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Increasing Nutrition And Healthy Eating Among Preschoolers

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RUNNING HEAD: INCREASING NUTRITION AND HEALTHY EATING AMONG
PRESCHOOLERS

Capstone Paper: Increasing Nutrition And Healthy Eating Among Preschoolers

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Introduction

There is little nutritional education in preschools. Children are not being taught about the importance of eating nutritious foods. When children are taught about nutrition, they will create positive eating habits that could make them less susceptible to health complications. To address the lack of nutrition education, I created a three-day lesson about nutrition for preschoolers at Teddy Bear Learning Center in Monterey, California.

Needs Statement

The (CDC) centers for disease control and prevention, indicate the importance of a comprehensive health around nutritional education which can empower children by providing them with the knowledge plus the skills to make healthy food and beverage choices. In order to increase the importance of healthy eating for children, schools must play an integral role in assisting children by establishing eating habits. Additionally, the percentage of schools providing required instruction on nutrition and dietary behaviors decreased from 84.6% to 74.1% between 2000 and 2014 (CDC).

During the years from 0- 5, children should inhibit proper nutrition for optimal growth and development (Taras, H). The first few years are the best times to teach children what they need to know especially around nutrition and making healthy food choices. Research from child care centers announce that preschool children are not consuming the suggested amounts of whole grains, vegetables, and fruit (Taras, H). When children are away from their homes and are at school, they are exposed to different foods and cultures in which they will be able to learn amongst each other and increase their knowledge of nutrition and food.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2017), a healthful diet and lifestyle are key factors within a sustainable supportive environment and community. Because children

acquire more than 70% of their daily nutrition intake in childcare settings, implementing nutrition education can help promote optimal health and development. Furthermore, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics released a benchmark in July 2018 that encouraged early care and education (ECE) programs, including child care centers and family child care homes, to incorporate cultural and religious food preferences of children into meals. Preschool children can learn the benefits of nutrition and understand the importance of proper health from the different food exposures earlier on in their lives.

Theory/Diversity Framework +Learning Outcomes

Social Learning Theory

In his Social Learning Theory, Albert Bandura discussed that children are able to learn vicariously through observation and/or observations through others. Bandura asserts that most human behavior is learned through observation, imitation, and modeling. He asserted that human behavior is a continuous reciprocal interaction between individuals cognitive, behavioral and environmental influences. Most of the behaviors that people display are learned deliberately or inadvertently through the influence of examples (Bandura, Albert 1971).

Through observation by another person's experience, that particular experience inevitably also becomes the child's. The Social Learning Theory would state the very act of observing a negative reaction to nutrition and food which could then cause the observing child to dislike a food or even become a picky eater. Because Bandura's Social Learning Theory focuses on observational learning, it is suitable as a tool in reference to preschool aged children about increasing their awareness of nutrition and food to help them make healthy choices.

Through observational learning, teachers and adults can model behaviors for children. In the case for preschool children, an effective way to increase awareness around nutrition and food

is through modeling desired behavior for them according to Bandura's Social Learning Theory. In his theory, he claims that observation alone will not be enough to measure maximal learning; a person's motivation and their mental state also contribute to learning. Instead, Bandura asserts learning is a result of intrinsic reinforcement as well. For example, a child may learn something due to their sense of self, satisfaction and even accomplishment. Therefore, teachers and peers of children who model positive behavior relating to nutrition and food will increase the likelihood within children to exhibit the same behaviors around food.

Furthermore, this theory can be applied to preschoolers when increasing their awareness around nutrition and food, and can be used to teach them positive behaviors. According to the theory, individuals in this case, children are more likely to pick up the desired behavior through someone they admire and look up to. Teachers can be mindful of using positive role models and reinforcement to increase a desired behavior and therefore, alter the class environment. For example, if there are two children in the class and one of those children has a negative reaction towards a new food, the child who is receiving praise is because they are exhibiting positive behavior towards the experience. The child then who displays negative behavior towards a new food will be more likely to try new foods in order to receive the same praise from their teacher. Therefore, observation plays a very powerful role in learning. It does not only help support students but assists them to strongly understand, retain, and apply their learning to their lives so they can learn and achieve even more in the areas of nutrition and food.

