

Improving and Understanding our Emotional and Physical Health: The Hispanic Point of View

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INTRODUCTION

My objective is to develop a curriculum unit that helps to create a healthier environment within my classroom and to motivate and educate my students to live a healthier life in the outside world.

I am writing my curriculum unit from the Hispanic point of view because this is the way my students and I perceive the world and understand ourselves. We can be only what we are and respond to the world from our culture, through our native language, and the traditions of our families, no matter where we live or whether we speak a second language.

Although being Hispanic myself, it did not take long to realize that my students were behaving differently depending on how long their families have been living in the United States. Understanding and learning about our students will improve the quality of our teaching. If we learn and understand our students' culture, we will be enriched while we teach. We will be learning at the same time. Our classroom will be, as I call it, a learning center, with the objective of becoming a learning center for real life:

By acquiring health-related knowledge, values, skills and practices, children can be empowered to pursue a healthy life and to work as agents of change for the health of their communities. This goal can be achieved if we have the will. (Nakajima)

In order to be more efficient in the process of teaching and learning, we have to develop a curriculum through which children can connect their daily school tasks with their own experience of life. The purpose is not to preserve our family knowledge, but to use it as a foundation to improve the quality of our lives. This is not a difficult objective with new families of immigrants. They come to the United States with a dream: to give their children a better life. It is our responsibility as teachers to help this dream come true. In a place like Houston, good education can nurture our very diverse population of students.

Emotional and physical health is a priority in our teaching, especially with immigrant children. These children are coping with abrupt changes in their lives. Everything changes, from the air they breathe to the way they live. As teachers we can plan our daily routines, having in mind several aspects of the life of an immigrant child. We can help them build meaning to new aspects of life: how to remain healthy, how to live in their new city, what to do when they get sick, whom to call when they have a problem, how to keep from getting sick in Houston's climate, how to stay out of trouble, where to go to church, where to make good friends, how to be safe inside and outside the house, where to exercise, how to improve their eating habits, and so forth.

Many of our families learn about all these issues in a painful way. Also, we have to understand that most of these families do not speak English or good Spanish, and many of our students live in poverty by American standards.

Educating becomes more meaningful than instructing. When we teach immigrants subjects without considering their background, we are not educating, we are only giving information that may not have much practical meaning for them. Constructing knowledge from their experience of life will develop and expand the student's knowledge. When we are interested about their experiences of life, we learn about their family dynamics. This information will give us a foundation to build better instruction that covers the students' needs and perhaps we can extend it to their families.

HOW CHILDREN LEARN

When children learn about their emotional and physical condition, they will become aware of their own self, and they will be able to connect better to their surroundings. They will understand better their capacities and limitations. I have seen students I had several years ago, including my own children, to whom I have transmitted my passion of looking to our inner world, and to learn about ourselves in order to use the environment, take advantage of all we can to increase our knowledge, and improve our physical condition to understand the marvel of living.

Building Meaning

As readers are going through this paper, they will understand it and give meaning to it through their own perspective and experience of life. This wonderful experience of teaching people with different backgrounds and nationalities leads me to believe that each child will be different from other children according to their family traits and individual education.

I will illustrate this concept with some examples. The verb "gustar" in Spanish means, "to like" in English, can give us a clue of how people with different languages construct sentences. In English it looks very easy, "I like candies;" in Spanish will be "A mi me gustan los dulces." If we translate this sentence literally, it will say, "To me, myself candies are liked." In English the subject is "I" and the predicate is "like candies," while in Spanish the subject is candies and the rest of the sentence is the predicate. If we continue working with this same verb we will see that the verb "gustan" is in plural form because the "candies" is a plural noun. Many English or English as a Second Language teachers cannot understand why Hispanic kids cannot learn the pronouns "his or her" when English speaking students do not have any problem. In Spanish we have only one word and this is "su," and so you can understand it better, it is not a pronoun, but an adjective. I could continue writing several examples about my experience teaching Spanish, but I would need to write another curriculum.

We cannot go against nature and have a tree before we plant a seed. We cannot go against the way we learn. Dealing with immigrant children, we are dealing with a web of former knowledge and experiences that we have to consider in order to build meaning in our teaching. If we want them to learn, our teaching has to make sense, and sometimes what makes sense to a teacher does not make sense to a child. One of the American teachers in my school was saying that she could not understand how a fourth grade student had to wait up for his father to come home on the day before the student was having an exam. For a Hispanic youngster there is nothing more important than the father, irrational as it may seem.

Eric Jensen, in his book *Brain-Based Learning*, states that "The brain is trying to learn, in order to survive. This is why it makes so much sense to design your approach so that it is centered on the needs of the learner" (6). If we want to be successful in teaching and we want our immigrant students to learn, we have to be creative and build meaning out of everything we teach. The process of learning starts with life and ends when we die. Life is in itself a learning process, and it is in charge of teaching many lessons every day. The same day we are born our teaching and learning process starts. If we cry, we are nursed. If we understand this pattern, we know that our students are eager to learn, but we often do not teach what they need.

I have been meditating about teaching for several years and I have wondered: What can be more important than “health”--in every aspect of the word? Do we know our body? Do we listen to the messages our organism sends us all the time? Do we take time to nourish all the needs of the only body we have? Do we meditate on our existence and how to cope with stress, war, work demands, family, and money?

At this moment in my teaching career, I cannot find any subject more meaningful than to learn about the most precious gift we have--ourselves. When we learn more about ourselves we will connect mentally, emotionally, and physically to the whole environment.

Learning is a Self-Experience

I came to this country as an immigrant in 1995. I was offered a job as a Spanish instructor and Latin American culture trainer at Phillips Petroleum Company headquarters in Oklahoma, where I worked from January 1996 to May 2002. While working at Phillips Petroleum Company, I learned that emotional and physical health is a priority in modern life. I experienced the importance of integrating health into our daily program. The company takes care of several aspects of the employees’ development in order to obtain a high quality performance in the work place. I do not pretend to explain all that the company does to accomplish this goal, but I will mention some of the actions they take. I experienced a new way of living when I came to the United States. I lived in Oklahoma for six years, working at Phillips Petroleum Company in the International Division of Exploration and Production, in the Human Resources Department, and in the Liquefied Natural Gas Division. I know what it is to live far away from all that you are used to, without family and without speaking “Okie.” Everything was different; the weather was terrible for me; it was the first time in my life I experienced snow. People dressed and behaved very differently from what I was used to. No one helped me. They took it for granted that someone was taking care of me. Even churches were different. In Mexico, churches are owned by the state; everyone goes wherever he or she wants. Here you have something like a membership. I had to survive and I did all that I could, after crying a lot, to belong to my new city and start learning how to live and socialize there. I learned quite well; I even married again. I had to learn the hard way. I did not have a teacher to help me out in those difficult moments.

