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Barriers to Health Literacy and Competency Participatory Education in the Champlain Valley Head Start Program

Alyssa Bennett
Kenneth Christian
Rosamund Davis
Vanessa Hui
Jessie Janowski

See next page for additional authors

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Authors
Alyssa Bennett, Kenneth Christian, Rosamund Davis, Vanessa Hui, Jessie Janowski, Elizabeth Lycett, Christopher Randall, Michael Salmela, Melissa Barrett, and Christa Zehle

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Background

Poor health literacy has impeded public health efforts for many years. Several barriers to achieving higher levels of health literacy have been identified and specific methods are applied to overcome these barriers.

- Role-playing has been shown to be an effective way to communicate ideas, creating audience participation and learner empowerment.
- Pictographs, simple drawings depicting stories or principles, have also been used to make health information more comprehensible.
- Non-written forms of communication have been especially useful in overcoming language barriers.
- A recent Harvard study demonstrated the ability to increase health literacy in low-income populations.

Methods

Two one-hour educational sessions were held on two separate days. Prior to the sessions, the Head Start program distributed a survey to parents to determine health topics of interest to them. "How to keep colds and flu away" and "Quick, Inexpensive and Healthy Meals" were selected as the focus for the two sessions, based on parent interest as indicated on the returned surveys.

Sessions were held at 6:00 p.m. in the Burlington Children’s Space in Vermont.

Incentives for attendance:
- Free dinner
- Childcare
- Gift cards to local grocer
- First-aid materials (b and-aids, thermometers)

Session schedule included:
- Pre session test to gauge topic knowledge:
  - Ten true or false questions
  - Presented on paper and orally
- A Participatory discussion
- Educational module using pictographs, games and skits
- Post test in the same format as the pre session test

A paired Student’s t-Test was used to assess significance.

Results

Nine individuals completed the pre-test, with seven individuals completing both tests.

- Pre-session test scores had a mean of 8.57 out of 10
- Post-session test scores had a mean of 9.14 out of 10
- Difference of the mean scores was an increase of 0.57 questions correct, with a p-value of 0.17

Reference


Conclusions

Test scores tended to increase following the educational sessions. Further study will be necessary to achieve conclusive results regarding the effectiveness of the training programs employed by this work.

Limitations to the study include:
- Limited transportation
- Difficult weather conditions
- Proximity to holidays

Each of these factors may have contributed to low attendance at the training sessions.

One of the goals of this project was to develop presentations that would be utilized in future educational sessions conducted by members of the Head Start staff. Staff are required to hold quarterly meetings with the parents to address issues pertinent to the care and well-being of their children. Staff members were encouraged to attend the educational sessions, and all learning materials were presented to the program following the completion of the project.

References