Consideration of Diversity

My project will be done at Teddy Bear Preschool in Monterey, California. I will conduct my lessons in Room 3 with children mixed ages from (2 ½ -4). Nearly all the children are English proficient. There are a total of 10 children in the classroom and a total of 45 in the entire

center. More than half of Teddy Bear Preschool enrollments are parents of military personnel which require them to provide their children with convenient food for the purpose of time and scheduling. There are two issues of diversity within my participants which are around culture and ethnicity. First, culture plays an important role in diet and nutrition because it connects the individual to their roots and what they know. For example, another's culture may rely solely on a vegetarian diet when another culture's diet requires one to consume meat on a daily basis. Because most of the children are caucasian and eat a standard american diet, I will be able to introduce diverse foods from different cultures. Secondly, by including different foods from different backgrounds, children will be able to understand that others don't necessarily eat the same food one does. However, they will increase their awareness of other foods out there.

The two issues of diversity within my content is language and food choices. I am using culturally-specific foods and some children may not be familiar with some of the foods listed. My lessons will be taught in English, so the children have to be able to comprehend and understand me. The second issue of diversity are the food choices I picked for my activities. Because the group of children I am working with come from different cultural backgrounds, I incorporated food that is unfamiliar or new to the children for a better model used to increase knowledge of nutrition and food.

Learning Outcomes

I created a three-day lesson plan around nutrition and healthy eating habits to address the lack of nutrition education for preschoolers at Teddy Bear Learning Center in Monterey, California. By the end of my project participants will be able to:

1. Distinguish healthy and unhealthy foods
2. Identify two foods from any of the five food groups (i.e. dairy, vegetable, fruit)

3. Create their own healthy lunch

Method

Day 1

First, I thanked the class and the teacher for letting me come and execute my lessons. I let the children know what my lessons consist of and what I will be teaching them. I then conducted circle time by singing the good morning song, followed by reading main ideas in *Good Enough to Eat?* (Rockwell, 2009). I passed along food cards (See Appendix A) with different types of food from the five food groups for each student to take turns during our discussion. Followed by the discussion was an activity worksheet. (See Appendixes A)

Day 2

On the second day, I arrived early to set up the classroom and played, “*Healthy Foods Song*” by Hartman (2019). I encouraged the children to get up, dance, and move their bodies to the music. I then settled the children into a large group and conducted my circle. First, I read the book, *Why should you eat well?* (Llewellyn, 2011) (See Appendixes 2). As I was reading the book to the children, I made sure to stop and put emphasis to which foods are sometimes food and healthy food for them to see and hear me. I stopped a few times when the character was eating healthy foods and made positive comments such as, “Wow, I like how she is making a great decision and trying new vegetables.”. Then, I divided a felt board (See Appendixes 2) with tape and placed “healthy food” on the left and “Sometimes food” on the right side. After discussing the story, I went around the circle and handed out food cards for children to tape and place on which side they think each food type belongs. To measure their understanding of the lesson, I handed out a worksheet the children could circle or cross off two healthy and unhealthy foods based on what they just learned. See Appendix X.

Day 3

On the final day, I began by summarizing our lessons from the previous days. Before lunch, I read through the book, *Yummy: Good food makes me strong* (Rotner, 2018?). After reading the book, we discussed as a group what we normally have for lunch to eat. Further, we discussed whether or not the food we normally eat was considered healthy or not. For our last activity, my goal for the children was to create their own lunches using cut out images of food. I handed out the images and they were able to glue them to their lunchbox worksheet.

