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Creating a more Proficient Food Process Allowing more Teaching Time for Children

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### **Abstract**

Teachers of the Monterey County Office of Education Early Head Start and Head Start programs are having hard time to carrying out the process of separating food for children at their centers. Since, it is interfering with their teaching time, they are asking to find a solution to resolve this problem because they only have four hours to fulfill the Head Start program requirements. This report explains the process of a pilot project that was implemented in one of the Head Start centers during the months of April and May. This project consisted in taking food to centers already separated, so teachers will have more time to teach their children. Even though this project will not be implemented to the 2017- 2018 school year due to insufficient funds of the Head Start program, it is encouraged to be implemented it in the future.

*Keywords:* Food separation, teaching time, Head Start

According to the Monterey County Office of Education (2014), the Head Start Program is a public nonprofit organization and is federally funded. It is funded 75% by the federal government to provide services to children and families. This program is required to generate 25% matching non-federal funds in in-kind contributions. This means they rely on donated services from local community members and partner organizations. The Head Start Program started in the summer of 1965 to fight the “war of poverty” (Monterey County Office of Education, (MCOE), 2014). The purpose was to address the needs of families with young children whose incomes were very low. Since, its initiation an immense number of families and children have been benefited from this program. Children have received child development services through Head Start (MCOE, 2014). It began in Castroville with a funded summer program that was awarded to Monterey County Board of Supervisors to serve 100 children and their families. Since then, Head Start has provided several services. For example, comprehensive early education, literacy, health, and social services to local families and children (MCOE, 2014).

The mission of Monterey County Head Start & Early Head Start, together with the community, is dedicated to offer the maximum quality early childhood education for children 0-5 years and comprehensive child and family services (MCOE, 2014). Also, the vision of this program is to be recognize as leaders in research based in early childhood education and family development. Moreover, it provides high-quality, comprehensive, seamless services based on community assessments and the individual needs of families. Most important, this program values children and families because all of them come with unique backgrounds, experiences and strengths. Therefore, it is dedicated to work with children and families to help them in achieving their needs and goals (MCOE, 2014).

The Head Start Program promotes good nutrition, physical activity, and sound health practices. It encourages healthy eating and lifestyle ideologies because this program believes that those are the fundamental elements to guarantee optimum brain development. The head Start program is committed to ongoing assessment to have better understanding of the community needs and to plan on how to decide what services and resources are going to be provided (MCOE, 2014).

This Program believes that culture and linguistic diversity of the community are to be respected and celebrated. Also, it values the participation of everyone because it believes that services are best distributed to children, families, and staff with a collaborative environment (MCOE, 2014). Furthermore, Head Start believes that the better you are educated the better you are going to serve your community. Therefore, it counts with well-prepared staff that provides high quality services. Moreover, good management is essential to maintain the program's success and sustainability. So, this program is always trying to use all the programs funds to offer a better quality of services for children and families. In addition, children in this program explore both teaching and outside environments. Therefore, this program provides high quality facilities and equipment for those children (MCOE, 2014). Finally, their goal is to start preparing their students with the skills needed for College and Career Readiness.

Each year, Head Start serves 1,245 children 0-5 years of age in partnership with two Delegate Agencies; Greenfield Unified School District (GUSD) and the Monterey Peninsula Unified School District (MPUSD). They represent 12.3% of the estimated total of eligible children in Monterey County. Monterey County Head Start and the delegates agencies funded enrollment of 1,245 is serving 23.7% of Head Start eligible children in the County (MCOE, 2014)

Head Start families are 96% Hispanic/Latino. From these families, there are 71% that identify Spanish as the primary language spoken at home. Head Start parents often have relative low levels of education attainment. More than half of the parents that receive services from Head Start have less than a high school diploma or equivalent (MCOE, 2014).

#### Statement of the Problem

Problem statement: Teachers of the Monterey County Head Start are using around 30 minutes of their teaching time to separate food for children at their centers.

#### Problem

The current problem is because teachers only have four hours to teach the class. Even though there are three teachers in each session, they have to do many things during those four hours. For example, feed them, teach them, take them to the bathroom, diaper change, take them outside to play, and if it was not enough, they must separate food for morning and afternoon sessions. There are only three teachers for both sessions. The afternoon teacher is in charge of doing the separation of food. Every teacher spends around 30 minutes in the process of separating it.

