Comparison of EFNEP Educators’ and Low-Income High School Teens’ Opinions of a Game-based Nutrition and Physical Activity Curriculum

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**Background**

Rev It Up! (RIU), an Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), classroom-based, nutrition and physical activity (PA) curriculum for teens, is under development at Rutgers University. As a part of the formative research to support its development, a comparison between educators’ and teens’ perceptions of the lessons was conducted.

**Study Design, Settings, Participants**

The intervention, a 10-week program, was taught between 2018-2020. Researchers conducted semi-structured, post-intervention, one-on-one, face-to-face interviews with the educators and teens (who attended over 80% of the lessons). The students were interviewed at Brimm High School in Camden, NJ and NJ EFNEP educator interviews were conducted on Zoom or Cisco WebEx. The audiotaped interviews were about 30 minutes long and conducted by 2 graduate student and 1 EFNEP staff member.

**Outcome/Analysis**

Two independent coders performed a thematic analysis of interview transcripts. Findings were discussed until both researchers reached consensus.

**Results**

- A group of 25, 9th-grade teens (female = 16) and 9 NJ EFNEP educators participated in the study.
- Some EFNEP educators presumed that aspects of the curriculum were not appropriate for teens, thus, unyielding of results. The topics with the highest frequency of concern were:
  - A walk-indoors DVD featuring an adult cast
  - A sustainability video encouraging reduced red meat consumption and increased plant-based foods consumption
  - A food safety lesson based on a cookout.

“I feel like this one is a little rough with the walking DVD. Because it’s the first time they see it, we kinda like trick them into doing it. So, it’s kinda easy in the beginning but as the DVD goes through I think we lost more and more people with that.”

“The students are not preparing picnics. They’re not in charge of the picnics. And so, a lot of the information, they weren’t really interested in...they’re not grilling, for the most part. They’re not keeping the food safe, they have no idea about it, it’s not even on their radar.”

“I think that they did care [about the environment and sustainability], they do care about their planet...but I think the video was a little boring to them.”

**Results continued.**

However, the teens reported favorable knowledge and/or intention to change, regarding their:

- PA, which was taught using the DVD (75% of teens reported improvement in PA behaviors),
- Vegetable intake, which was taught in part using the sustainability lesson (40% of teens reported improvement in vegetable consumption), and
- Food safety practices, which were exclusively taught using the cookout lesson (>33% of teens reported improvement in food safety behaviors).

Teens’ and EFNEP educators’ had high levels of agreement regarding:

- Gamified lessons encouraging greater participation and engagement compared to other curricula
- Fast food restaurant education being impactful.
- Visualizing the sugar in sugar-sweetened beverages yielding behavior modification.

**Conclusion**

Educators and teens valued gamification as an effective educational approach for working with this age group; yet with regards to some lesson contents, educators appeared to be far more sensitive to potential issues than did the teens.