covered in the CWK tasting classes to only science class and health topics. Also, the mostly concurrent responses of teachers, FEs, and students indicate uniformity of curriculum implementation and of the understanding of these topics among student participants, and the perceived strength and value of integrated lessons.

It has been shown that nutrition education programs that rely simply on conveying nutrition knowledge can have a modest influence⁶ but that hands-on experiences with food are engaging and effective and exemplify theory-based practice.¹⁹ Both knowledge and attitudes may be altered through this experiential type of programming, and students respond positively to it. These FG results indicated that both integration into academic curriculum topics and hands-on learning are key aspects of the CWK curriculum. These teaching approaches may be especially important in the cultural context of Santa Fe, New Mexico. Studies exploring the special challenges of nutrition education in Hispanic and Latino communities report that health messages often conflict with cultural values, making change difficult.²⁰ Hands-on cooking experiences that emphasize learning among peers through a culturally meaningful medium such as cooking may help overcome health promotion barriers and reach Hispanic populations more effectively.²⁰

The examples of food, cooking, or health or nutrition experiences other than CWK reported by students in all 3 conditions were valuable in understanding the context in which the program occurred. Some of these memories were relatively strong; for example, a student recalled the "foods of the rainbow" experience in detail from kindergarten 4 years earlier. These experiences may have had a significant effect on students,

which could have a confounding or masking effect on measures of CWK's influence.

Study limitations include environmental issues such as the challenges of conducting interviews in the classroom (eg, noise levels or distractions), which can make it hard for students to focus. Gaining access to the student participants meant adapting to the schedule and available facilities of the school. This sometimes resulted in uneven divisions of students into groups, depending on language preference or behavior problems among students. Additionally, multiple moderators were needed to complete all FGs during the available time. Development of an interviewing protocol, training moderators, and timely review of audiotaped interviews to address any inconsistencies in interview implementation served to minimize this limitation and provided consistency across interviewers. Strengths of the study's methodology also include purposeful sampling of students from all 3 research conditions and participating schools. However, the results of this study cannot be assumed to be generalizable to other schools that implement a similar program.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

This project reaffirms that FGs can be effectively used with upper-elementary-aged children to gain a rich understanding of their perceptions and experiences with nutrition-related behaviors and classroom activities, perspectives that would be difficult to discern with quantitative methods. FGs can be used effectively as long as grade-level appropriateness and concept clarity are kept in mind when developing interview guides and the unique characteristics of FGs as a research method are followed when interpreting results. These results are consistent with literature that shows that FGs can be an effective tool for eliciting the student perspective.²¹

This study's value for practice lies in the view it offers into the classroom experience for students of an experiential food and nutrition program.

Results will be helpful to the CWK program itself, such as in future revisions to curriculum and classroom implementation, and to others developing similar programs. It may help program developers to understand student experiences related to cooking at home, with family, with friends, or in other school settings and may help them to shape future curriculums accordingly. This study also describes student and teacher perceptions about the integration of nutrition education programs with academic curriculum topics, which is essential in justifying nutrition education's continued place in the school curriculum.

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