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Increasing Preschoolers' Understanding of Healthy and Unhealthy Foods

Vanessa K Garcia

A Capstone project for the Bachelor of Arts in Human Development and Family Studies

Increasing Preschooler's Understanding of Healthy and Unhealthy Foods

Introduction

Today, many children are eating unhealthy meals at home or at school and cannot distinguish between nutritious foods and unhealthy foods. Although children are not the only ones making food decisions in the household, they are able to learn better choices that they can make and understand future health consequences of eating habits. To address this lack of knowledge, I created a three-day lesson plan that will increase the understanding of eating habits for the preschool children at Cabrillo College Lab Preschool.

Needs Statement

Preschool students lack education on healthy eating habits and are only primarily familiar with home-based diets. Beginning nutrition education at an early age can help reduce certain future chronic diseases that may occur. Child health and nutrition can be influenced at an early age and should be an important concept to discuss with preschool children.

At this age, children don't know the consequences of unhealthy eating habits. Children should consume approximately 1,400 calories in a single day since children are being active at this age group (Wittmer, Petersen, & Puckett, 2017). I have noticed that children are often snacking which doesn't fill them up with healthy meal choices. Children need to know the importance of a healthy MyPlate. According to United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), MyPlate is a healthy food plate that had the five major food groups which include "fruits, vegetables, grains, protein foods, and dairy" (MyPlate, 2018). These are the essentials of having the right amount of protein that we need and calorie intake. Although children don't know the understanding of a Myplate at this age, adults need to ensure we are feeding them the healthier meal choices. Preschool children can be picky eaters, but if adults offer different types of healthy food to choose from, children will learn to accept meal choices you offer. It was

researched that introducing new foods can enhance the child to try new foods. It was also mentioned that “having children help prepare meals” will allow them create their own plate and snacks (Wittmer, Petersen, & Puckett, 2017).

A resource that was I found interesting and educational was Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), which support families with the funding to support low-income families. This is plays an important concept since families may not be able to afford healthy food options while purchasing groceries. Since children only know about home-based diets they assume that what they eat at home is healthy. Children can benefit at an early age if healthy food is introduced to them and practiced. Research by (Kim, Y. 2016) has shown that engaging in family fun activities, such as allowing your child to help while you cook and reading cook books has shown to be the best way for children to learn about healthy eating habits and encouraging them to try new foods. Families of all ethnic backgrounds and different socioeconomic statuses can benefit from this need. if they took the time to research and learn how valuable their health is and their children’s health. (Zahnd, 2017).

Many low-income families are at risk for obesity and other chronic diseases if early childhood programs are not partaking in curriculum on health. Educating children at an early age about healthy food options can reduce the rate of being overweight or obese. Today approximately , “1 in 3 low-income preschoolers (2-5 years old) reportedly overweight or obese” (Zahnd, 2017). Unhealthy food options are easily accessible to families. Often children cannot distinguish what else healthy and unhealthy because processed food unhealthy food is most likely the only food available in their household. Preschools play a huge role in obesity prevention since children spend a large amount of time in their school settings. Childcare settings can help “shape children's dietary intake, physical activity, and energy balance” (Story,

Kaphingst, & French, 2006). Educating children about healthy food habits can reduce the risk of chronic diseases. Preschool children can indicate healthier eating habits while at home or at school.

Developmentally Appropriate Approaches

Developmentally, preschoolers from age 2 to 7 are in the Preoperational stage according to Piaget's theory. As part of this stage, children have the ability to represent things with words and images but lack logical reasoning. Due to lack of logical reasoning, children automatically come to conclusions or do not understand the other people's point of views. Piaget's theory will allow children to cognitively learn concepts and start to develop logical reasoning on healthy eating habits

