



NUTRITIONAL EDUCATION FOR PARENTS AND PRESCHOOL CHILDREN IN DAY CARE

Educação nutricional para pais e pré-escolares em uma creche

Educación nutricional para padres y preescolares de una guardería

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To describe an experience with nutritional education through a children's fable developed with parents and preschool children in a public day care center. **Data Synthesis:** The experience occurred on May 15, 2018, which celebrates the international day of the families, at a public day care center in the municipality of Fortaleza. A total of 35 children aged 2-4 years and 30 adults of both sexes participated. The educational action was developed from an adapted presentation of the child's fable "The three little pigs". A 3-meter poster was built using non-woven fabric to display an image of the pigs' three houses. The straw, stick and brick houses were associated with ultra-processed, processed and natural or minimally processed foods, respectively. The foods were chosen based on the Dietary Guidelines for the Brazilian Population. Parents/guardians were welcomed with informative leaflets upon their arrival and then invited to step closer to the poster. The ludic way in which the poster was presented facilitated the interaction between the target audience and the preceptor and university students and aroused the curiosity about the association of the houses with the human body in relation to the importance of food choice. The school environment was understood as a place that can potentially promote health. **Conclusion:** Nutritional education is fundamental in the school environment for the promotion of healthy eating. The development of ludic activities is important to arouse children's interest and hence favor learning.

Descriptors: Food and Nutrition Education; Child, Preschool; Healthy Diet.

RESUMO

Objetivo: Descrever uma experiência de educação nutricional por intermédio de uma fábula infantil trabalhada com pais e crianças em idade pré-escolar de uma creche pública. **Síntese dos dados:** A experiência ocorreu no dia 15 de maio de 2018, em que é comemorado o Dia Internacional da Família em uma creche pública no município de Fortaleza, Ceará. Houve a participação de 35 crianças, entre 2 a 4 anos, e de 30 adultos de ambos os sexos. A ação educativa desenvolveu-se a partir de uma apresentação adaptada da fábula infantil "Os três porquinhos". Construiu-se um cartaz de três metros com material de tecido não tecido (TNT), que continha uma imagem das três casas dos porquinhos. As casas de palha, madeira e tijolos foram associadas aos alimentos ultraprocessados, processados e in natura, ou minimamente processados, respectivamente. Os alimentos escolhidos baseavam-se no novo Guia Alimentar para a População Brasileira. Na medida em que os pais/responsáveis chegavam, eram acolhidos com panfletos explicativos e convidados a aproximarem-se do cartaz. Em decorrência do modo lúdico apresentado, percebeu-se facilidade na interação do preceptor e dos acadêmicos com o público-alvo, despertando a curiosidade na associação das casas ao corpo humano em relação à importância da escolha dos alimentos, entendendo-se o ambiente escolar como um local possível para promoção de saúde. **Conclusão:** A educação nutricional é fundamental no ambiente escolar para a promoção da alimentação saudável. O desenvolvimento de atividades lúdicas é importante para despertar o interesse das crianças, favorecendo o aprendizado.

Descritores: Educação Nutricional; Pré-escolares; Alimentação Saudável.



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RESUMEN

Objetivo: Describir una experiencia de educación nutricional a través de una fábula infantil trabajada con padres y niños de edad preescolar de una guardería pública. **Síntesis de los datos:** La experiencia se dio en el día 15 de mayo de 2018 en el cual se celebra el Día Internacional de la Familia en una guardería pública del municipio de Fortaleza, Ceará. Participaron 35 niños entre los 2 y 4 años y 30 adultos de ambos los sexos. La acción educativa se ha desarrollado a partir de una presentación adaptada de la fábula infantil "Los tres cerditos". Se construyó un cartel de tres metros con material de tejido no tejido (TNT) que tenía la imagen de las tres casas de los cerditos. Las casas de paja, madera y ladrillo fueron asociadas con los alimentos ultra procesados, procesados e in natura, o mínimamente procesados, respectivamente. Los alimentos elegidos se basaban en la nueva guía alimentaria para la población brasileña. Mientras los padres/responsables llegaban eran recibidos con panfletos explicativos e invitados a acercarse del cartel. A través la manera lúdica de la presentación se percibió la facilidad de la interacción entre el preceptor y los académicos con el público-alvo despertando la curiosidad sobre la asociación de las casas con el cuerpo humano respecto la importancia de la elección de los alimentos entendiéndose el ambiente de la escuela como un sitio posible para la promoción de la salud. **Conclusión:** La educación nutricional es fundamental en el ambiente escolar para la promoción de la alimentación saludable. El desarrollo de actividades lúdicas es importante para despertar el interés de los niños y favorecer el aprendizaje.

