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## Increasing Healthy Eating Habits In Preschoolers

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## Increasing Healthy Eating Habits In Preschoolers

Lizbeth Angeles

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

## Increasing Healthy Eating In Preschoolers

### Introduction

There is a lack of nutrition education in preschools. Without nutrition education, children may choose poor quality foods, and develop health problems, which may lead to obesity later in life. To address the lack of nutrition education in preschoolers, I created a two-day lesson plan about healthy eating choices for preschoolers at Valle Verde Migrant and Seasonal Head Start in Greenfield, California.

### Need Statement

During ages 3 to 5, children start to develop their own food choices. Because of this ability, children benefit from education on nutrition and learning how to differentiate healthy foods from unhealthy foods. If children do not have adequate nutrition education, they are at risk of developing unhealthy eating habits, which later on could have negative effects on children's health. To address the lack of nutrition education in preschoolers, I created a three-day lesson plan about healthy eating choices for preschoolers at the Valle Verde Migrant and Seasonal Head Start in Greenfield, California.

Around “12.5 million children in the United States under the age of five attend some form of child care throughout the week” (Laughlin, 2013 as cited in Barnes & Warren, 2017, p. 274). Besides the home setting, childcare centers are another place where preschoolers receive nutrition education and are encouraged to have a healthy eating habit. Unfortunately, most children who live in the United States do not have an appropriate diet and are at risk of developing obesity or other diet-related diseases in the future (Andreyeva et al., 2018). Nutrition education provided at child care centers could prevent children from those risks by influencing

them to have healthier eating habits. Child care settings could have an influence on children's diets by providing nutritious food, beverages and also provide them nutrition education, as well as teacher role modeling that will encourage them to make healthy food choices (Andreyeva et al., 2018).

The "Federal *Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)* provides financial support for foodservice in Early Childhood Education settings, including child care centers and family day care homes" (Andreyeva et al., 2018, p. 458). This program addresses food insecurity and it helps improve nutrition in young children from low-income families (Andreyeva et al., 2018, p. 458). The CACFP regulates the types and amount of food that is served to children at the centers. However, many states are required to follow the nutrition standards of the CACFP in all licensed child care centers but some centers do not reinforce these standards. According to Andreyeva et al. (2018), there is not much evidence about the meals served in centers that do not participate in CACFP. The way food is being served to preschoolers by caregivers can have an important role in the amount of food they intake. When children are at child care centers, they mostly rely on their caregivers and it's important for them to determine what is the best feeding practice and make sure they are receiving an appropriate intake of food (Lanigan et al., 2019).

The preschool years are very important because it is when children establish their healthy lifelong eating habits. Increasing the consumption of fruits and vegetables during early childhood may prevent children from developing chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, and stroke (Hunsaker & Jensen, 2017). Not only should child care centers serve children more fruits and vegetables but they should also provide knowledge and skills on how to prepare healthy lunches at home (Battjes-Fries et al., 2016). Caregivers could teach children these skills by having

hands-on activities where children could taste different foods, cook, and garden. By having children do these activities, it would help them increase their interest in consuming healthier foods.

Given that young children between the ages of 3 to 5 start developing their own food choices and are not receiving adequate nutrition education, they might be at risk of developing unhealthy eating habits and compromising their health. In order to increase the awareness of eating healthy, I intend to provide a two-day lesson plan about healthy eating choices to preschoolers at Valle Verde Migrant and Seasonal Head Start in Greenfield, California.

### Theory

According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, the preoperational stage begins around the age of two and ends around the age of seven (McLeod, 2018). During this stage, children use "symbols to represent words, images, and ideas" (Lally & Valentine-French, n.d). In the preoperational stage, young children also start to use language but they are not able to understand "adult logic or mentally manipulate information" (Lally & Valentine-French, n.d). Therefore, children's logic is based on what they have personally learned throughout the years. A child's perception and preference for fruit and vegetables are not clear because they are at a stage where they are starting to learn what nutrition is and exploring different foods (Kok, Koelen, Zeinstra, & De Graaf, 2007). Therefore, children who are in the preoperational stage are not able to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy foods (Kok, Koelen, Zeinstra, & De Graaf, 2007). When children eat different foods, they are aware that the food they ate went inside their stomach but are not aware of the effects it has on their body. Since children are not able to understand the difference between healthy and unhealthy foods, I intend to provide children three

lessons that will help them make healthy eating choices. Like I had mentioned before, children who are in the preoperational stage could not understand adult logic, so they understand things better symbolically. That is why I will be using images and animated books, so children will be able to understand food and health in a more simple way.

#### Consideration of Diversity

My project will be conducted at Valle Verde Migrant and Seasonal Head Start in Greenfield, California. Valle Verde Seasonal Migrant and Seasonal Head Start provides child care and preschool services at no cost to low-income families whose income is from working in agriculture or harvesting (Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, n.d.). This program serves children from birth up to five years old. Most of the parents that take their children to Valle Verde are agriculture workers. This means most of the children only speak Spanish or a little bit of English and some may only speak dialects like triqui or mixteco. My lessons are intended to be in Spanish and English, this means that children have to be proficient in Spanish or English. Unfortunately, children who speak another language other than Spanish or English will be unintentionally excluded from my lessons.

