Towards a Common Understanding of Food Literacy
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Introduction

• Food literacy has traditionally been informed by nutrition-focused thinking, with a particular emphasis on food skills.
• Food literacy, however, goes beyond this traditional focus to incorporate both knowledge and skills with a focus more on broader food contexts such as food systems.
• A recent systematic review of food literacy definitions revealed a "harmonization" of these areas of focus should be considered.
• Various practitioners and scholars have been actively engaged in contemporary food issues and as such, propose various definitions and frameworks in an effort to explain the complexity of food literacy and to advance interventions at an individual and broader level.
• This has resulted in confusion and competing viewpoints reflected in the various definitions and frameworks for action.
• No shared understanding limits progress on program and policy development, implementation and evaluation.

Background

• Food literacy elicits a great deal of attention in academia, schools, government and non-government organizations.
• This concept has evolved over the past few years into a growing area of debated research and practice.
• Most food literacy definitions focus on awareness and understanding of nutrition related knowledge1.
• There has been an increasing number of food literacy definitions suggested over the past few years that incorporate both knowledge and skills with a focus more on broader food contexts such as food systems.

Methods

To unite the multiple theoretical perspectives associated with food literacy, in response to distinct bodies of literature, through an interdisciplinary lens.

Food Literacy Conceptual Model

Objective

To unite the multiple theoretical perspectives associated with food literacy, in response to distinct bodies of literature, through an interdisciplinary lens.

Results

• Given that food and health are synergistic, the intersection of health literacy and food literacy is essential to advance food literacy interventions, policy and practices.
• The proposed Food Literacy Conceptual Model includes an interpretive approach and a deeper understanding of food literacy through an interdisciplinary lens by building upon the Food Literacy Framework for Action2 conceding "individual behaviours and skills cannot be separated from their environmental or social context" (p. 144), and adapting the Integrated Model of Health Literacy3 while evolving the components4 and attributes of food literacy components5.

Discussion

• Many diverse disciplines aim to contribute to improving food literacy.
• Although food literacy often has a priority focus on individuals, it also embraces the public health notion and other aspects of food such as a sustainable food supply (agriculture) and the broader environment.
• Not all disciplines focus on the core elements of public health; however, they can still contribute to the broader context of food literacy through population-based programs, practices, initiatives and policies.
• Food literacy must have an interdisciplinary scope and broad interpretation in order to effectively plan and evaluate food literacy policies, programs, practices and initiatives.
• This analysis offers the proposed Food Literacy Conceptual Model, which integrates the individual and public health perspectives.
• The proposed Food Literacy Conceptual Model may serve as a basis for developing food literacy policies, programs, practices and initiatives and provide a conceptual basis for the development and validation of evaluation tools.
• Having a common understanding of food literacy may lend itself to aligning vision, strategies and priorities within and across governments locally, nationally, and internationally.

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References


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