

Effective approaches in nutrition and health education

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Abstract

Teaching/Instruction requires effective communication. In order to facilitate effective communication approaches of communication are essential. Methods or techniques of communication form the concrete bridge to help a learner reach his or her goal. An approach differs from a method which is a specific way of organising a few learning experiences. It can be described as a communication procedure that is planned and unified to help the learners and instructors to work together to attain the desired outcomes. It includes specific combinations of methods. For example, lecturing should be minimised and combined with other methods to bring about creative interaction between the instructors and learner to make learning permanent.

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1. Introduction

Several approaches are available for nutrition and health education communication. Some of them are traditional in nature and recently being adapted to nutrition and health education. Some of the traditional approaches include instructional approaches, folk songs, folk dances etc. Modern approaches have emerged recently; they may or may not have their roots in traditional approaches. Some of the examples of modern approaches are games, simulations etc.

All of us are aware that the human population is increasing at a rate faster than the rate at which the earth's resources can be made to increase. This is especially so with regard to food resources. If we want to be able to provide adequate food for the ever increasing human population, we must get maximum value out of whatever food resources we have. In other words, we must make the most efficient use of the food available to us. The study of nutrition has given us an insight into our nutrient needs. Today we know a great deal about what we should eat and how much to eat. Information is available which can help us assess the nutritional requirements of each member of our family. Enough information is available in India regarding nutritional requirements of individuals, the nutritive value of foods, as well as planning nutritionally adequate diets. To keep the family supplied with food within the amount of money available for it, and to make sure that it not only meets the nutritional requirements of each member, but is also liked and enjoyed by them, requires and understanding of the nutritional needs of our family members and an appreciative awareness of their likes and dislikes; and it requires ingenuity not to sacrifice one for the others. It also requires knowledge and information about foods, the choices that are available to us and the ability to obtain the maximum value for the money we spend.

1.1 Traditional approaches

Traditional approaches of communication mainly focus 'information transmission'. In these approaches, the instructor's role in communication is to a maximum extent. Some of the important traditional approaches are instructional

and folk approaches like folk songs, ballad from (burrakatha) and puppet play. These approaches are far less expensive and much more effective as they communicate at a direct and personal level. Their reach is far and wide in our country particularly the folk approaches.

1.2 Instructional Approaches

This is the oldest and most widely used approach in any educational sphere as well as in nutrition and health education. It is a directive approach in which the information or message is predetermined and is conveyed by the instructor to the audience. This approach is used to impart information and also develop skills. In the instructional approach the message is in built or coded into the media (methods and aids) and activity used for teaching.

The instructional approach can be modified as a specific combination of methods that you can decide to adopt in a given course of instruction. This approach may consists of more than one teaching methods or it may be complex using a great variety methods and media.

Suggestion procedure for improving the approach alone will not work. We must obtain practice in using the approach with a variety of methods and media. The following are some of the feasible combinations suggested based on research.

- Lecture + Discussion
- Lecture + Flannel graph
- Lecture + Discussion + Flannel graph/flashcard/etc.
- Lecture + Method Demonstration
- Lecture + Role play/puppet play
- Lecture + Game

1.3 Folk approaches

The folk arts of India have always been used for moral, religious and also for socio – political ends. Rarely have they been resorted to for pure entertainment alone. In the recent past, they have started being used for an educational purpose particularly in nutrition and health education. In contrast to the modern mass media, the traditional media are personal,

familiar and more credible forms with which the majority of literate and illiterate individuals identify easily. Indian folk forms have a generous mix of dialogue, dance, song, clowning, moralising and prayer.

Several advantages of folk approaches can be listed. They:

- Appeal at a personal and intimate level
- Make for clarity in communication due to the use of familiar format and colloquial dialect
- Avoid cross-cultural communication hurdles
- Establish immediate and direct rapport
- Are available to all at a very low cost
- Are flexible in adopting new themes
- Satisfy the innate desire for self-expression and the need for moral instruction combined with entertainment.
- Preserve and disseminate the tradition and culture of our ancestors in a lively manner.
- Cater to small audiences, but are caught up deeply by them
- Involve and often invite audience participation.

1.4 Folk music

There are more than 300 folk musical styles in India. These folk musical styles have been and are used in all languages and style and states in India. The nutrition health education and environmental sanitation (NHEES) project launched by UNICEF in different states has developed quite a few nutrition and health songs based on the folk style. An experience of Andhra Pradesh is quoted for your information. Folk songs are being used in the field. Though they are not field tested and scientific studies have been not carried out to study their impact on people, the following observations are were made while using them in the field for nutrition and health education.