With these examples I want the readers to understand how our brains work differently according to the language of our parents and to our own experience of life. Children come to our schools rooted in their culture, and many of us immigrants are very proud of our culture. We do not want to change, but we want to improve and adapt ourselves to our new city as fast as we can. Often this is a painful process, and teachers should consider it while planning their curricula. Immigrants will engage in their new way of life physically and emotionally. Teachers can develop their curricula considering all these points in order to allow their students to visualize new connections and develop a healthier environment in their classrooms. Learning is an experience of self. Hispanic children will differ from children of immigrant families of other origins. Our education and culture is different from all other cultures.

I have learned by teaching and working with professional adults while working at Phillips, how our language builds differences and barriers to understanding as we talk. I worked with Americans, Latin Americans, Frenchmen, Taiwanese, Australians, Russians, Englishmen, Canadians, and Germans. Each trainee, according to his/her language and nationality, gave different meanings to things and actions. This experience allowed me to understand that each culture has a unique personality.

I will illustrate this experience with an example that made me understand better what words means in other languages. I was teaching Spanish to a Phillips employee from Taiwan. After several classes with her I understood that it is very different how we should teach immigrant students from Chinese speaking countries. English and Spanish have an alphabet while Chinese

children are expected to learn more than 2,500 characters by the time they leave sixth grade (Wang, Inhoff and Hsuan 2).

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CONSTRUCTING KNOWLEDGE FROM EXPERIENCE

Learning cannot be isolated from our lives. Teachers can create a respectful environment where students are motivated to talk and write about their lives. This will be an opportunity for teachers to learn about their students. We cannot work with something or someone we do not know. In order for education to be productive, teachers learn the most they can of the most important part of education: the student. We will be surprised at the testimonies and stories children bring to our classroom. In these testimonies we shall learn about their beliefs, rituals, traditions, healing processes, family activities, dynamics, experiences, daily diet, taboos, fears, prejudices, and athletic preferences. All these will compromise an important foundation to create a curriculum based on each student's needs. One year of practice will not be enough to develop it. Years of experience will make our class environment and teaching richer, and we will become more understanding of our students.

If we consider how immigrant children learn, how they build significant knowledge, how they experience what they learn on a daily basis, they will connect to their new city, Houston, with a healthier mind and a healthier body.

Students' Environment, Culture, and Testimonies

Learning and understanding about our students' culture will create a foundation for the teaching and learning process. In my school our student population is almost entirely Hispanic. My students' parents do not speak English and are not familiar with the American culture because they have very little or no contact with Americans. In order to develop a good curriculum about health, the ideal will be to know the traditions, taboos, beliefs, healing and remedies, rituals, religion, spiritual inclinations and philosophy of life of our students. We also have to have in mind, not only to educate the student but to extend the education to the parents.

On February 2, 2005, we had a guest in our seminar, "Health, Illness and Medicine in Houston: A Cross-Cultural Exploration," led by Professor Joseph A. Kotarba. Maria del Rosario Garcia is a "Curandera," which some people also see as a witch, herbalist, or shaman. We had an assignment in our class to state our opinions about the topic. The next day, I went to have a chat with my class from last year, who are now in fourth grade, with permission of their teacher, who stayed with me all the time and is also a member of the Houston Teachers Institute. I told them about my class, and asked them if they had any experience with these types of healers. They did not need any explanation of what a "curandera" is. They knew what I was talking about.

My experience went beyond my expectations. My first question was if they knew what a "curandera" was? They said that was someone who used plants as a remedy to cure. For example, if someone is sick at the stomach, they use certain herbs to cure the problem or they use a cupping glass. It could be that those of you who read my paper do not know what this is, but my mother used this remedy for her pains in her back. Our maid would put a coin on her back, then get a piece of cotton wet in alcohol and place it on the coin, light the cotton and cover it immediately with a glass. The resulting vacuum will suck air from her skin. In Mexico, people believe that air gets inside the skin, causing pain. My mother at least thought that this remedy was helping her. On the other hand, I have never used this kind of treatment for my pain, but I am thinking that I could try, just to see if it works.

I asked if this person recovered with this treatment and the answer was, yes! I asked if they had had any other experience with this kind of medicine. Another child answered that she had had a problem with her feet. Both were pointing to the center of her body, instead of straight. Her mother took her to a “quebrantahuesos.” (I will translate that as “bone cracker.”) This is not the same as a Chiropractor, who has a professional degree. This is someone who works with bones to make people feel better when they have a problem with legs, arms, neck, or back. She said that she felt better after she went to this person. Another girl said that her neighbor took her daughter to a quebrantahuesos because she is not walking right, but she said that the girl was not doing better.

Another student said that her family had visited psychics to help her brother, who was having problems at school, affirming that he is feeling better. Two of the students said their grandmothers were witches. They have many kinds of herbs in their houses. They have seen people who go to their grandmothers for help. One of the girls went farther and said that her father was bewitched and her grandmother tried to cure him. I asked if her father was better now. She said, no, you know how he behaves. When he had this treatment he went from bad to worse.

Three of the students confessed to having powers themselves, one to see the future, another to see the future in his dreams, and the last one to see when a spirit has taken the form of an animal, like a cat. Under no circumstances should we make assumptions about our students’ families’ beliefs and practices just because they are all Hispanic.

Students’ Beliefs, Rituals, and Traditions

This group is an excellent group of students. Most of the students who shared their experiences with their teacher and me are A+ students. They are responsible, hard working, eager to learn, and very well behaved. While the students were talking about this matter, they were very serious. I would say even a little bit scared. The environment of the class was full of energy. Everyone was thinking about something in their lives that was similar to the experiences that the other students were sharing. Only one child said that he did not have any experience with this topic. All these experiences were familiar to me.

