

## Health Literacy

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India is changing, at a break-neck speed. And the young Indians are leading a life incredibly different from the earlier generation. Economy is booming, unemployment has reduced and the youth today are making more money (even factoring inflation) and enjoying more riches than their parents did. Unfortunately, they are also leading a much less healthier life than their parents. That very fact is ironic as shouldn't all the money we are making individually and as a nation help us lead a healthier life?

Well, economic progress has ensured better health care – facilities, hospitals, advanced technology, medicines, vaccinations, supplements, professionals, therapies, insurance, etc. But the list does not include good health itself, since it cannot be bought from supermarkets or medical stores. It comes from conscious living, a good lifestyle, proper eating habits and a strong commitment to healthy living.

This article tries to explore ways in which schools and teachers can achieve this important goal – health education leading to positive action.

### What is Health Education?

The **World Health Organization** defines health education as *any combination of learning experiences designed to help individuals and communities improve their health, by increasing their knowledge or influencing their attitudes.*

In a developing society, schools can play a significant part in promoting student health and their overall wellbeing.

Some topics that come under health education are:

- a. appreciation, respect for, and care of the human body and its vital organs
- b. physical fitness
- c. nutrition and healthy eating choices
- d. emotional health and a positive self image
- e. health issues of alcohol, tobacco, drug use and abuse
- f. disaster preparedness – fire, earthquake, floods, epidemics

- g. road safety
- h. environmental health (e.g.: air quality, water quality, food sanitation)
- i. choosing professional medical and health services
- j. choices of health-related careers.

### **Who is doing what? – A little trivia!**

The US state education departments follow a comprehensive health education curriculum framework to impart this valuable learning through schools.

In 2000, *Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE)* was made a part of national school curriculum in England.

Australian states' education departments have *Health and Physical Education (HPE)* in their school curriculum.

In India, *National Health Policy 2002* envisages giving priority to school health programs that aim at preventive health education, regular health check-ups and promoting positive health seeking behaviour amongst children.

### **Role of schools in Health Education**

Through schools, the girls and the boys, the rich and the poor, the budding young scholars, the sports kids and the artists can all be *included* in a well-researched, timely and complete education in health related topics. A combined school project or an event can mobilize all, in a fun and exciting way.

### **Some simple ideas to start with:**

#### **1. Healthy Lunches at School**

Chef Ann Cooper is known in the US for her *School Lunch Revolution* that aims to bring healthy eating habits to schools. Celebrity Chef Jamie Oliver's campaign in Britain brought this topic to the forefront and changed the type of food that was being served in British schools.

- a. Start serving healthy lunches in schools to students and staff, if there are such facilities in the school premises.
- b. If not, encourage and recommend healthy lunch ideas to students and staff to bring to school. It can be communicated by way of a simple letter to parents or an annual lunch planner or different healthy lunch and snack ideas can be put on school websites for students, staff and parents to follow. Recommendations regarding healthy ready made food or snacks can also be given for those with time constraints.

## **2. ‘Walk to School’ Week! Or School Walk**

- a. How about celebrating and reinforcing the health benefits of the humble *walk*? It may at first seem difficult to some, but if enough thought is given, *Walk to School Week* can be a very powerful and fun exercise for awakening health consciousness in students, parents and staff, with long term benefits.
- b. If arranging a *Walk to School Week* looks impractical for your school to organize, then a combined *School Walk* may be a good alternative. In this, the whole school (students, staff and parents) can participate in a certain length of walk every term of the school. As in the case of marathons, the school walk can be of varying distances based on age and ability of the walkers.

## **3. Competitions and Events that promote health education**

- a. Healthy eating quiz
- b. Poster making on topics such as hand washing, food groups, staying safe during epidemics
- c. Sorting/classifying healthy and unhealthy choices
- d. *HFQ* – Health and Fitness quotient

### **Regular check-ups and drills**

- a. Annual health check-ups
- b. Annual dental check-ups
- c. Fire drills
- d. Crisis drills – practising what to do during a crisis that could be a possible threat in the area where your school is, for example - fire, earthquake, floods.

#### 4. Community initiatives

Community initiatives have multiple benefits:

- facilitates a sense of responsibility among children towards their community,
  - helps provide healthy surroundings and environment for the children and adults in school,
  - helps children understand that they can play an important role in creating a healthy environment for themselves,
  - helps spread awareness and good practices in the community.
- a. Cleaning up the surroundings – *School Clean-Up Day, Environment Working Bee* (where everyone in the locality gets involved to clean up the area), installing garbage bins, etc.
  - b. Planting trees in the area
  - c. Teaching others – teaching/reminding adults (yes, they need it more than anyone else) about health at any workplaces in your area – in offices, business schools, universities. Teaching the not so privileged about health and hygiene.