- They serve as entertainment
- Songs are repetitively sung by the children and a few mothers
- Measurable improvement was seen in the knowledge gain in the case of both children and mothers.
- Retention of knowledge was more than in the instructional approach where lecture alone was used.
- They involved and often invited audience participation.

1.5 Ballad form of folk approach

Common Indian Ballad styles are: Burrakatha (Andhra Pradesh), Villupattu (Tamilnadu), Alha (Uttar Pradesh), Jugani and Vaar (Punjab), Powada (Maharashtra) and many others. The range of folklore presented through these ballad styles is extensive and as full of variety as the country itself.

The behaviour changes aimed at through these presentations are:

- Awareness of the existing nutritional problem of children and mothers
- Knowledge of the symptoms of various nutritional problems
- Knowledge of both curative and preventive measures for different types of nutritional problems.

1.6 Puppetry

Puppetry has fascinated people of all ages but children in particular for centuries. Puppet shows are an effective communication folk approach practised in many culture. They

are interesting educational experiences for learners. Making puppets, writing the script and rehearsing and performing the show provide opportunities for learning and practising new skills both in the classroom and in the community.

Type of puppets we can use:

- Strings puppets
- Rod puppets
- Shadow puppets
- Hand puppets

2. Modern approaches

Now we will come to know about a few modern approaches like analytical, dialogue, persuasive and games. Modern approaches are participatory in nature which emphasise the involvement of the learners in the process of learning.

2.1 Analytical Approach

The objective of the analytical approach is to stimulate analytical thinking wherein learners/participants are encouraged to analyse a particular situation and react to it. The varied reactions of the group usually provoke discussions which could be guided by the facilitator towards a meaningful solution of the problem at hand through a series of steps. These steps are –

- Observation
- Reasoning
- Classification
- Comparison
- Discussion
- Decision making

While using the analytical approach to educate people you should follow the steps as described –

1. Identify the issues and problems that confront the target group through observation.
2. Reason out the factors responsible for the genesis of the problems identified.
3. Group or classify the factors responsible for the problems.
4. Discuss the possible and appropriate solutions to the problems identified through the process of questioning.
5. Arrive at solutions which are most applicable to their own situations through comparison and decision making.
6. Act or decide upon these solutions within the available local resources in the communities to which they belong.

2.2 Dialogue approach

A major expectation of participants in the participatory approaches is not only to learn and evaluate, but also to ‘share’. There is much of the spirit of sharing both in informal and formal situations. The approach, which provides more opportunities for sharing of knowledge, skill and experiences, is known as “Dialogue”. The dialogue approach is essentially an intensive sharing of ideas, skills and experiences with regard to a particular topic between two individuals. Of the two individuals, one is facilitator and the other is a learner.

The dialogue approach is of two types –

- Structured
- Unstructured

Structured – it will held essentially between two individuals – one is the facilitator and other is the learner. It is a planned process. The conversation will be guided by putting some

probing questions in order to achieve the objectives. Number of topics dealt with through this approach may be limited, but the topics can be of our choice.

Unstructured – It is a spontaneous dialogue within the group. There is no restriction on the number of people to be involved, but the smaller the group, the more effective the dialogue. The small group facilitates ample discussion in order to go into depth and talk about the topic selected. Since it is a free dialogue one cannot have the topic selected before. The issues or topics must be picked from the dialogue and analysed after the dialogue.

2.3 Persuasive approach

Nutrition and health education is concerned with persuading people to act in their own interests. Any form of nutrition and

health education should provide facts, so that the individual has a rational basis for making his own decisions. However, we would agree with us that mere provision of information is no guarantee that behaviour change will follow. It is important to put the learners through a positive process of decision making in order to prepare them for later, vital decisions regarding their food behaviour.

Persuasive communication continues like this. If the intended learner reaches the stage of action, there will be convergence of ideas of the facilitator and the learner. In this process, the many related factors – viz, communicator, message and communicate influence the outcome of the communication. Factors related to the communicator are credibility, trustworthiness, sincerity etc. similarly knowledge, social background and concerns of the communicate are factors which influence persuasive communication.