When we finished, I thanked them all for talking to us so openly. I told them that this conversation could help other teachers to better understand our culture and our traditions. This is the same reason why I am writing about this experience in this paper without going into it in detail. However, to gain the trust and confidence of Hispanic children is not an easy task. Most of their parents like to have their private lives for themselves, as do many other cultures. What I do as a teacher to learn more about my students and their lives is to be very observant. I analyze the relationship between their parents and the way they relate to each other. I try to have a lot of contact with most of the families. I give them my telephone number and I ask the family to feel free to call me at any time if they need help with homework or ask any other question. I talk very openly with my students, and sometimes I tell them episodes of my life, for trust and confidence goes both ways.

Hispanic kids are very affectionate, especially children of new immigrants. They like to hug and kiss me, and sometimes walk with me holding hands or with my arm around their back. They are not like that with all the teachers. Students understand the differences in cultures quickly. Each culture has a comfort zone that has to do with proximity. In the United States, people need to keep more distance from each other than in Latin cultures. “Social distance is 4 to 12 feet and used for business meetings and impersonal social gatherings” (Gudykunts, Toomey, and Sudweeks 315-316). Never the less, the ESL teacher has learned to be very affectionate with them also. This relationship of no fear of proximity is accepted by Hispanic kids without any problem.

The information we can get about our students gives us excellent material to construct knowledge from their own experience. While talking to the children, I kept in mind the objective of my questioning. Did this kind of treatment help this person? What I want to create with this questioning is to encourage the students to analyze the events of their own lives and be observant and aware of all their families' beliefs and later in life be able to decide to repeat or improve such behaviors. Alternative medicine is being used much more than we think by families in our schools, but I believe that it is always good to question the effectiveness of any treatment and to recognize that there are many untrustworthy people about who only care about the money or do not have any scientific or medical knowledge of the services they are giving.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH

I will teach this unit for the entire year because I want to become healthier emotionally and physically and guide my students with my example to a healthier life. We have to work with related health topics, one-way or the other, everyday. My idea is to become an observer of any emotional or physical health-related concept, emerging from the group, to translate it into a topic for investigation, analysis, and practice. Enrique Pichon Riviere, an Argentinean educator and psychiatrist, in his book *Teoría del Vínculo*, defines an observer as someone who is not isolated from experimentation, but is a participant in the analysis at every moment, and in all circumstances. The observer is always committed affectively and ideologically to investigation and research (89-90).

I do not want to set a time for this unit because emotional and physical health has been one way or another a priority in my own life. I hope my students can become aware of their own health by "learning to learn" (Freinet) how their own bodies and minds work.

No matter what the topic or subject of our learning, we can always link it one way or another with emotional and physical health. It will be very productive to keep this link in mind when we teach our students emotional and physical health, as well as when dealing with our own health. A company like Phillips Petroleum, while creating a work environment, is endeavoring to keep a healthy work force and a healthy environment to obtain more benefits for the company.

Our school is a Title 1 school, which means that most of its population comes from low-income families. Our school is in the Denver Harbor area in Houston. Most of the area has very old houses. Fine sand is everywhere. It is very difficult to have our classes free of this fine sand. The school is also of an old construction. In 2003, important measures were taken to improve the quality of the environment of the school by removing all asbestos from the school, changing the floors, and repairing heaters and air conditioners. These are great advances in creating a healthier environment for teachers and students. However, this is not enough. Our school is continuing to improve conditions little by little.

In order to have good results in academic education, it is not enough to have good teachers. We have to educate for life. To be successful in education for life, education should be a responsibility of everyone, everywhere. I would not say that Bartlesville, Oklahoma, Phillips Petroleum's headquarters, was a perfect city, but education was a responsibility of many citizens. Phillips employees would volunteer for all kinds of educational projects creating a very positive environment in which to work and live.

I have observed in Houston that children who live in wealthy areas get a healthier education while children in marginal areas get fewer opportunities. Regardless of lacking many services in our school, teachers are looking for alternatives and using creative thinking to make our children successful in their academic achievements.

Classroom Practices

I have admired many pedagogues in my long life of educator, but Paulo Freire has a very special place in my heart. While studying at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, I met Miguel Escobar Guerrero; he was also a great admirer of Freire. Talking about him in one his books, he says that Freire dedicated his life to the oppressed, to those who did not have the right to define their own world, and he adds that he discovered educational practices to give voice to those who do not have it, a practice of an education that is built from reality and not from concepts (160).

The teacher can have this practice in mind and each time that our students or any other circumstance manifests something related to health, we can take opportunity of the emerging situation and work with it. For example, when kids start getting the flu or colds, we have a great opportunity to develop a lesson plan that helps all of us to avoid it or get rid of it as soon as possible.

My Group

This school year, my group is more active and louder than any year I can remember. This has been a new situation for me. I have been observant of this behavior and I have tried to learn more about it. I do not want to label my students as hyperactive, with discipline problems, or learning disabilities, but with this behavior it has been difficult to teach and to motivate my students to learn. In spite of this problem I have tried everything that I can to make this group be successful, academically speaking.

Instead of labeling my students in different categories, I considered it an emotional health problem. Health problems, like colds, can be taken care of, so I decided I was going to take care of my students' behavior. I said to myself, if I cannot improve the behavior, I will motivate them to learn and feel the accomplishment of their effort.

Last year I attended Houston Teachers Institute and I liked my seminar so much that I decided to do it again. Before coming to the initial conference, I thought of taking a different seminar, but when I heard about "Health, Illness, and Medicine in Houston: A Cross-Cultural Exploration" seminar, I decided that this was what I needed to improve the quality of my teaching and the environment of my class.

Working in the seminar has opened new windows for my teaching practice. Our group is quite diverse, making the course more interesting. We are four teachers from Latin America and from three different countries, one teacher from the Philippines, and the other eight teachers are Americans, but also of different origins. Not all of us are teachers, and this makes it more interesting. There are alternative certification teachers, certified nurses, and dieticians. Everyone has a different perspective and background education, but one very interesting thing we have in common is that all of us work with Hispanic students.

I have learned that all the teachers are concerned about our students' diet. We have agreed that the school diet is not the best they could have. This is a very important issue. We should work to improve our students' health through diet. According to Deanna M. Hoelscher, a guest in our classroom, talking about Child Obesity in Texas, shows in all her studies that a greater percentage of Hispanic children are overweight than White, Asian or African American.