Caregivers and parents play an important role in early practices in healthy eating practices (Dev, 2017). Beginning education at an early age can help reduce certain future chronic diseases that may occur such as diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, and heart problems. It is appropriate for children to learn about nutrition and their health at an early age, so they can learn how to make healthy choices and decisions when adult figures are not around. Children make eating decisions at school, and also when parents have busy schedules, children might have to pick out meals themselves. At this age, preschool children know what they enjoy eating but do not have enough logic to distinguish healthy and unhealthy foods. Consuming and knowing about nutrition will help the child grow healthy, develop, feel good about their themselves, and prevent chronic diseases. Children should start being educated on foods that are good for their bodies. Further, research has determined that child health and nutrition can be influenced at an early age. The researcher explains that having interest in learning about "eating habits to foster and sustain the child's healthful development"(Kim, Y. 2016). One theory that I researched about

was Piaget's theory in nutrition education. In this journal it mentions how that early habits will likely continue into adulthood. In Piaget's theory he mentions that nutrition education should be included in the following three stages "offering of education, acquisition of knowledge, formation of attitudes and behavior development"(Başkale, 2009). Children are capable of eating healthy food on their own with the support of their caregivers and parents. Teaching children as young as in preschool can help prevent future diseases and also encourage them to make healthier meal choices. Therefore, I am creating a series of lessons to help children understand how their eating habits will have an influence on them.

Consideration of Diversity

My project will be conducted at Cabrillo College Lab Preschool (CCLP). Given its connection to Cabrillo College students and employees, the ethnic diversity of the children reflects the attendees and employees of the college. According to conversations with the main teacher in the Spring semester of 2018, 22 students are enrolled, 9 children are Latino (6 of them are bilingual) and 13 students are White. The families come from various socioeconomic statuses, given that the majority of the children have parents that are enrolled at the Cabrillo College as a student or their parents are professors at the school. Low socioeconomic status is often a disadvantage in nutrition. Not all families may have food security at home, so it is beneficial when a preschool provides healthy meals.

My lesson will focus on healthy food choices that some families may not be able to afford on a regular basis. As a result, the content of the lesson may exclude some kids because their family may be unable to provide the foods at home. Since I will be performing the lessons in English, the children will have to be English proficient enough to complete the tasks and understand the content.

Learning Outcomes

I intend to provide three, 30-minute lessons to preschool students enrolled at Cabrillo College Lab Preschool.

By the end of the project, children will:

1. Construct their own healthy plate
2. Distinguish healthy and unhealthy foods
3. Indicate healthy foods they eat at home

Method

Day 1

First, I will gather all the “green group” of preschool students and I will introduce myself to the new students and also remind the former students who I am and explain to them why I’m there. Once the students are sitting down I will be reading a book called “Why Should I Eat Well?”. During the book, I will ask the students questions regarding the book or ask about their experiences to which they can relate. To help students engage, I will ask for a helpers to turn pages or to call on students who have their hand raised to answer questions. Then, I will summarize the book and ask if they had any questions about the book or any of the concepts. After, I will hand out a worksheet with unhealthy and healthy foods, which students will be able to circle or color healthy foods and X out unhealthy foods.

Day 2

Today, I will recap to the students if they remember the book “Why Should I Eat Well?” from the previous Friday and show the book again. I will ask the students if they remember healthy and unhealthy foods that were presented in the book and physically flip through the pages with them. Then, I will inform them that we will be creating a healthy plate of foods that

they personally like. I will be providing students with paper plates, glue sticks, and food cut outs. I will show them examples of my plate with vegetables and fruits such as broccoli, squash, apples, etc. After, we will go around and show our healthy plates. I will inform them about foods that are ok to eat “sometimes.”

Day 3

Today, I will recap to the students about our healthy plates and show my previous example. I will then inform them that we will be going grocery shopping for three healthy foods and one unhealthy food that they eat at home or foods they have in their fridge. I will hand out small paper bags and set up laminated foods around our group. Children will go choose their three healthy foods and one unhealthy and come back to the group. Then, each student will then be able to present the foods they chose and tape it to the paper refrigerator I created. After, I will go over their healthy choices and unhealthy choices and explain why some foods aren't good for us. I will wrap up my lesson with presenting them with their vegetable and fruit option that is usually served for lunch after my lesson.