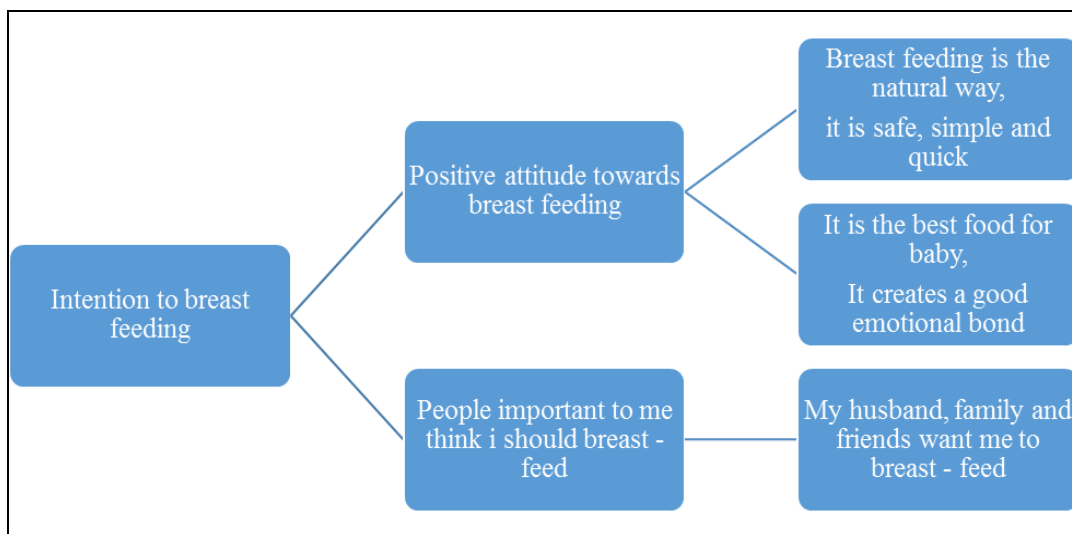


Fig 1: Beliefs leading to the establishment of bottle feeding.

2.4 Educational games

Educational games can be entertaining as well as informative. This approach is appropriate to bring about change in knowledge and practices through self-effort of the participants. With creativity and imagination, common games can be adopted to teach nutrition and health concepts. Innovative games can be invented incorporating nutrition and health messages in the form of board games, card games, puzzles, action games etc. The educational games should extend to learning and application of messages of nutrition and health to improve nutrition and health behaviour.

2.5 Guidelines for developing games in nutrition and health education

We may require some guidance to develop games for educational purposes. A few such are given here for our reference and action.

- **Adapt common games to specific nutrition and health educational situations:** Modify the game by introducing the nutrition and health messages. Be sure that the messages in information used in games are suitable to local conditions, and are in keeping with the cultural background of the target group.
- **Create games which have scope to incorporate nutrition information:** Think and develop games in

which there is scope to introduce nutrition messages. Such games will help the participants to get the messages indirectly while playing the games.

- **Create innovative games that help to gain practice and skills related to nutrition and health:** These games provide opportunities for participants to think decide and act. They will have greater impact than those which merely present information. Such realistic and effective games will help students to practise working together and to overcome nutrition and health problems.
- **Involve our learner in the creation of educational games:** By taking part in creating the games they play, students gain through knowledge of the concepts presented in the games. They may be further encouraged to continue to discuss these messages.

A number of games have been developing through adaptation of common games and development of innovations in nutrition and health education. Some of them are:

- Nutrition snakes and ladders
- Food card games
- Food family game
- Playing cards
- Road to health game
- Puzzles etc.

2.6 Sum up

Traditional approaches concentrate on the effective transmission of messages related to different fields. Earlier educators assumed that desirable practices will result automatically with the rigorous treatment of the message by the instructor. It failed in certain situations related to nutrition and health education. Hence the idea of modifying the instructional approach suitably came in. As a result this approach is being modified to encourage practice of the ideas conveyed.

Frequently nutrition researchers state that changing food behaviour is a complex process and requires a long period of time. The approach used is probably more important than the length of time. It is proved to be possible to bring about in a relatively short time, definite changes in food behaviour through participatory approaches like analytical, persuasive, dialogue, simulation games etc. Factors such as age and interest of the learners are important for these approaches to be effective. These factors help them to involve themselves in the activities designed in each of the approaches. In addition to these, the learner must feel they need to adopt any new dietary practice. Thus nutrition education which purports to improve dietary behaviour can be expected to do so, through the participatory approaches.

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