#### 5. Visits and visitors

Allowing students to visit significant places related to the concept of health and hygiene and inviting professionals working in those areas to talk to them are great ways to integrate the school with the world outside. These really open up a window to the outside world so that students get to see the practical demonstration and relevance of what they are learning in school to real life.

- a. Visit to the Councillors or Municipal Corporation - to learn about who keeps our surroundings clean, how they do that, whom we should contact in case of any problems with hygiene and environment in our area.
- b. Visit to farms and orchards if your school is closer to one.
- c. Visit to a supermarket, fresh food stores and markets - Shopping for good health - a live experience in making healthy choices.
- d. Chat with a dentist
- e. Chat with a doctor – what to do during epidemics
- f. Chat with a nutritionist
- g. Chat with the Councilor

Most of these ideas might seem hard to turn into reality, especially in such a busy school schedule, but they are not. Schools can play a very significant part in teaching our next generation the ways and merits of healthy living. It is an important social opportunity that only schools can provide, and in this age of information and technology, the schools will have to rethink their real role in development of their students and the community at large.

### **Role of teachers in Health Education**

Teachers directly impact students and their education. Every responsible teacher has the power to initiate awareness about healthy living and the consequent education on ways to achieve it, through his/her own subject.

The best place to initiate health education is your classroom, and the best way for young people to receive health education is through case studies, examples, activities and projects while learning school subjects.

Many adults are struggling with different health issues today. Diabetes, cardiovascular problems and other lifestyle diseases are becoming prominent in our communities. It is time to initiate a change and groom children to become healthy and educated citizens, positively contributing to a developing society.

Making health education come to life through school projects and activities will not only help children become aware about health but it will also make these subjects more relevant to real life, and interesting for the students as well as teachers.

***Swapna Mirashi** is an author of 3 books and an established consultant in financial literacy. A recent encounter with young urban professionals in Mumbai and their erratic schedules and lifestyles with resultant health issues inspired her to initiate her work in Health Literacy.*

## Lesson Plan on Healthy Choice

Swapna Mirashi

### Promoting Health Literacy Through School Subjects

#### For teachers of Mathematics

- Reading and interpreting food labels, proportion of nutrients in the food you eat – teach basic math operations, like *greater than/less than, percentage*.
- Cost of good health (good fresh food, regular health check-ups) vs the price you would pay for bad health (falling sick, dental problems, etc.), classification and sorting healthy and unhealthy choices, reading and interpreting health data and news – real life examples and projects – when teaching *percentage, ratio, proportion, addition, comparison, sorting, and statistics*
- Using real life word problems and news reports/research on health while teaching relevant topics

#### For teachers of Languages

- Using health vocabulary while doing activities like *word building*
- Using text and visuals on packages, ads, pamphlets/brochures, editorials for *word/picture comprehension*
- An exercise in making notes while watching news/reading newspapers/magazines/books for *note taking* activities
- Using letters to editor, response to advertisements, queries about consumer rights and responsibilities as an exercise in *letter writing*
- Recommending reading fiction/non-fiction books that focus on healthy living and general well-being

#### For teachers of Social Sciences

- Typical meals of the past (grandmother, mother, you) – *history, sociology*. How diets changed, and the factors influencing the changes.
- Typical cuisines of different regions, why and how they are in line with the food pyramid? – *geography, sociology*

- Environment and its effect on health - *environment*
- Who keeps our city clean and how you can contribute – *civics/citizenship*
- Seasons, seasonal changes and fruits and vegetables that grow in these seasons
- Seasonal germs, infections or environmental changes and how they affect us

#### **For teachers of Science**

- *Nutrition*
- *Body parts and organs* – how to take care
- *Kitchen chemistry* – chemical ingredients, reactions in the kitchen
- *Chemicals* – good and bad for health. Artificial colours, preservatives, etc.
- *Food allergies and reactions*
- *Organic farming and fertilizers*
- *Genetically modified food*

#### **For teachers of Arts**

- *Colouring* (for little kids), *drawing* (for older) – healthy foods
- *Craft* – healthy food mobile, collage, masks
- *Design and Art* to support health initiatives/solve social health problems – garbage bins, poster making, teaching aids

#### **For teachers of SUPW/ CAS/ Work Experience**

- School projects mentioned above through innovative media like presentations, demos, street plays, storytelling and trainings could be planned through CAS (IB), SUPW (ICSE) or work experience subjects.