Results

Learning outcome one was for the participants to identify or list any two foods from any of the five food groups. Before the activity, I read the book, *Good Enough to Eat* (Rockwell 2009). I read through the food groups as the class interacted with me by saying out loud what the food group was and what food they saw in the book. In order to assess this outcome, I had the participants paste the correct food image into the proper food group using a sorting worksheet (See Appendix A). After evaluating the worksheets, I noticed that all the children were able to identify at least two foods from any of the food groups. For example, three participants identified food out of the fruit group, two children identified food from the vegetable group and one participant identified two foods from the dairy group. The results were successfully met.

Learning outcome two was for the participants to be able to sort healthy and unhealthy foods. In order to assess this outcome, I had the children complete a worksheet in which they were to distinguish healthy foods from sometimes food using markers (Appendix B). After I analyzed the worksheets, I calculated the number of healthy foods (7) and sometimes food (8) and grouped the results by successful and unsuccessful. I grouped them whether the participants were able to circle more than three sometimes and food and more than three healthy foods.

Looking over the worksheets, I calculated three out of six children who were able to identify more than three sometimes food and 5 out of 6 children who were able to identify more than 3 healthy foods. Once the children finished, I asked them about why they circled the foods in which they did. One child said, "I eat treats sometimes." Another child said out loud, "I circled hot dogs because it's a good food and I can eat it a lot. It makes me happy." However, some children when asked why they circled the foods, responded back either with a like or dislike. Although, some of the children did not fully understand the directions which caused them to mark foods they liked or dislike instead of actually differentiating from healthy versus unhealthy. Therefore, I believe this outcome was only minimally met.

Learning outcome three was for the participants to be able to create their own healthy lunch. Unfortunately, this learning outcome was not met. Before the activity, I read through the book, *Yummy! Good Food Makes Me Strong* (Rotner 2008). To assess this outcome, I gave the participants images of food and a lunchbox worksheet where they were able to pack their own healthy lunch by gluing food images onto their worksheets of which they said was healthy. I think this activity was a little too advanced for them as I saw they were not able to create a healthy lunch. Some children included the occasional treats such as ice cream and cereal. One participant failed to present a visual overall of what was inside his healthy lunchbox. Another reason why I did not think this outcome was met was because one participant, instead, wanted to glue all the food images on their lunch box.

Discussion

Overall, I think my project was successful. Although, not all my learning outcomes were met. I believe the children enjoyed the lessons and were engaged in the different activities. Because his theory focuses on behaviors modeling and imitation. The lesson failed to bring in

live models for the children to observe and imitate. Instead, I choose books that would be visually appealing and easy to make out the concepts. However, the books I chose were able to give children a foundation of having food in moderation whether it was healthy or sometimes food. When I was first introduced, 'Why should I eat well?' The words used in the book were 'fatty this and that'. Instead, I took out the word 'fatty' and made sure to replace it with the words 'sometimes food'. After discussing the book, some children were able to tell me how much they ate of certain foods and make real life connections.

For example, in the 'Yummy' book pictures diversity such as a child using chopsticks. I asked if any of the children knew what chopsticks were and they all had a clueless look on their face. I then began to explain as I used myself as an example to model desired behavior towards a new concept. If I were to do this activity again, I would have extended the lesson to go on for more than three days. I would have brought in props such as different eating utensils used from different cultures and backgrounds including different food/fruits. Although, my learning outcomes were minimally met. I feel the children took away a better understanding of different food types and identifying positive and negative effects. For example, some children understand that treats are sometimes food because when discussing what foods we have at home, children state they are not allowed to eat foods such as candy or cupcakes because it doesn't make their body feel good. However, a child said they can have hotdogs everyday for lunch because it makes her feel good.

