

A Snapshot: Concepts of Healthy Eating and Fitness Held by K-8 Pre-service Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to describe the concepts of healthy eating and fitness held by K-8 pre-service teachers at a four-year urban university located in southeast Texas. **Methods:** A questionnaire that described the participants' concept of healthy eating and fitness was distributed on the first day of class. A phenomenological approach using a constant comparative method was used to describe the responses from the teacher candidates. **Results:** Ninety-five percent of the participants lived with someone and were responsible for 75% of the grocery shopping solely or with someone else. In addition, 66% of the students indicated that they were the primary cook or cooked in combination with someone else in the household. The participants' concept of healthy eating was consistent with national dietary recommendations. Participants indicated that a healthy meal consisted of fruits/vegetables, grains, and fish/chicken (as opposed to red meat). The underlying principle for what constituted a healthy meal was that it was nutritious and low in fat. On the other hand, an unhealthy meal was identified as snack foods, fried foods, and fast foods. Such foods were perceived as having a high fat content and contributed to health issues. The concept of eating healthy was influenced by parents/family, media, and experience. Nearly 65% of the participants indicated they exercised, however, they assessed their level of fitness according to how tired they were after exercising and by how they looked and felt. The concept of fitness encompassed exercise, diet, and general physical activity and was shaped from their experience, media, and parents/family. **Conclusions:** The results suggest that students are aware of the national dietary and physical activity recommendations. However, the participants lacked a complete understanding of healthy eating and fitness. This is not surprising given that their primary sources of information were family, media, and their own trial-and-error strategies. Thus, it is imperative that K-8 pre-service teachers have a thorough understanding of healthy eating and fitness because they serve as role models for

their students. Further, these future teachers may be responsible for teaching healthy habits to their students.

KEY WORDS: Education, Health, Lifestyle, Pre-Service Teachers