**Topic Ideas – Integrating Health Literacy through School Subjects**

**Sample Format 1– Cross Curricular/Integrated Lesson Plan**

	<b>Title:</b> <i>Healthy Choice</i> – Awareness campaign
<p><b>Subject/s:</b></p> <p>Science, Civics, Math, Language, Art, SUPW/ Community living</p> <p><b>Place:</b></p> <p>Within the school/workplaces</p> <p>(This plan can be modified for other places like lower income communities, slums, and schools.)</p> <p><b>Group size:</b></p> <p>Entire class (in groups)</p> <p><b>Duration:</b></p> <p>2 to 4 classes for pre work</p> <p>1 class for presentation</p> <p><b>Materials required:</b></p> <p>(If any)</p>	<p><b>Health Education Objectives:</b></p> <p><b><i>Making healthy choices</i></b> – like eating healthy and fresh food on time, saying no to smoking, drinking, drugs and excessive intake of coffee, tea or soft drinks and junk food. Walking or cycling vs driving; sitting in right posture, taking breaks as relief from stress. Reading and understanding food labels and thereby, make healthy choices.</p> <p><b>Subject Skills:</b></p> <p>Reading Comprehension</p> <p>Writing and Presentation</p> <p>Community Service</p> <p>Health and Hygiene</p> <p>Data Interpretation - Analyze and use mathematical data to support proposed healthy choices.</p> <p><b>Activity:</b></p> <p>Planning <i>Healthy Choice</i> project – content, medium of communication (presentations, street plays, skits, posters, etc.)</p> <p>Researching and organizing the content</p> <p>Creating the communication aids</p> <p>Coordinating with the partner organization</p> <p>Conducting the program</p>



## **Sample Format 2– Individual Subject Lesson Plan**

**Curricular Subject:** Language

**Topic/Theme:** Reading Comprehension

### **Subject Learning Outcomes:**

1. Students are able to read and comprehend a non-fiction text.
2. They learn to relate the text to what they already know.
3. They learn to stop and think about what they are reading so that they understand the text fully.

### **Aspect of Health Education:** (*Examples given below*)

1. Food and nutrition
2. Health and hygiene
3. Epidemics and how to stay safe
4. Road safety and rules

### **Activity:**

1. Introduce students to a non-fiction text.
2. Share a text from a book/editorial/news/research article on the health-related topic chosen for the lesson.
3. Relate the topic of the text to what they already know on the subject – *class discussion*.
4. Talk about summarization strategies to use while reading in order to understand the text.
5. Give them some time to read through the text silently.
6. Let them write down important points that they understand from the text – *action steps*, if any.
7. Encourage group discussion on what they have read and understood.
8. Ask one or two students to present their understanding of the text to the rest of the class.

**Homework:**

Study any other non-fiction text from some book/newspaper/magazine/internet article on the same topic to increase your understanding of the subject and jot down important points/gist of the article to share with the class in the next session.

**How to design a lesson to include health education objectives?**

1. Start with the particular subject learning objectives.
2. Look for health education topics/issues that you can address through your lesson.
3. Take hints from the ideas given here.
4. Use a format to trigger thoughts (*Refer to the sample formats given*).
5. Use your creativity and come up with an interesting lesson plan.
6. Deliver it with the objectives achieved.

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## Words Section



### **Callisthenics** (noun)

#### **Meaning**

➤ (*functioning as plural*) Gymnastic exercises to achieve bodily fitness, develop muscle tone and grace of movement, etc.

(*functioning as singular*) The practice of callisthenics exercises.

(*Oxforddictionaries.com*)

**Origin and additional information** ~ The term was derived in the early 19th century, from Greek *kallos* (*beauty*) + *sthenos* (*strength*) + *-ics*.

The history of callisthenics is linked to Greco-Roman gymnastics, having originated in ancient Greece, where it was mentioned in a Persian scout report on Spartan warriors before the *Battle of Thermopylae*, with the Persians interpreting the odd synchronized movements as a form of dance, and thus a sign of weakness.

Disciples of *Friedrich Ludwig Jahn* brought their version of gymnastics to the United States, while *Catherine Beecher* and *Dio Lewis* set up physical education programs for women in the 19th century, when the term became popular.

Callisthenics when performed vigorously and with variety can benefit both muscular and cardiovascular fitness, in addition to improving psychomotor skills such as balance, agility and coordination. Groups such as sports teams and military units often perform leader-directed group callisthenics as a form of synchronized physical training to increase group cohesion and discipline. Callisthenics are also popular as a component of physical education in primary and secondary schools all around the world.

Callisthenics usually include exercises like *lunges*, *jumping jacks*, *sit-ups*, *crunches*, *push-ups*, *pull-ups*, *squats*, *calf-raises*, *dips*, *flutter kicks*, *twists*, etc. These are done as warm-up preceding any kind of sport activity, and as part of a work-out to burn food energy without requiring any gym equipment or apparatus.

## **Words Section**

### **Usage ~**

- i) *Callisthenics are recommended for general good health, and are part and parcel of a healthy lifestyle.*
- ii) *Several different callisthenics were illustrated in the home exercise video for working professionals.*

### **Derivatives ~ callisthenic (adjective)**