I have twenty-one students in my classroom; three are overweight. My group is below the 30% of Hispanic kids who are overweight in the third grade. I take these numbers as an emergent to start creating awareness of weight in our classroom, and not when it is too late. Dr. Hoelscher said that it is easier not to gain weight than to try to lose it. As teachers we can start practicing a program that will help create more awareness about weight-related problems. My students have

only three hours of physical education every two weeks. To increase the time for exercise in my classroom we do some yoga exercises or we stretch at least twice a day. I also encourage them to play soccer and run during recess. Exercise will not only help our students to burn some calories; it will also help them to stimulate the brain (Jensen 165).

I used emergent concepts in my seminar at the University of Houston as well as in my third grade classroom. Professor Kotarba invited an aromatherapy specialist, Trish Laha, to our seminar. She talked about the power of different aromas. Immediately, I thought about my group, and how active and loud they are. Among several plants, lavender has the power of calming and healing, causing a soothing effect. I observed that after Mrs. Laha used lavender in our classroom, most of us were very relaxed. Aromas have been used for centuries and have become a major business in cosmetics. We all know the prices of French perfumes. So, I thought of trying lavender aroma in my classroom. Believe it or not, my students and I were relaxed. I will not abuse the use of aromas in my classroom because I do not want my kids to sleep or have allergic reactions.

These are some examples of how I use what I learn from my students and other people. In this same paper I wrote about how I was motivated by our guest, the “curandera” and how much I learned about the healing processes of our students at home, how I managed my class to guide the students to serious observation and research, and prove by themselves whether the healing family traditions work for them or not.

Emotional and Physical Health: Third Grade, Bilingual

The life of an immigrant family is not easy. There is so much to learn and so many things left behind, so many things to forget. Some of the things we learned in our countries we have to relearn. In spite of many difficult circumstances, my students are full of joy, energy, and hope. I want to grab these emotions and use them as tools for the present, for their academic life in third grade, hoping they will be prepared to face more difficult academic years to come. I want to teach them the know-how to learn, regardless of the subject they are working with.

This is the reason why I will teach this unit using blocks. I tell my students that if we work step by step, as we have learned important things like walking or riding a bicycle, it will be easy to learn anything. I was amazed to see the two-year-old child of one of my students from Mexico using a computer and knowing exactly what he had to do. For his age I thought that he had an amazing coordination compared to any other child of his age. While teaching I have seen that young students can learn anything if they work step by step. I tell them that they should fill their brains with positive thoughts. If they think, “I can’t do it,” that is the only thing that will be in their brains. But if they start trying solutions, solving problems step by step, with time and patience they will get the answers and solve any problem.

Solo, la infancia y la juventud son capaces de trepar audazmente hacia las cumbres. Y todavía hace falta no impedírselo.

Only children and youth are able to climb audaciously to the top of a mountain. Yet, we have to avoid forbidding it to them. (Celestine Freinet)

Celestine Freinet

Celestine Freinet was a French pedagogue. Since I started my profession as a pedagogue, I have admired his work in education. Freinet, after fighting in World War I, went back to teaching. His health was not good and he had to look for alternatives that could help him and his students. He could not work inside a classroom for a long time, and it was difficult for him to lecture. He developed teaching techniques for use outdoors and not for the classroom. He wanted his students to become students for all their lives and not just for school. He stated that only through contact

with reality, and experiencing failures and successes, will students receive an education for real life. He thought that it was necessary for schools to become a place of activity and work for life, where students would be enthusiastic, encouraged, and excited.

As this curriculum deals with health, I thought that it was a good idea to develop it with the work of a pedagogue whose health made him recreate the traditional method of education. When creative people are sick or have health problems or physical or mental impediments, they will recreate a new method to work or learn, as Freinet did. I love the following example of recreating a way of learning.

Jose Carreras, one of the three best tenors in the world, became ill with leukemia. He was in an iron lung for several months. Jose Carreras knew that if he did not practice his opera he was going to lose his talent. He started studying in his mind several hours a day. When he recovered his health, he continued being one of the three best tenors in the world.

Health is a subject for real life. It will not have any value to know about health without practicing, experiencing failure and success, and teaching others of our knowledge. This is the reason why I am going to work with Freinet's techniques.

The more we read or study, the more we can see that some thoughts are never old fashioned or obsolete. As I read again *L'Education du Travail*, or *Education through Work*, by Celestine Freinet, I am fascinated by his beliefs in education. In the first chapters of his books he writes about alternative medicine and scientific medicine. He talks about the encounter of two cultures. I see a window opened; he wrote for my students and me. We are encountering a new culture with different perspectives about health. Houston is one of the most advanced cities in the world regarding medicine. But, at the same time there are other kinds of medicine and healing practitioners of all kinds. This is a quote from Freinet's book when he is writing about a "curandero" in France:

Doctors have their own competence. They have studied for a long time all parts of our mechanism; they have marvelous equipment to see the interior of our flesh, but they do not feel life under their fingers. They treat and cure people as if the human body were only a passive and dead group of bones, muscles, and nerves.

I pass my fingers and feel how your flesh and body live, Misses; in spite of myself, I suffer with you, and I do not feel calm, until the functional harmony of your body, which is health, is recovered. (15)

I think about my students and their families visiting alternative practitioners of medicine, and I think they do it because they can find someone to listen to them and heal not only their bodies but their souls.

Freinet believes that our function in life is not to adapt ourselves to the world we live in, but to transform it into a better place to live. He states that it is difficult to live, thinking differently from the rest of the people. We take too many risks and we are never sure that what we are doing is the right thing.

These are only some ideas of this educator and the reasons why he has created a strong impression on my career as a teacher.

LESSON PLANS “THIRD GRADE BILINGUAL”

“To incorporate work plans into our life is essential and is easily forgotten” (Freinet 10).

Overview

I have learned from Freinet that work is a natural instinct in children, and our objective as educators is to encourage with enthusiasm the energy of children for action and movement. As teachers we tend to quiet the impulses of joy, enthusiasm, cheers and strengths of emotions.

I want to adapt all that we have received during our seminar, not only to my curriculum but also to my own life. When we become senior teachers we lose most of our energy and we prefer to work with a quiet and non-active group. I have understood that if we keep ourselves active, regardless of our age, we will be more energetic and healthier.