Descriptores: Educación Alimentaria y Nutricional; Preescolar; Dieta Saludable.

INTRODUCTION

During preschool years – ages between 2 and 6 – children need greater care in relation to food, especially because it is the phase of life in which there is the introduction of new eating habits and sensory experiences that will directly motivate the eating pattern to be adopted by the child, such as smell and taste, and the notion of times for food intake^(1,2).

Due to the wide variety of food options, environments stimulate the onset of obesity, a condition in which people find it difficult to exchange an unhealthy food for a nutritious one⁽³⁾. The high rate of weight gain acquired in early childhood is a problem as it is associated with the increased risk of developing physical, social and psychological changes^(4,5). This situation decreases local eating practices and increases the consumption of processed foods, which has an impact on the health of the individual since the production of the product^(6,7).

Data from the Food and Nutrition Surveillance System (*Sistema de Vigilância Alimentar e Nutricional – SISVAN*)⁽⁸⁾ for the city of Fortaleza in the Northeast region show that in 2017 the Body Mass Index (BMI)-for-age in children aged 1 to 5 years was as follows: 24.02% children were at risk of being overweight, 12.90% were overweight, and 8.81% were obese.

It should be noted that children develop their habits in two environments that can and should be permanently dialoging: the family and the school. For school-age children and young people, the school is a source of concrete information, a place where the relevance of the facts in the media can be checked⁽⁹⁾.

Therefore, places that encourage learning, play and care are essential to prevent excess weight and facilitate the development of more appropriate eating habits. But these places are becoming increasingly distant from the family environment and have become part of kindergartens and early childhood education schools. In England and New Zealand, more than 80% of preschoolers attend these environments⁽¹⁰⁾.

Given the reduction of appetite and interest in food during the preschool phase, it is necessary to seek to diversify the presentation and strategies to arouse in the child the desire to consume healthy food and seek the balance of portions offered, which have proven to provide the nutrients needed for a healthy life⁽¹¹⁾.

Thus, it is important to know the magnitude of the impact that playful health promotion activities focused on eating have on children and how parents see this alternative. Therefore, this paper aimed to describe an experience with nutrition education through a children's fable developed with parents and preschool children in a public day care center.

DATA SYNTHESIS

This is an experience report of a nutrition education program targeted at preschoolers and their parents in a public day care center in Fortaleza, Ceará, Brazil. The day care center selected is part of the coverage area of

the internship in a Primary Health Care Center of the School of Nutrition of a private university. The program was developed by the students and the preceptor of the Mandatory Internship in Public Health of the School of Nutrition, which promoted the articulation with the day care center.

The nutritional transition promotes changes in eating habits, such as an increased and easier access to low-cost and high calorie processed foods. These changes increased the prevalence of noncommunicable diseases. People's diets became full of sugars and fats and the intake of complex carbohydrates and fiber decreased⁽¹²⁾.

Food and Nutrition Education (*Educação Alimentar e Nutricional - EAN*) can be defined as an intervention based on multi-professional and intersectoral work in which learning is constant. It seeks to make individuals able to change their eating habits through active and didactic methodologies⁽¹³⁾. The information passed on by EAN build knowledge and must respect the culture and particularities of each group⁽¹⁴⁾.

Thus, the educational activity consisted of a presentation adapted from the famous children's fable "The Three Little Pigs". The original fable describes the story of three little pigs and a big bad wolf who are the main characters. After deciding to leave their mother's house, each of the little pigs built their own house: one made of straw, one made of sticks and a third one made of bricks. The three little pigs cartoon was released by Disney in 1933 and the little pigs were named Fifer Pig, Fiddler Pig and Practical Pig. However, the story has undergone several adaptations since then⁽¹⁵⁾.

This story was chosen because of its allusion to fragility, represented by the straw and stick houses, and to rigidity, represented by the brick house. Thus, it illustrates that the human body would be similar to a house which must be cared for through healthy eating so that it remains strong like the brick house and that foods that can make the body as fragile as the straw and stick houses should be avoided.