#### Learning Outcomes

I intend to provide a two-day lesson plan about healthy eating choices to preschoolers at the Valle Verde Migrant and Seasonal Head Start in Greenfield, California. The lesson plans will be approximately 15 minutes.

By the end of the project, participants will:

1. recognize different foods from the five food groups.
2. create their own healthy lunch.

3. identify one vegetable and one fruit from the green and red group.

### Method

#### **Day 1**

First, I will be introducing myself to the children and tell them that I'm there to do a project on nutrition. I'll ask them to sit in a circle and then inform them that we are going to be discussing the different food groups. From there, I will proceed to read the book, *The Two Bite Club* (Adams & Lunsford, 2009). This book explains the different food groups the USDA's MyPlate has. After reading the book, I will introduce an activity that relates to the book. For the activity, I will be using cutouts of healthy and unhealthy foods made out of flannel and MyPlate flannel board (See Appendix A). I will be handing each child one cut out and then asking them to put it in the food group it belongs to. The food cutouts have a border that is the color of the food group in which they belong to. The borders will guide the children to place the food cutouts in the correct group section.

#### **Day 2**

The second time I meet with the children, I will read the book *Vegetables (Healthy Eating with MyPlate)* (Dickmann, 2012). By reading them another book, I will refresh their mind on what they have previously covered. Once I am done reading the book, they will do an activity that relates to the story. For the activity, I will have a MyPlate set for each child at the table. See Appendix B. Next to each plate, there are going to be colored baskets that represent the five food groups. Inside the baskets, there are going to be food cutouts that belong to each food group. See Appendix C. I will call the children to the table and tell them they could create their own lunch

using the cutouts. For documentation, I will take pictures of the children's lunch and then they will be free to take their plate home.

### **Day 3**

For the last day, I will be discussing fruits and vegetables with the children. I will have the children sit in a circle on the floor, and I will point to the green section of the MyPlate poster and say, "Do you remember learning about the vegetable group of my MyPlate?" I'll allow the children to answer and I will write their answers on a piece of paper. Then I'll ask "what are some foods that you would find in this group?" Once children answer, I'll write their answers down on a piece of paper again. After that, I will point to the red section of MyPlate and say, "Do you remember learning about the fruits group of MyPlate?" Once again, will allow the children to answer and then I will write down their answers. Then I will ask them "Can you name some fruits that would be included in this group?" After we are done with the discussion, I will read the book *Give Me 5 A Day!* (Reeves & Celander, 2006). When I finish reading the book, I will ask the children the number of veggies and fruits they need to eat per day. All their answers will be written down on a piece of paper. To end the lesson, children are going to have the opportunity to create their own fruit puppets. At a table, I will have different fruit cutouts, colored popsicle sticks, and glue. See Appendix D. I will invite the children over to the table and tell them to pick a cut out and create their own puppet. As a thank you, children are going to be able to take their puppet home and I will give them a sticker.

### Results

Not completed due to COVID-19.

### Discussion



Not completed due to COVID-19.