Objectives

- Safety first
- Encourage the student to learn about their own bodies.
- Increase awareness of our own bodies regarding health.
- Learn how to prevent health related problems.
- Find out what our body needs to be healthy.
- Promote critical thinking about health practices.
- Motivate working in family and peer groups to improve healthy habits.
- Develop a sense of responsibility for taking care of our own health.
- Involve students in scientific inquiry by researching using the internet, books, newspapers, magazines, TV, and other sources to learn more about health.

Materials

- Several web addresses about health related topics
- HISD monthly calendar
- Small classroom library
- Dictionaries and encyclopedia
- Newspapers, health related magazines, Scholastic magazines, *Scholastic News for Kids*, health related brochures and posters
- Measuring health devices: thermometers, measuring rulers with inches and centimeters, scales with grams and pounds, body fat measurer, stethoscope
- School nurse tools and help
- Index cards, index card file boxes
- Binders and notebook papers
- Graph and construction paper
- Evaluation chart for each student
- Bottled water
- TV and tape and boom box
- Different kinds of music tapes and compact disks
- Aromas: candles, flowers, oils, herbs
- Hygiene products: soap, vinegar, alcohol
- First aid kit
- Mats (The large, rubber, interlocking, square tiles, the kind that are used for babies to play on any surface)
- Third Grade Science Books
- Science Project CLEAR Curriculum (HISD)

Classroom setting

- During the year our classroom will become a healthier place to be; keeping it clean, drinking bottled water, washing with soap, using natural furniture cleaning products like simple soap or vinegar, having a first aid kit and thermometers accessible.
- Two computers will be ready all day for research.
- The small health library, dictionaries and encyclopedia will be accessible for the children to use all the time.
- A cabinet with binders where we can file all research papers in alphabetical order
- Small tape and compact disks collection box with TV, tape recorder, and DVD player
- Mats accessible for exercising and stretching
- Any aroma that is not allergenic (candles, oils, spices, flowers or dry fruits)
- A special place for a scale and health devices
- Computer Excel program for graphs as well as graph paper

Time

There will be some activities that will last all the year and some that will take a limited amount of time. Many of the activities can be linked to science, reading, mathematics, writing, physical education, art, technology, and ESL. The first lesson plan will last one week.

Lesson One: Learning About Our Own Body

“Get Moving Houston,” Mayor Bill White's initiative to galvanize the efforts and resources of many groups throughout the city around several overreaching wellness goals...one of which is to permanently “get Houston off the Fattest Cities List!”

Overview

Freinet says that all the work that is given to the kids must be well understood by them and able to be performed by the students without much help from the teacher.

This lesson plan will start the first week of the school year. We will work with the whole group, in groups and individually. Freinet understands that there are some students who like to work individually. The strength of the group will depend on the quality of the work they can perform and the support that the teacher can provide. The teacher has to be democratic and respect the initiatives that the students develop to solve the task. It will be very important to have in mind that the students, besides learning a subject, will be learning how to relate to each other, solve character problems, develop leadership, and change roles as the tasks develop. Each task will have a reasonable time in which to finish it. It will be very important to set a project time schedule with steps to follow the first week of class for everyone to have the objectives and the activities clear.

Procedure

We are going to start with a brainstorming session. There will be five questions written on posters in different colors. I will show one poster at a time to lead them to the next question. It is more interesting if we use a little bit of mystery. All answers will be correct, and I will write all suggestions on each poster, while they write them on a piece of paper. Before we start working on our fifth poster I will show the mayor's film clip inaugurating the fitness program “Get Moving Houston.”

Note: It is important to understand that the Freinet Techniques encourage the teachers to be flexible. We do not know all the answers that students will suggest, and I am making some of them up. Sometimes the children come up with better ideas, and it is very important that we follow their ideas. The poster shown below can change substantially by the student's answers.

First day:

Time for this exercise: Between 30 to 45 minutes.

First poster	Second poster	Third poster	Fourth poster	Fifth poster
What is most important in a classroom?	We decided that the students and the teacher are the most important factor in a classroom. What will make teachers and students work better during this year?	Health is very important. If we are healthy we can work better. What can we do to be healthier?	You have given wonderful ideas to be healthier. Can we start with something that all of us can do everyday?	We have seen the mayor Bill White with his initiative of “get moving Houston.” What do you think we can do in our classroom to exercise at least 15 minutes everyday?

After we have talked about the importance of health I will provide the children with four topics to develop during the next four days of class.

Time: Each day they will have 45 minutes to work in their projects. They can finish some work at home.

Before we start any health program, we have to learn how our own health is. Many of Freinet’s techniques are used in modern school curricula, including Project CLEAR. As we have a great initiative from our mayor, we can start following his program or create a program ourselves with the children.

I will prepare a bulletin board to outline the program as we develop it. I will also prepare a card for each student like the one below:

Date:	Personal Health Chart
Name:	
Date of birth:	
Age:	
Weight:	
Height:	
Body Mass Index:	
Rest pulse:	
Pulse after exercise:	
Pulse difference:	
Blood pressure:	
Temperature:	
Breakfast at home:	
Snacks at home:	

Lunch at home:	
Dinner at home:	
Breakfast at school:	
Snacks at school:	
Lunch at school:	

All students will write their name and age and write down all that they eat for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks in the appropriate blanks.

First team: Each student will get their weight and height in pounds and inches and fill in their card. The members of each group will be helping each other to measure and weigh after I model how to do it. I will do my own card, too. When the first team finishes the activity with their group, they will start helping the rest of the students to get their weight and height and register it in their own cards. When all the class has registered their weight and height, I will have a chart ready to make a graph with all the information of the class.

Evaluation: Every two months we can repeat the activity and each student can compare his weight and height as the year passes.

Second team: Go to the following Internet address. In order to get started this team needs to have their weights and heights: They will be helping each other to get the information.

http://www.houstonisd.org/HISD/portal/article/front/0,2731,20856_90333894_108637764,00.html, then click: For kids. Read the information and go to BMI for additional information and calculate your child's Body Mass Index, BMI, visit:

<http://www.keepkidshealthy.com/welcome/bmicalculator.html>. At this web address they will get their body mass index automatically like the example below:

“A 9 year and 8 month old (female) child, who is 74.5 pounds and 4 feet tall, has a body mass index of 22.8, which is above the 95th percentile and is considered to be overweight.”