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Table 1

List of identified foods chosen by participants

Participant	Food Group	Identify any 2 Foods
1	Fruit	Carrot, Banana
2	Vegetable	Carrot, Broccoli
3	Dairy	Milk, Cheese
4	Vegetable	Broccoli, Carrot
5	Fruit	Watermelon, Grape
6	Fruit	Banana, Watermelon

Table 2

List of healthy and sometimes food chosen by the participants including total

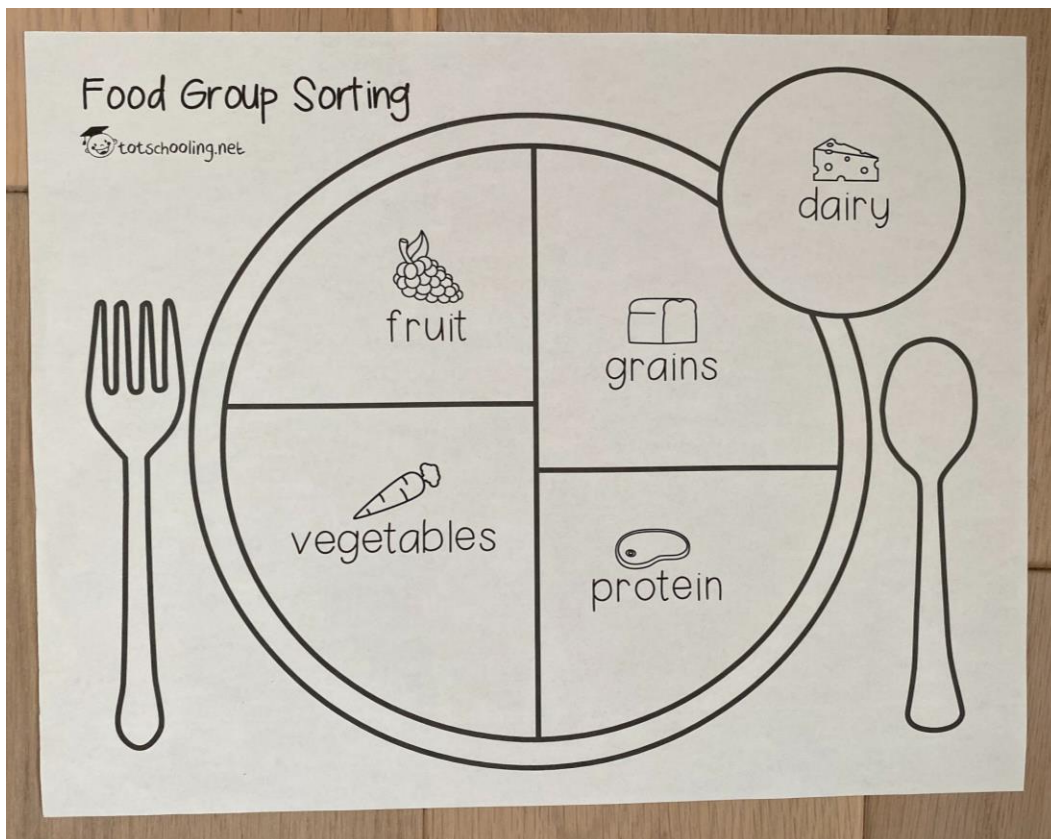
Participants	Sometimes Food Chosen	Total	Healthy Foods Chosen	Total
1	Pie, Pizza, Ice cream, Hotdog, cake,	5 out of 7	Grape, pear, strawberry	3 out of 8
2	Cake, Ice cream	2 out of 7	Cherry, Pear, Apple, Tomato, Strawberry	5 out of 8
3	Burger, Donut, Cake, Pizza, Hot dog	5 out of 7	Lemon, pear, strawberry	3 out of 8
4	Burger, Pizza, donut, pie, hotdog	5 out of 7	Grape, broccoli, pear, lemon, pepper	5 out of 8
5	Ice cream, pizza, pie, cake	4 out of 7	Pear	1 out of 8
6	Burger, donut, pizza, ice cream	4 out of 7	lemon , apple, pear, strawberry	4 out of 8

