

“We’re made of meat, so why should we eat vegetables?”

Food Discourses in the School Subject Home and Consumer Studies

Ingela Bohm

Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt försvar i Hörsal F, Humanisthuset, fredagen den 16 december, kl. 09:00. Avhandlingen kommer att försvaras på engelska.

Fakultetsopponent: Professor Hilary Janks,
Department for Applied English Language Studies/University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, Sydafrika.



Institutionen för kostvetenskap/Department of food and nutrition

Umeå universitet/Umeå University

Umeå 2016

Organization

Umeå University
Department of food and nutrition

Document type

Doctoral thesis

Date of publication

2 December 2016

Author

Ingela Bohm

Title

“We’re made of meat, so why should we eat vegetables?” Food Discourses in the School Subject Home and Consumer Studies

Abstract

Food has many different functions. On a physical level, it is needed to survive and to maintain health, but it also has many social, psychological, and emotional meanings. One arena where food occupies a central position is the Swedish school subject Home and Consumer Studies (HCS), which focuses on physical and psychosocial health. Since these dimensions are not always compatible, the aim of this dissertation was to explore how students and teachers of HCS use big ‘D’ Discourses to talk about and handle food in the subject. Fifty-nine students and five teachers were observed, recorded, and in some cases video-taped. Participants’ talk about vegetables, meat, vegetarian food, and sweet foods was transcribed verbatim and analysed for big ‘D’ Discourses.

The results indicated that students mostly based their choice of vegetables on sensory and cultural Discourses. Some vegetables were mandatory and others were optional. The health Discourse was only used if a specific assignment demanded it, and was closely tied to evaluation. Meat was seen as central, and any reduction could be problematic. It was regarded as simultaneously healthy and unhealthy. Vegetarian food was seen as ‘empty’, deviant, and an unattainable ideal. Access to vegetarian food was limited for non-vegetarians. Sweet foods gave social status to both students and teachers, and they could be traded or given away to mark relationships and hierarchies, but also withheld and used to police others.

Views on what constituted ‘normal’ eating could make ‘healthy’ food choices difficult. To counteract such problems, teachers can 1) focus on sensory experiences, experimental cooking methods, and already popular foods, 2) challenge normality by the way they speak about and handle different types of food, 3) make cooking and eating more communal and socially inclusive, 4) explore the psychosocial dimension of health on the same level as the physical dimension, and 5) make sure they do not grade students’ cultural backgrounds. However, scant resources of time, money, and equipment limit what can be achieved in the subject.

Keywords

Critical food literacy, discourse analysis, food sociology, health education, home economics

Language

English

ISBN

978-91-7601-617-6

Number of pages

124 + 4 papers