As we can see, we are getting information for reading, math, health, and writing. All this information will be recorded in their cards. Additional information will be written on notebook paper. Each child individually will analyze his/her information.

Evaluation: When they have all their information, they will write a report of their own results. I will evaluate all the information to check that everything is correct. Students who did a good job

can help the other students to register all they need. When all the reports are checked they can take their work home and share the information with their families. It will be important to bring back the information with their parents' feedback and file their papers for future research.

Third team: Take their pulse (and if possible their blood pressure at the nurse's office) before and after exercising and record it in their personal cards. This team will be responsible to be sure all students went to the nurse to take their blood pressure and registered it in their personal cards. They are going to be responsible for taking the rest of the students' pulse and be sure all of them registered it on their personal cards.

Evaluation: The students will compare their pulse before and after exercise and take the difference and they will also register it on their personal cards.

Fourth team: Take temperature and register it on the personal card. Before they take their temperature they will make a smart guess, or a hypothesis. I will ask them to write if they think that all of us will have the same temperature or if it will vary from person to person. After writing their hypothesis they will take their temperature and register it on their cards.

Evaluation: Each student will tell the entire group his/her temperature. I will record it on a chart which I will have ready. They will check if their hypothesis was correct or not.

Individually all kids will work with their card filling up with the food they eat. This can be done at school and finished at home with their family's help. One week later they will make the list of what they eat at school using HISD calendar, where the menu appears. They should only write what they eat on the list.

The next part of our research will consist of what we can do to keep healthy or get healthier.

Lesson Two: Creating our own program to improve our health habits

Overview

It would not be worthwhile to have all this information without using it. In the second lesson we will link some activities to mathematics, science, physical education, creative thinking, and real life problem solving.

I am convinced that a good nutritional program will improve the results of our education. Motivating families and their children to improve their quality of life will enhance our academic life. Eric Jensen in his book *Brain-Based Learning* states that good nutrition promotes healthy functioning of neurons. The brain essentially needs glucose and oxygen. This means it is important to get a good amount of pure water. It is not the same to drink tea, coffee, or soft drinks because these drinks are diuretics and the beneficial effect with these drinks is lost. Other ingredients critical to the brain are in proteins (76).

I have heard many teachers complaining about children drinking sodas and very little water or milk. Most of us know the saying that you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. This saying has a lot of truth in it. I have seen student refuse to drink water when they are in the classroom with the air conditioner on, but I have never seen them refuse to drink water when they come back from recess or physical education class. My students will even drink the milk without chocolate they refused at breakfast time.

The more our students learn about their health, bodies, mind, and intelligence, the more they will grow in awareness. When I have talked about health with my students they show great interest. They want to be successful in life. If we nurture ourselves, emotionally and physically, we will become better individuals, capable of accomplishing our goals.

If I wasn't dyslexic, I probably wouldn't have won the Games. If I had been a better reader, then that would have come easily, sports would have come easily ... and I never would have realized that the way you get ahead in life is hard work (Bruce Jenner).

Physical activity and sports will help our students become better in learning, setting goals, discipline, coordination, using the whole brain, solving problems, improving relationships, working in teams, and achieving goals.

Goals are best when they are:

- ▼ Created by the learner
- ▼ Concrete and specific
- ▼ Have a specific due date
- ▼ Able to be measured through self-assessment
- ▼ Reviewed and adjusted periodically

(Jensen 86)

Note: Freinet was a revolutionary educator after the World War I; now his concepts are commonly used in modern pedagogy. If we, as teachers, want to be successful at educating, we have to help our students make their dreams come true. We have to educate for life. To take care of our own health, to be aware of our own bodies, and take responsibility for improving health habits and physical activities will be educating for life.

Objectives

- Create our own food pyramid.
- Plan an exercise routine.
- Learn research in the internet, books, magazines, and newspapers.
- Elaborate index cards.
- File index cards.
- Write their health program.
- Work with their families to develop interest in improving health habits at home.
- Assess our own eating habits and physical activities.
- Get in the habit of scheduling their own work after they set a goal.

Procedure

There are many activities we can perform after finishing Lesson One. I will suggest some activities that will help our students to know more about themselves and their health habits.

The following web address will tell us how many calories a child needs per day. Counting calories will be a fun activity for children and it will develop their awareness about their eating habits and their sense of observation.

http://pediatrics.about.com/library/bl_calorie_calc.htm?start=1&gender=undefined&age=NaN&activity_level=NaN&page=1

Calorie Calculator: How many calories do you need each day?

At this web address they will find out the number of calories someone needs per day to keep them healthy.

After they have this information we are going to another web address. This is the new food pyramid that the government has published: <http://mypyramid.gov>.

At this web site there are many activities for the students. They can get their own pyramid with the number of calories they should eat each day. This pyramid has many resources and we can find the information in Spanish! There are 12 pyramids, one for the needs of each individual

interested in improving his/her diet. I will invite parents to talk about the advantages of a healthier life, and we will watch “My Pyramid Animation.”

I will encourage students to follow, step by step, all the activities which can help them and their families to be more conscious of their eating habits and physical activities.

I will give each student another chart to share with their families. If their parents are interested in working with their own pyramid they can come to our classroom to work with their children or go to the library and work with their children’s help. If the students are able to teach what they learned they will have all concepts clear.

The chart will look like the one on the web, shown below. I will add the amount of exercise and an average of hours of sleep per week.

Name:	Date:	Grade:	Number of calories needed:
		Tips	Exercise (Minutes daily)
Grains:	Ounces		
Vegetables:	Cups		
Fruits:	Cups		
Milk:	Cups		
Meat and Beans	Ounces		
Hours of sleep per week:			
Glasses of water per day:			

Bulletin Board: We will make a bulletin board with the help of the mothers with the new pyramid and share this information with the whole school. We will also show a fitness program for our class and invite the whole school to join us one way or the other.

Evaluation: If we want to make a habit of eating healthy and doing physical activity we have to track and assess our performance. The students will write all that they eat in one day. With this information we will go to Mypyramid.gov and they will assess their eating habits and then they will make a personal viable plan with their parents to improve it. I will invite parents two by two to work in the computers with their children. It will be interesting to know what they eat at home and what they eat at the school cafeteria.

