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## An Instruction Unit: Nutrition for Kids

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## AN INSTRUCTION UNIT: NUTRITION FOR KIDS

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If you give a man a fish, he will have a meal.

If you teach him to fish, he will have a living.

If you are thinking a year ahead, sow seed.

If you are thinking ten years ahead, plant a tree.

If you are thinking one hundred years ahead, educate the people.

By sowing seed once, you will harvest once.

By planting a tree, you will harvest tenfold.

By educating the people, you will harvest one hundred-fold.

Kuan-tzu, fourth to third century B.C., China

The true purpose of education and learning is to help people learn to live the most effective, productive and satisfying lives possible. Nutrition should be an integral part of this education and learning.

Malnutrition exists throughout the world, even in the United States, which is considered a very wealthy nation. Malnutrition is not restricted by economic status, education or race (Todhunter, 1969). This suggests that people may not be informed of proper nutritional practices, or that if they have been informed, are not aware of the consequences of neglecting such nutritional practices. Considerable concern has arisen as a result of this information, and solutions to the problem are being sought (Darby, 1976).

Indications are that some of the problems experienced by the student who cannot concentrate and is restless or disruptive in the classroom can be resolved through a well-balanced diet (Stronck, 1980).

Many teachers have found through observation and questioning that hungry students have problems concentrating and are often discipline problems. Children who eat breakfast have more energy, can pay attention longer and have a better attitude (Schauss, 1981).

As an elementary school teacher, the writer of this paper has observed throughout the years that the same students do not eat breakfast day after day. Often these students do not eat breakfast because they must get themselves up and ready for school; some of the parents tend to oversleep habitually; or in some cases, there is nothing at home to eat for breakfast.

### **Development and Components of the Instructional Unit**

As a result of the interests previously discussed, personal beliefs and direct observations, the author developed the unit, *Nutrition for Kids*, which includes a teacher's guide and a handbook for parents titled, *Kids' Food*. The handbook offers encouragement to parents to make sure their children eat a nutritious breakfast every morning. It also is an attempt to encourage parents to replace junk food snacks with nutritious snacks for their children.

The handbook contains guidelines for good nutrition as suggested by the

United States government (U.S., Congress, House, Committee of Child Nutrition, 95th Congress, November 10, 1977), reasons for eating a good breakfast, and suggestions for a good nutritious breakfast. Ideas for both traditional and non-traditional breakfasts are suggested, and a section of recipes is included.

A questionnaire was sent to the parents of the students who received the handbook, to help evaluate its effectiveness. Most of the parents replying to the questionnaire indicated satisfaction with the general information and recipes.

A unit in nutrition can be exciting and challenging for students. Let them touch, squeeze, smell, taste, prepare and cook. Expose the students to something that interests them and they will respond with enthusiasm. *Nutrition For Kids*, a teacher's guide plus a student handbook were developed with this in mind. As students prepare snacks and look at fruits and vegetables, they become aware of the basics of good nutrition.

The teacher's guide suggests many nutrition activities in math, reading, spelling, language, cassette listening, and film strip viewing which proved to be excellent for learning centers. Students were able to learn how to work in groups to make peanut butter, stuff celery sticks, plan a party and prepare a poster about basic food groups. Students prepared menus, shopping lists, looked for newspaper grocery ads, and did the actual shopping for a class project. By doing the planning and preparation, the students put into practice their knowledge of nutrition (Martin, 1963).

The *Nutrition For Kids* teacher's guide, student handbook and *Kid's Food*, the handbook for parents, are available at cost from the author.

Nutrition education is undergoing major change. Learning is no longer equated with cognitive retention in the nutritional education field. Learning is now approached to effect a change in behavior as a result of experience. Self-image programs have replaced the original disease-oriented approach, and self-evaluation programs now begin at the kindergarten level (Osman, 1972).

Food habits take years to develop and, as a result, are difficult to change. Food habits are very personal. Each individual thinks about food in a different way.

As children grow up they learn food habits from those around them. These early formed habits influence food consumption for a lifetime. Because of this, students should be helped to develop a taste for a great variety of nutritious foods that will help build strong healthy bodies.

Teaching people what to eat while they are still young should make a powerful impact upon their health. Educators need to be concerned about the health and behavior of all students. Children are our investment in the future. Providing them with proper nutrition education is part of that investment.

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