

# Taste Lessons: Best Practice in The Netherlands

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School-based nutrition education programmes are increasingly used to teach children about nutrition and to provide them with the skills to make healthy food choices. In the Netherlands, different programmes are developed, each with its own characteristics. Taste Lessons is one of these nutrition education programmes. It focuses on taste development, healthy nutrition and food quality, and not primarily on overweight and physical activity. Currently, over 4000 primary schools in the Netherlands have experience in giving Taste Lessons. We evaluated the programme on its aim to increase children's interest in food, and their knowledge and skills regarding healthy and conscious eating behaviour. Furthermore, the influence of adding experiential learning activities and implementation factors on effectiveness are investigated.

Two evaluation studies are conducted using a quasi-experimental design and accompanied by a process evaluation. The first evaluation study showed that partial implementation of the ten to twelve lessons of Taste Lessons (first edition) by the teachers during one school year resulted in small increases in psychosocial determinants of healthy eating behaviour. The highest increase was observed in children's knowledge, which persisted six months after the programme. A second evaluation was conducted to study the effectiveness of the revised and shortened version of Taste Lessons (second version) on change in (psychosocial determinants of) vegetable consumption and willingness to taste unfamiliar vegetables.

For this study, Taste Lessons with and without additional experiential learning activities were compared. Results showed, with almost complete implementation of the five lessons of Taste Lessons, similar results as the first effect evaluation. Additional experiential learning activities, such as an extended cooking lesson with a dietician and the parents, an excursion to a grower and a supermarket assignment with the parents, showed more and stronger increases in several psychosocial determinants of vegetable consumption than Taste Lessons without these additional activities. No significant intervention effects were found on children's willingness to taste unfamiliar vegetables during a taste test, and also not on their daily vegetable consumption.

Analyses on process indicators in both studies revealed that teachers and children highly liked Taste Lessons and that children most liked the experiential learning activities. Moreover, children's programme appreciation and interpersonal communication about the programme activities after the lessons were found to be positively associated with their change in psychosocial determinants.

In conclusion, evaluation of Taste Lessons showed an increase in children's knowledge and several other psychosocial determinants of eating behaviour. Implementation of (additional) experiential learning methods in school-based nutrition education is likely to enhance the intervention's effectiveness. To achieve behavioural change, school-based nutrition education should be complemented with a consistent set of changes in children's environment.