Lesson Three: Get moving Houston! (Mayor's initiative)

After researching and being well motivated to learn more about our bodies and minds, we will create a third grade plan for exercising and nourishing our emotional health. It is important to be aware of our busy schedule and plan activities that can be performed in a short time.

Overview

I have written in this paper that in the school year 2004 – 2005 I had a very active and noisy class. They had many problems focusing on their subjects, listening, and understanding. However, we had several activities that helped them to be more interested in their classes and focused in their learning.

I have heard that yoga is a discipline that helps people to relax, develop awareness, and prevent diseases. I started taking yoga classes to understand it better. I used some simple exercises with my students and this, added to all the other techniques I used, resulted in our accomplishing our third grade goals.

Children can start their yoga practice at seven or eight. Yoga will help children to know their bodies better. The practice of yoga improves intellectual growth, empowers attention, and develops memory. Yoga philosophy is based on tolerance, non violence, love, and compassion. When a teacher practices yoga with the students she/he has to keep a positive attitude and be a model for the students. The teacher has to model the exercises and be patient while teaching. The child and the teacher should enjoy the yoga practice. The success of this practice depends on consistency and discipline as does any other subject. This author advises not to incorporate Hinduism doctrines or any other doctrines in its teaching, but to teach aseptic yoga without any religious tendency (Calle 19). I believe that if we understand yoga as a holistic science to improve health, a practical psychology, an attitude for life, a natural medicine, or a method to gather lost energies, it will agree perfectly well with Houston Independent School District Project CLEAR Curriculum.

Objectives

- Help students to learn how to concentrate by focusing only on one thing for a small period of time without distraction.
- Develop among children the habit of exercising every day to be perseverant.
- By practicing yoga, children will understand the value of taking care of their mind and body.
- Linking exercise to ESL, reading and vocabulary. This activity will teach the students to follow instructions out of a book, and learn daily life vocabulary in English.
- Link exercise to memorization and learn some words in Sanskrit.
- Link exercise to art. They will have their own notebook of exercises to follow in order to practice at home or share the exercises with their family

Procedures

The third week of class when we have set rules and we have understood the need for taking care of our mind and bodies I will start reading them the book *My Daddy Is a Pretzel* by Baron Baptiste. I will read a small part everyday, and immediately after we will go to work on the exercise. All yoga exercises have to be done at least two hours after eating.

I will tell the story of the author that you can find in the Introduction. The author talks about how adults in his life helped him to know about people who were perseverant and disciplined: People who mastered their body and mind, as well as agents of social change. His parents were pioneers in establishing Yoga in the United States. Now he shares this knowledge with his own children and wrote this beautiful book to share his knowledge with parents, teachers and children. I found this beautiful thought of a teacher on the title page:

“I am a teacher. A teacher is someone who leads. There is no magic here. I do not walk on water. I do not part the sea. I just love children.” Marva Collins.

I want to transmit this thought to my students and help them find what I have found in Yoga this last year.

Before I start reading the book to the children I will ask some questions about the Introduction: Do you know some one or have heard or read about someone who can be a model for your own life. What would you like to learn from these people? Do you think that if we follow the example of these people we will become better persons? Why?

After we have talked about the above questions I will have written some words on cards: “Vrksasana,” gardener, pose, support, remain, stable, and flexible. We will repeat the words, the students will explain their meaning or I will explain it in case they do not know these words. Then I will read to them from the book.

“Niki says her mommy’s a gardener.
Sometimes, my daddy’s a tree.
The Tree Pose
Vrksasana

The tree pose teaches us to support ourselves with strong roots, so that we can reach high and remain stable, yet be flexible, at the same time” (Baptiste 3-5).

The following page teaches us in six steps how to do the tree pose. I will model the pose for the whole class and then they will try to follow me step by step. This will take us about five minutes to do it all.

After this exercise, the children will draw this pose and will write an explanation of how to make the pose, step by step. They will also write the name of the pose in English and Sanskrit.

Next day one of the students will tell us how to do the exercise and all of us will follow him/her.

We will add one exercise everyday if the students have understood the pose; if not, we will practice a couple of days. There are nine poses. We will do all poses in the same way as the first one.

When the students know all the poses, they will be able to create their own pose. It can be an animal, a geometric figure or anything they can think about. They can do it with a partner or by themselves. Then they have to illustrate it and explain the pose in writing. We can make our own illustrated book of exercises and poses. They also have to write the name of the pose in English and Spanish.

We will add and review the vocabulary every day and try to use it while we work on the poses.

Notes

Last school year we did some exercises of stretching and breathing. The class was very excited to work on these activities. All the students improved their reading speed. They were able to focus for a longer time on a lesson and they improved their marks considerably. I cannot say that breathing and stretching alone helped the group to accomplish improvement, but I seriously believe it helped.

Almost everyday I used light classical music, classical music, and soundscapes music. Very often in our classroom I light a candle with a weak smell of lavender. Another activity we practiced was to close our eyes for a few minutes and concentrated on one thought only, for example on one color. If our mind went somewhere else we would try to go back to the same color we were

concentrating on. While we were walking to lunch they would concentrate on their walking only. This activity helped them to keep silence whenever we were in line.

I believe that a good holistic health program will help my students to be better persons, self-disciplined, and believe more in themselves. I did all that I learned in our seminar and other sources, and all that I could think of to try to help my students to be successful in their school year. As a teacher I will continue looking for other paths to encourage my students to become achievers.

I will add to this paper some things we can add to our environment to adapt it for more successful learning.

Music

Music is related to rhythm and movement. The movement of the planets, the growth of plants, the lives of animals and peoples, all them are related. Everything in the universe vibrates (Ostrander & Schroeder 81-85).

Musical selections:

- Handel: Concerto for Harp and Lute Larghetto, op. 4, no. 6
- J.S. Bach: Suite 3 (“Air on a G String”)
- Vivaldi: “Four seasons” Spring, Largo
- Mozart: Clarinet Concerto in A Major
- Beethoven: Symphony no. 6 (“Pastorale”)
- Mahler: Symphony no. 5 (Rose & Nicholl 187-8)

Aromas

Smells in our environment can influence our moods and levels of anxiety, fear, hunger, depression, and sexuality. We all have memories that we can link with smells for example, when we smell popcorn we can link it immediately with movie theaters, I link the smell of cigarettes to my childhood because most of my family smoked, one of my students will recognize one of my perfumes because she linked it to her mother’s smell. Research suggests that peppermint, basil, lemon, cinnamon, and rosemary enhance mental alertness, while lavender, chamomile, orange, and rose flower calm and encourage relaxation (Jensen 66).