The Monterey County Head Start has its own kitchen. Here, hot and cold food is prepared for all children enrolled and teachers. Hot food and cold food should be ready by 8:00 am. At 5:00 am, one of the two cooks began to gather all the ingredients that it will use to prepare the food. In the meantime, the other cook is preparing the cold food. When hot food is ready, it is placed into one large metal container for each classroom and then into cambros to keep food warm until it is deliver to the centers. As a result, when food arrives the centers, teachers should take the temperature of the food as soon as possible. It should be above 135°F. If it is below this temperature, teachers are responsible to reheat the food until the temperature rises above 135°F

to avoid bacteria to grow. After that, food should be placed into the preheated warmer until is time to be served to children. In addition, the fruits should be cut into halves and placed into small baskets. For example, apples, oranges, and pears. The time to this process is about 30 minutes.

### What is known about the problem

According to Rocio Silva, one of the teachers at First Step 2 (personal communication, April 19, 2007) this problem started 13 years ago. The head start program had a 2-hour part time employee per each classroom. This person received the food when it arrived the center. Then, it separated it for am and pm sessions. Also, same person had the table ready when children were going to eat. After that, it would clean the eating area and take the dirty dishes to the kitchen. Resulting, teachers having more time to spend with children and providing them a safety environment. Even though it was functioning perfectly, there was a reduction of money for the head start program that they had to fire those people. The work that they used to do was added to the teachers. Since this time, teachers are struggling because they did not have enough time to spend with the children.

### Causes/contributing factors

The time that teachers are spending in this process is because they should meet the Head Start standards requirements for the family style meals. According to the National Center on Health (2015), “Family style meals is a great way to introduce healthy foods, model healthy behaviors, and provide opportunities for nutrition education” (p.1). It also means, “serving foods in dishes and eating together at the table. It is also an opportunity for children to have meaningful conversations with adults and develop social relationships” (p.1). Even though family style meals are a very good idea for children to socialize and develop fine and motor skills when children

pour, pass, serve, and share food, it is time consuming to teachers at a time of separating it into small containers. However, this is the only way children can hold them and pass them to their classmates which is part of the family style meals.

### **Consequences**

Since, centers with double sessions only have four hours per session to cover all the curriculum, there are some consequences that this problem has occasioned. For example, there have been occasions that these teachers can only take part of their breaks because the separation process takes away part of their lunch time. Also, sometimes, they do not have enough time to take care of the children as it should be. It can be risky because little kids sometimes do not know how to behave and can hurt themselves or harm other children. In addition, when they have conferences with parents, teachers are having a lot of trouble to prepare the materials that they will show to parents (R. Silva, personal communication, April 19).

### **Problem model**

#### **CAUSES/CONTRIBUTES TO:**

Teachers are separating food into small containers as soon as it arrives the centers.

Fruit and vegetables should be cut into small pieces to children.

#### **PROBLEM**

Teachers are spending 30 minutes separating food and cutting fruits for children at head start centers.

#### **CONSEQUENCES**

Teachers do not take their breaks on time or take less break time.

Teachers are not watching the children as they should be and it could be a considerable risk for children.

## **III. Capstone project description and justification**

### **Project Description and Justification**

Title: Eliminating the separation process of food for children in double-sessions centers at Head Start.

I am part of a new project that my mentor will be implementing in all double sessions centers at Head Start. This project will be implemented in the school year 2017-2018. However, we decided to pilot it first in one center that has two classrooms and each classroom is double session. My part in this project will consist in monitoring classrooms as well as the head start kitchen. I will be asking questions to staff of the center and the kitchen. It will be helpful because I will be recording all disagreements and new suggestions that teachers may have to improve the project. The project will consist in sending hot food to centers already separated into small containers and cold food already pre-portioned one plastic bag per table. Fruit and vegetables will be sent already cut.