Results

Learning outcome 1 was that the participants would distinguish healthy and unhealthy foods. In Appendix A, I have provided one photograph of the worksheet on which the participants were asked to circle healthy foods and X out unhealthy foods for their answers. I also included Table 1 to show the correct and incorrect responses. In addition, we went over the worksheet answers and talked about the effects of unhealthy eating and how it can lead into negative consequences. Although the participants discussed eating habits, I am not sure there is clear evidence that participants achieved this outcome due to confusion of “what is healthy”

because some participants circled food they enjoyed and were not necessarily healthy, and others understood the activity, answering correctly.

Learning outcome 2 was that the participants would create a healthy plate. At the beginning, I re-read them the book, *Why Should I Eat Healthy*, so the participants could recall the last lesson. I pointed out the healthy foods in the book and the unhealthy foods. I gave them different print out options of healthy and some unhealthy foods with a blank paper plate. In Appendix B, I have provided two examples their healthy plates. I analyzed all their paper plates, all of the participants were all correct, and they only put healthy food options on their plate. This finding means that they understood the difference between healthy and unhealthy foods in the activity. Although the participants did not understand learning outcome 1, I believe that the learning outcome was met through this activity focused on learning outcome 2 because they had a better understanding with a hands-on activity and review of the content of the book.

Learning outcome 3 was that the participants would indicate healthy foods they had at home. To achieve this outcome, I had the participants choose pictures of three healthy foods and one unhealthy food to put into a paper refrigerator. The majority of the participants six out of seven children were able to select three healthy foods and one unhealthy food correct. In Appendix C, I have provided a photograph of one correct shopping bag and one incorrect shopping bag. Six out of seven of the participants answered correctly for indicating healthy items. I believe that this outcome was met during the lesson.

Discussion

Overall, I felt my project was successful. Although not all the participants were able to fully understand the concept, they were able to discuss what the activity they participated in that day to their caregivers. Children were able to discuss to their caregivers what they learned about

healthy foods. Reflecting on my results, I noticed that each participant showed improvement throughout the short time

The results are consistent with Jean Piaget's theory of Cognitive Development, given that children ages 2 to 7 in the preoperational stage are able to represent words and images but lack logical reasoning. In my project, the children were unable to see the bigger concept of eating well, but, like most preschoolers at this age, were able to understand the idea during the activities of the lesson.

In my project, I feel I could have included diversity more by adding food options that different children can relate to culturally-specific, home-based foods. Although I provided pictures of common foods, I could have added "healthy" meals they might eat at home depending on their cultural background. I also could have translated some of my lessons activities into being bilingual so that children could access their home language.

Next time, I would make sure to do my lesson plans on consecutive days. It was challenging to have to have to remind the children about healthy eating, since it was a 7-day gap between my lessons. I would also make sure to only work with children that are about to transition into Kindergarten because teaching one three year old distracted from the other children who were more advanced.

Overall, I think that the children learned about healthy eating and nutrition in the short time I was present at CCPS. I'm not sure if they will remember all the information I discussed but I'm content that they majority of the participants understood the lessons at the moment. Given that the children may not be explicitly taught at home about nutrition, I felt the knowledge I gave them they will remember partial aspects of my lesson.

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Appendix A

Worksheet

Healthy Foods II

Name Lily

Healthy Foods

- Circle the foods that are healthy.
- Put an X on the foods that are not healthy.
- Color your favorite healthy food.

The worksheet contains 12 hand-drawn food items arranged in a 4x3 grid. Each item is marked with a red 'X' and colored in pink. The items are: bread, ice cream, carrots, a pie, a carton of milk, a carrot, a plate of sliced meat, a fish, a wheel of cheese, a pile of nuts, a round cake, and an apple.

Table 1

Correct	4
Incorrect	3
Total	7

Appendix B
Healthy plates



Appendix C

Shopping bags