Children are interested in this fable because the three characters are little pigs who are theoretically small and fragile just like children, although the oldest pig is the smartest to have built the brick house⁽¹⁶⁾. "The Three Little Pigs" is a story that children love and shows them that when they grow up they will be more responsible and take care of themselves. Thus, with greater knowledge it becomes easier to overcome challenges⁽¹⁷⁾.

To begin the activity, a three-meter poster was built using nonwoven fabric (NWF). The poster featured an image of the three houses built by the little pigs, as narrated in the story. Food selection for the houses was based on the new Dietary Guidelines for the Brazilian Population, which lists fresh or minimally processed foods, processed foods and ultra-processed foods⁽¹⁸⁾.

The straw house was made of broom straw. Its door was made of rubberized boards and the roof was made of orange cardboard. The stick house was made of wood paper and it had a door made of rubberized boards and a roof made of orange cardboard. The brick house was made of brown brick-shaped cardboard, a rubberized door and an orange cardboard roof. On the roof of the straw house were pictures of some of the unhealthiest foods children eat. The ingredients on display at this time were ultra-processed foods: stuffed cookies; packed snacks; instant noodles; sugar-sweetened or artificially-sweetened beverages, such as soda; fruit juice powder; sausages and other products derived from meat and animal fat; and ready-to-heat frozen products that are nutritionally unbalanced. Because of their formulation and presentation, these foods tend to be eaten in excess and to replace natural or minimally processed foods. In addition, the forms of production, distribution, marketing and consumption adversely affect culture, social life and the environment⁽¹⁸⁾.

In the stick house were the foods that should be consumed moderately. Although processed foods retain the basic identity and most nutrients of the food from which they are derived, the ingredients and processing methods used in manufacturing unfavorably alter the nutritional composition. The addition of salt or sugar in much greater quantities than those used in culinary preparations in general makes the original food a source of nutrients whose excessive consumption is associated with heart disease, obesity and other chronic diseases⁽¹⁸⁾.

In the brick house were the healthiest foods, which consisted of a wide variety of natural or minimally processed foods predominantly of plant origin, which are the basis for a nutritionally balanced, tasty and culturally appropriate diet that can promote a socially and environmentally sustainable food system⁽¹⁸⁾. Thus, the foods in the brick house favored the strengthening of the organism. After that, each child received a picture of the little pigs to paint.

The description of the activity is summarized in Chart I. The food classification and the food source for each house are described.

Chart I - Description of a playful activity targeted at preschoolers. Fortaleza, Ceará, 2018.

Representation	Types of Foods	
Straw house	Ultra-processed foods	Soda; stuffed cookies; ice cream; candies in sweets in general; cakes and cake mixes; juice powder; instant noodle; packed snacks and ready-to-heat frozen products.
Stick house	Processed foods	Preserved food; fruits in syrup; cheese; breads made with wheat flour; yeast and salt.
Brick house	Natural or minimally processed foods	Legumes; vegetables; fruits; potato; manioc; white or brown rice; corn grain; beans of all colors; nuts; beef, pork and poultry; fish; pasteurized milk; eggs and drinking water.

The activity was scheduled for the end of the day when parents/guardians pick up the children so that they could effectively participate in the promotion of care with the children's diet. Thus, 35 children aged 2-4 years and 30 adults of both sexes participated. The activity took place on May 15, 2018, when the International Day of Families is celebrated according to the school calendar.

As parents/guardians arrived, after picking up their children, they were welcomed with explanatory leaflets and invited to approach the poster featuring the three little pigs' houses displayed on the wall. The playful mode of presentation allowed students and the preceptor to easily interact with the target audience and arouse in them curiosity about the association of the houses with the human body regarding the importance of food choice.

Traditional fairy tales are simple tools that allow parents, educators and nutritionists to explore numerous concepts about food and nutrition in a playful way by integrating various areas of knowledge. For its successful use, it is important to establish clear objectives of what is intended to be achieved and to adapt them to the child's skills and capacity of understanding respecting their magical thinking and cognitive development⁽¹⁹⁾.

In order to make the activity pleasurable for both children and parents, we sought to establish an emotional bond between them during the nutrition education activity as technical competence and lovingness are educational relationships essential to successful learning⁽²⁰⁾.

Making children themselves prefer healthy foods should be an ongoing exercise for parents and educators so that in the future children will become adults with healthy eating habits. Thus, meals and snacks should be relaxed and healthy moments since at this stage children need a lot of energy to grow, play and study⁽²⁰⁾.