Table 3

List of food items packed inside participants lunches

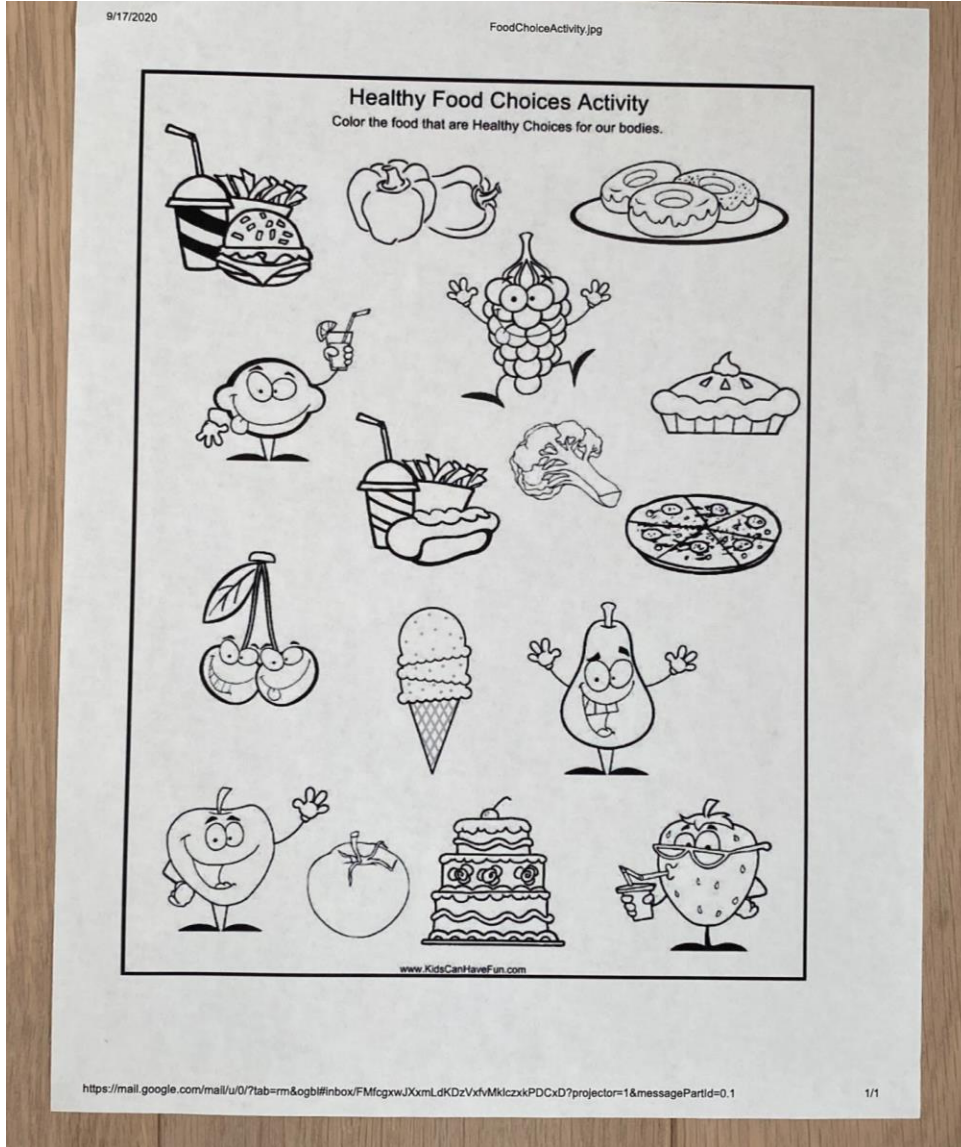
Participant	Items chosen for healthy lunch	Sometimes Food
1	Pasta, yogurt, milk, grapes, fish, banana, watermelon, ham, steak, carrot and cheese	None
2	Ice cream, carrot, watermelon	Ice Cream
3	none	none
4	Pepper, yogurt, egg, ice cream, broccoli	Ice Cream
5	Milk, fish, ham, steak, banana and carrot	None
6	Cereal, spaghetti, banana, grapes, pepper, bread	None

Appendix 1



Appendix 2





Kid Explorers love Fruits and Vegetables!

Veggies and Fruits add a rainbow of color to your meal.
Can you guess our names and what food group we belong to?
Put a square around all the fruits. Put a circle around all the vegetables.

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