Colors

We all have experienced one-way or other of how color influences the environment. We can see that plants grow greener if they receive the light of the sun, or that gray clouds mean that rain is coming. Colors also change our state of being. I had some students at Phillips Petroleum who lived in Alaska and got very depressed during the winter. There are some colors that can help set a better environment in our classrooms.

Yellow stimulates the sense of optimism, hope, and balance. Orange is a great color to stimulate learning. If we want our students to be calm, we can use blue. The brain releases and the body relax. It reduces the temperature, perspiration, and appetite. It can be too calming for our classrooms. Nevertheless, it was a good color for my students who were so active. Bright colors, such as red, orange, and yellow, spark energy and creativity. They can also increase aggressive and nervous behavior. For optimal learning, choose yellow, light orange, beige, or off-white. Those colors seem to stimulate positive feelings (Jensen 57).

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Beautifully illustrated, this book has a great story to teach yoga exercises in the classroom. It will also help the teacher to build character in the class.
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This book is an analysis of Paulo Freire's pedagogy. While studying at the University of Oklahoma, I was very pleased that Freire was becoming popular, creating alternative education for the oppressed and people without a voice because of their economical or social situation.
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This is an inspirational book for teachers who desire to improve their teaching by learning how our brain works.
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- Pichon Riviere, Enrique. *Teoría del Vínculo*. Argentina: Ediciones Nueva Visión, 1986.
Project clear encourages teachers to work in groups and centers. This book is an excellent source to understand the dynamics, roles, and psychology of working with groups.
- Rose, Colin, and Malcolm J. Nicholl. *Accelerated Learning for The 21st Century*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1997.
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- Wang, Jian, Albrecht W. Inhoff, and Hsuan-Chih Chen, eds. *Reading Chinese Scripts: A Cognitive Analysis*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999.
Chapter 1 examines the role of metalinguistic awareness in learning to read Chinese. This chapter will help us understand the differences of language and what it means to speak English as a second language.

Supplemental Resources

Resources for Teachers

- Canino, Glorisa, and Peter Guarnaccia. "Methodological Challenges in the Assessment of Hispanic Children and Adolescents." *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 1.3 (1997): 124-134.
This article describes some of the main challenges involved in carrying out culturally informed mental health research and assessment with Hispanic children and adolescents. Issues are framed within a dynamic and creative conceptualization of culture.

- Corsiglia, John, and Gloria Snively. "Knowing Home: NisGa'a Traditional Knowledge and Wisdom Improve Environmental Decision Making." *Alternatives Journal*. Summer 1997: 22+. Questia. 1 May 2005 <<http://www.questia.com/>>.
This article will enlighten us to understand better the beliefs of indigenous people. Many of our "Hispanic" students are indigenous as well as many immigrants from Africa and Asia.
- Hamm, Mary, and Dennis Adams. *Literacy in Science, Technology, and the Language Arts: An Interdisciplinary Inquiry*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1998.
I highly recommend this book to plan activities related to health and science. This book explains how children build meaning from and engage in learning from the environment. We can accomplish better teaching of language and communication.
- Miranda, Esther, and Richard Landmann. "Gifted Teachers Creating Gifted Classrooms: One Exceptional Teacher, One Exceptional Classroom." *Roepers Review*. 23.4 (2001): 230. Questia. 1 May 2005 <<http://www.questia.com/>>.
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- O'Connor-Fleming, Mary Louise, and Elizabeth Parker. *Health Promotion: Principles and Practice in the Australian Context*. Crows Nest, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 2001.
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- Palfrey, Judith S. *Community Child Health: An Action Plan for Today*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995.
By reading parts of this book we can relate what is happening in Houston and other cities of the United States with economically disadvantaged children. Many of our students in the Houston Independent School District are economically disadvantaged.
- Sapora, Allen V., and Elmer D. Mitchell. *The Theory of Play and Recreation*. 3rd Ed. New York: Ronald Press, 1961.
This book is an excellent source to understand why it is so important to play and exercise with our students. It is an excellent book to support the Houston mayor's initiative on "Get Moving Houston." As teachers we can understand that walking, running, jumping, and climbing, are fundamental movements to help a child grow. These activities are usually forbidden in schools without explaining the reasons why. Teachers should encourage children to do the opposite, under the right circumstances.
- Tzeng, Oliver C. S., Jay W. Jackson, and Henry C. Karlson. *Theories of Child Abuse and Neglect, Differential Perspectives, Summaries, and Evaluations*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1991.
This book will take us through history and learn about mistreatment of children. We teachers know that students need to live in a healthy environment in order to succeed in their academic performance. The prologue of the book states that this book was prepared under the impetus of desperate need, in academic institutions and clinical and social services, for a comprehensive introduction to diverse theorizations of child abuse and neglect etiologies. History documents that child maltreatment has existed since the beginning of human civilization. However, the formal recognition of the problem of child maltreatment has a relatively short history.

Web Sources for Teachers and Students

- All these web addresses are excellent source for health related topics for teachers, students, and parents.
- Superintendent Urges HISD Community to Join in Mayor White's "Get Moving Houston!" Wellness Initiative*. April 2005. <http://www.houstonisd.org/HISD/portal/article/front/0,2731,20856_90333894_108637764,00.html>
- Keep Kids Healthy.com*
Excellent web address for parents, teachers, and children. February 17, 2004.
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At this web you find the calorie calculator. It is very easy to use.
- United States Department of Agriculture*. June, 3, 2004. <<http://mypyramid.gov>>.
This is the web address for the new nutrition pyramid. It has very good information to follow a good nutritional plan.

Materials for Students

Baptiste, Baron. *My Daddy is a Pretzel: Yoga for Parents and Kids*. Cambridge, MA: Barefoot Books, 2004.

Beautifully illustrated, this book has a great story to teach yoga exercises in the classroom. It will also help the teacher to build character in the class.

Dresden, Judith, et al. *Mr. Slaptail's Secret*. Houston: Baylor College of Medicine, 1997.

This children's book is an excellent tool to link science and health to reading and hands on materials.