Research⁽²¹⁾ has shown the importance of the partnership between the various actors involved in the process of child's learning. The research described how important it is for teachers to engage in teaching-learning activities to address themes in a playful way in the classroom using active learning methodologies such as storytelling focusing on the school meals menu and fostering the importance of eating such foods. In addition, integration between parents, teachers and the nutritionist was also of great value as the nutritionist is an important professional in this process of training and encouraging good eating habits⁽²¹⁾.

The activity described in this study showed that the school environment can promote health through educational practices that draw attention using visual aids, colors, shapes and sounds that attract children, especially preschoolers – and not only through accommodation of traditional activities that involve explaining something.

A study⁽²²⁾ on the influence of educational activities focused on healthy eating on the literacy of students showed the importance of using innovative pedagogical practices in the education of children. The activity took place in a school in Realengo, Rio de Janeiro, using videos of children's stories that addressed healthy eating. Thus, it is important that teachers reinvent their activities. Aiming at changes over time, new approaches are essential for knowledge construction and fixation.

Carrying out playful activities is an excellent strategy because it stimulates the construction of human knowledge and the progression of different operative skills as it is an important tool for personal progress and the achievement of institutional goals⁽²³⁾.

Another study⁽²⁴⁾ carried out a storytelling activity in the Gengibre Community in Fortaleza, Ceará, with children aged 4-15 to address the story "Tainara, its community and the healthy crop". The story talks about the life of a sick child in society and some community dwellers who get together to plant and harvest medicinal food from a crop they grow and thus help the child to get better. The researchers noted that everyone paid close attention to the story and

wondered which foods they knew and which they had access to in the community. They concluded that the playful form of carrying out the activity enabled dialog and contributed to learning, as we also noted in our experience.

Storytelling is a valuable aid in the pedagogical practice of teachers in early childhood education and early elementary education. The stories stimulate creativity, imagination and orality, facilitate learning, develop oral, written and visual languages, make reading pleasurable, promote gross and fine motor skills, promote critical thinking, make-believe play, values and concepts, collaborate with the formation of the child's personality, enable social and affective involvement, and explore culture and diversity⁽²⁵⁾.

In the city of Rio de Janeiro⁽²³⁾, nutritional education activities carried out with preschoolers in a university day care center were analyzed based on the point of view of children's guardians. With regard to eating at the day care center, it was observed the need to implement nutritional education activities in order to promote greater acceptance of the menu by children. To do so, researchers used a collection of books called the Kingdom of Fruitland and the Kingdom of Vegetables as well as games and videos which were seen as a way to build knowledge. The teachers considered it to be a very effective activity and parents reported improvements in children's eating habits. This emphasizes once again the importance of nutrition education.

Reading is a powerful tool for children's imagination. The stories gain colors, shapes, and teach simply and effectively. These characteristics can facilitate the acquisition of good eating habits through books covering themes on the act of eating, that is, when listening to how much fruits and vegetables have vibrant and distinct colors and pleasant flavors, the research population may become more motivated to try them⁽²⁶⁾.

Actions that encourage healthy eating become a positive factor in children's eating habits. Although interventions centered on the environment influence change, larger and more constant interventions are still needed to increase impact⁽²⁷⁾.

This was the first fable adaptation activity carried out both students and preceptor and it enabled a good dynamism in the explanation. This experience provided great satisfaction in the work performed and the great interaction caused by the easy understanding of the subject by parents and children should be highlighted. Therefore, in carrying out this activity we realized that playful activities at this stage of life should be encouraged as important teaching-learning tools. Storytelling stimulated the development of the imagination and the association with the proposed plot, which also encouraged a healthier diet.

It should be noted that although the goal for which the activity was planned was achieved, there were some difficulties regarding the continuation of the activity with other students of the day care center due to the completion of the internship.

CONCLUSION

Given the above, it is concluded that childhood is the ideal period for the development and discovery of eating habits because it is during the preschool years that these habits are acquired. Acquisition of such knowledge can be facilitated by Food and Nutrition Education, which becomes fundamental in the school environment for the promotion of healthy eating. The performance of playful activities was important to arouse the interest in children and favor learning.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Ana Angélica Romeiro Cardoso contributed to the study conception and design, and acquisition, analysis and interpretation of data; **Maria Raquel da Silva Lima** contributed to the acquisition, analysis and interpretation of data and **Márcia Oliveira Coelho Campos** contributed to the writing and/or revision of the manuscript.

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