The first step I did was to see if the small plastic containers that head start already have will work or not. If they work, my mentor will order more because there are not enough to all the centers. Then, I went to the kitchen at 5:30 in the morning. I waited until the food was ready and myself filled the small containers with food and at the same time I was taking the time that it took me to fill eight small containers. I also took the temperature of the food before it was served into the small containers, after that, I placed them into a cambro to see for how long the food was kept warm. I checked it after one hour and the food was above 135°F. It meant that the small containers were good to use in the new project. The food was spaghetti and it was at 190°F before it was placed into the small containers. After that, me and my mentor decided to pilot a new project at First Steps, a double session center that has two classrooms.

### **Project Implementation Plan**

This project is unique for the Monterey County Head Start centers because it is not being implemented in any other Head Starts before. The plan is that food will be ready before it goes out of the Head Start kitchen. There are two cookers in the kitchen, they should be able to send

food already into small containers. One of the drivers that deliver food to the center is part time, this person will be work full time to help the cookers the pack breakfast and snacks for kids. This person will also help to cut fruit and vegetables. There is another person who will be helping when it has free time of its duties. It will also help the cooks with the knew process.

Part of the implementation of this project is to pilot it in two classrooms before the new school year starts. By the time that school begins again, we should be able to know if the project will work. Also, we will have an emergency plan in case this project does not work for any reason. My mentor and I are planning to have a meeting with the rest of teachers to explain and give them information about the new project.

### **Scope of Work and Timeline**

The pilot project will be implemented for two weeks at First Steps, one of the Head Start centers. This center has two double- sessions classrooms. Teachers received a memo where it explained how the new project will be implemented. It also had instructions for teachers on how to follow the new procedure. It also said that I am going to monitor it and that if they have any question I will be there to assist them. If the project works well, it is going to be implemented in the next school year.

When the 2017-2018 school year begin, the project will be implemented since the first day of school to all double sessions centers. If the project continues to work well, it will last until the last double sessions disappear. The agency goal is to have all centers extended from 8:30 a. m. to 3:45 p.m. by 2020.

### **Table and Outline**

Time for the pilot project: 2 weeks

The pilot project will be implemented in 2 classrooms.

Implemented in the rest of the double session centers will be in the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year.

This project will last until the 2019-2020 school year ends.

By this year all the center will be extended day.

There will be no more double-session classrooms.

Teachers will have enough time to separate the food by themselves because they will have only 20 children and they will continue to have three teachers per class.

### **Obstacles or unexpected circumstances**

Possible challenges or obstacles may occur with the personnel in the kitchen. It could be that they do not want to collaborate and disagree with the new project. However, all kitchen staff should collaborate with each other to make possible this project. Even though the new project looks difficult to them, it will not be difficult to do. The problem is that it will be time consuming. The first day could be frustrating for the kitchen staff. Maybe, food will not be ready for all centers, but if this happens, each center has emergency food, so children will have something to eat that day.

### **Expected Program Outcome**

An expected outcome of the project was that teachers reduced the time of preparing food for children in their centers. The goal was that teacher spend at the most ten minutes in putting food already separated by kitchen staff into the warmer or in the refrigerator until children would eat it. As a result, teachers would have more time to take care of children and give them a better security since they are little kids.

### **Expected Measurable Results**

One of the measures used to assess the new project was a short questionnaire to teachers. Here, they were asked questions about the new process. For example, what they liked, disliked, and suggestions to improve the project. I also talked to the teachers in person to have a better understanding of what they were thinking of this project and what benefits, they would take out from this project.

### **Data Collection Methodology**

A questionnaire was given to teachers at the end of two months that the project was piloted. However, this was not the only method I used to collect data. As I mentioned before, there was personal communication with teachers and kitchen staff. I asked Rocio Garcia one of the teachers at the center where we piloted the project. Do you think that this new project would benefit you and how? She was telling me that she really liked this project because it gave them more time to teach their children. It also, helped them reduce stress. She was telling me that the only problem was that sometimes food arrived cold in the plastic containers and they have to reheat it. This process took time and made the project not work at all. She suggested to buy new plastic containers that keep food hot longer (R. Garcia, personal communication, June 2, 2017).

I also talked to Esther Fernandez and Maria Guzman, they are the cooks of the Head Start kitchen. I asked them what they thought about the new project. Both of them were telling me that they were be able to collaborate to make the new project work. However, they were going to need another person to help them. They were saying that it was not difficult to do, but it was time consuming. In addition, it would take more time when the it is implemented to the

rest of the Head Start centers (E. Fernandez & M. Guzman, personal communication, June 1, 2017).

