

Reconceiving trial and error: A central information practice in everyday food life

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ABSTRACT

This poster reports selected findings from an interpretivist qualitative study of the everyday food lives of people living in urban and rural Canada. This research sought to illuminate how people come to feel informed about food, how people navigate food information on ordinary and extraordinary days, and how people's encounters with food information are embodied. Through constructivist grounded theory analysis of data resulting from interviews and video tours, this research identified areas of information practice held in common across a diverse group of participants. This poster focuses on trial and error, one information practice identified in the study. This practice deserves closer examination in our field, as it is complex, generative, and meaningful.

The terminology of "trial and error" originally referred to a rudimentary form of learning that hinges on repetition, with learners trying again and again to solve problems correctly. In this study, participants' trial and error practices were richer than this. They were also more sophisticated than the portrayal of trial and error in information science scholarship, which tends to emphasize finite processes of overcoming failure, rather than open-ended processes of exploration and experimentation. Trial and error in people's food lives is an iterative, embodied, information-generating cycle. The result of each effort—each seasoning-to-taste, recipe selection, or dietary adjustment—informs the next effort. By shedding light on trial and error, this poster advances information practices theory in the context of everyday life. It also questions the valorization of another mode of information engagement, critical thinking, as uniquely complex.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Information needs; information seeking; information use; sociology of information

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

Qualitative methods; information practices; everyday life; food; embodiment