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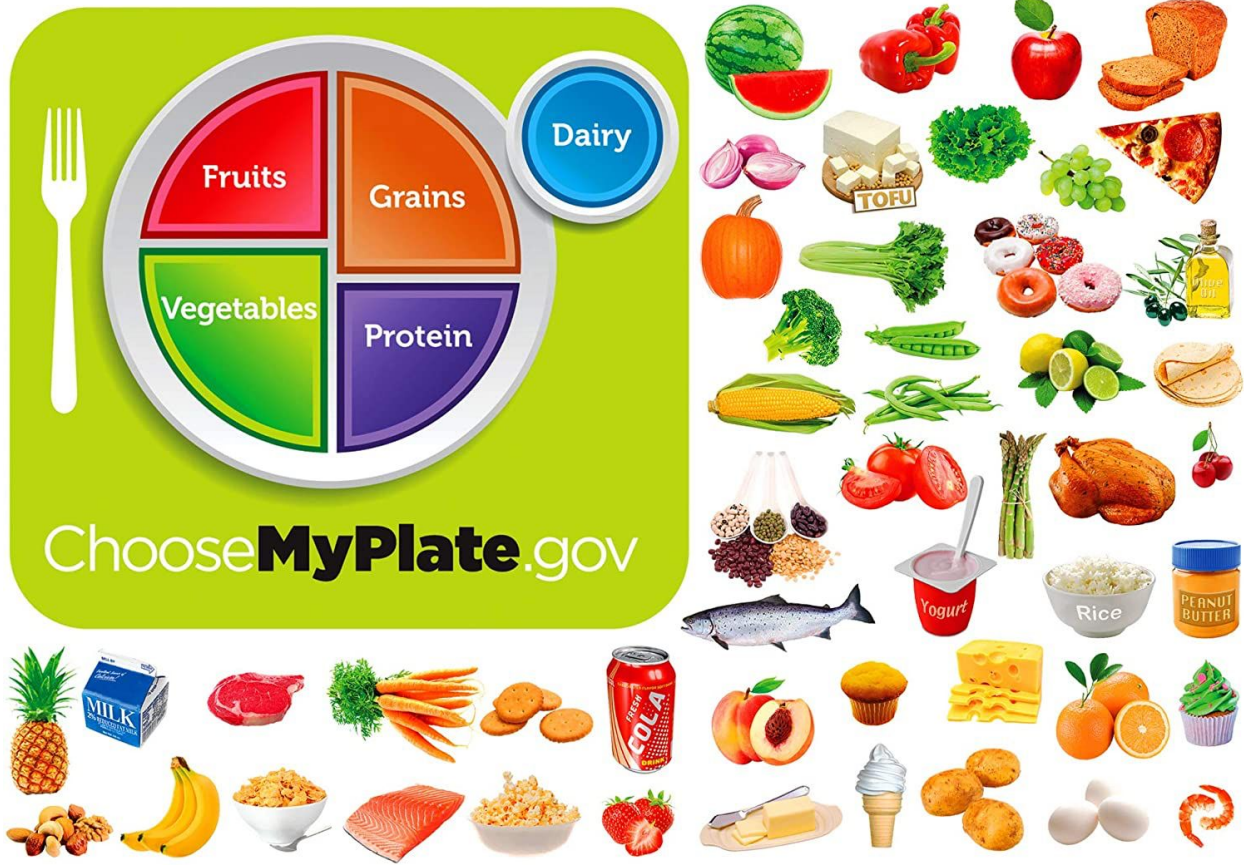
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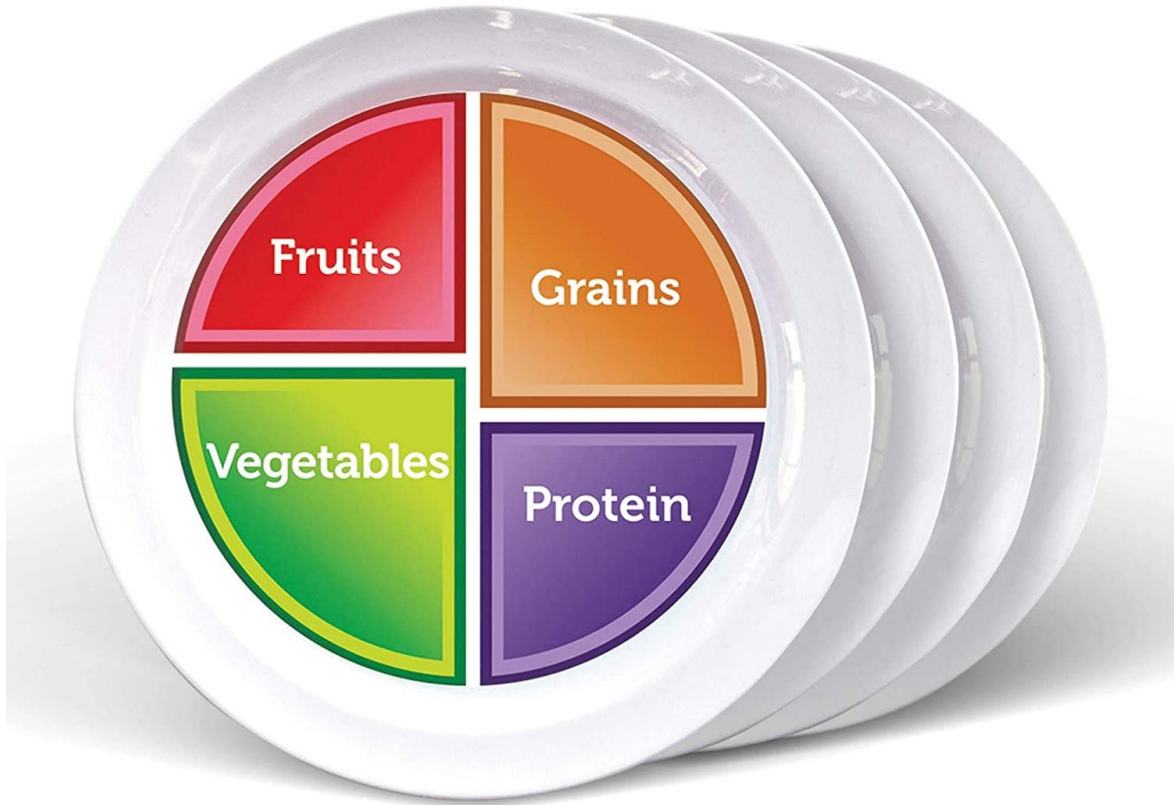
Appendix A

Flannel board and cut outs used in day 1



Appendix B

MyPlate used in day 2



Appendix C

Baskets and cut outs used in day 2



Appendix D

Fruit cut outs, colored sticks, and glue used in day 3