## **PROJECT RESULTS/FINDINGS**

In the middle of the project, I found out that some part of my project was not working. I could see this problem because most of the time I was there when food arrived at the center. For example, some of the hot food that was sent to the centers did not arrive hot. This created another problem. It was that teachers have to reheat the food and take the temperature again to make sure it was above the 135° F that the law requires. I talked to my mentor about this problem and she told me that during the summer we will look for other type of plastic containers that keep food warm enough until it arrives the centers. Even though this problem has a solution, another problem resulted with the kitchen staff. They were saying that this new project will benefit teachers, but it will affect them. However, they were willing to do it if Head Start hire another employee to help them. We have a solution for this problem. A part-time employee will be hired as a full-time employee. This person will assist the two cooks with the meal preparation.

During the summer, I was supposed to meet with my mentor to look for the new containers and plan the implementation to the rest of the centers. I was waiting for her to call me. However, she did not do it. I sent her a text message to have an appointment with her and talk about the project and the next steps to the implementation. She gave me a date and I went. However, she told me that the project will not be implemented because there was not enough money to buy the new plastic containers for the rest of the centers. Also, they will not be able to hire this person as a full-time employee because of the same reason.

### Personal reflection/final thoughts

Even though the Head Start program right now does not have the funds to continue with this project, it should look for new funds to implement it in the future. I believe so because I had the opportunity to be part of this project and could see how children and teachers benefited from it. At the end of the day, the most important thing is the wellness of children. As a result of piloting this project in one of the centers, now we have new ideas on how to improve it to have better result next time. This time, the project will not be implemented. However, a future intern could continue with this project to make it work. As the money is one of the major problem, this intern should be focusing first in making a proposal to get new funds for this project. Once, the money is funded, the project could be implemented in the rest of the Head Start centers.

### Personal/professional growth:

Being part of this project helped me to understand people that is affected by a problem. Also, I understood that if someone resolve a problem, another could be arisen. For example, the implementation of this project will resolve the teachers' problem, but it will bring more work for people in the kitchen because they would have to do the work that teachers will not do anymore. It was so difficult dealing with these people, but at the same time I understood their concerns and feelings.

I also understood that when planning a project, ones needs to explore the problem and make research to look for solutions or try new ideas that are already working in other country, county or state. After I finished this project, I learned that before trying to address a problem in an agency or a community, ones have to be sure that there is enough money to implement it. For example, when I started this project, I did not realize about the cost that it will cause. However,

thanks to this experience next time I will try to make sure that there are enough funds to implement a project.

I feel that I grew personal and professional with this project. This was my first time working in an office. The experience that I acquired was great. I learned from making copies to use ClildPlus software, it is the new system that the agency is using. This is where the record of each children is kept. Working with people in the kitchen and in the classrooms, was a great experience too. When I was there, I felt very important and professional. I dress up professional and I felt like a leader.

#### What you learned about the problem

Even though my project is not going to be implemented in the classrooms for the next years, I could prove that teachers can save more time to teach their children. Since, children are so innocents and they do not know how to take care of themselves, teachers can give them a better care by implementing this project. This project

#### What more could be done to address the problem

After piloting my project and seeing that it worked, I believe that my project could be implemented in the next school year. However, my mentor and I were not well organized and did not know how to look for funds to hire one more person to help the cooks. Since they are the people who are going to do the job, they necessarily need more help.

#### Advice to the agency

The advice that I would give to the agency is that they should begin to involve the interns more into the agency from the beginning of the internship. Interns could be more familiar to all

departments and know what they can do and what cannot do. Thus, inter would have a better understanding of how the agency works.

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**APPENDICES**

**1. What did you like about this new process of separating the food in the kitchen before it arrives to the center?**

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**1. What did you dislike about the new project?**

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**1. What suggestions can you give us to improve this process?**

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**2. On a scale of 1 – 10 with 10 being the most positive, how would you describe this new process? (circle a number)**

- 1            2            3            4            5            6            7            8            9            10**