

Nutrition Education In School

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A PART from parents the school teacher in most countries sees more of the children than any other person. By watching them day to day and observing their behaviour, appearance, ability to concentrate and to learn, the teacher can identify and point out to the health authorities who seem to be losing interest, vigour and manifest other symptoms which may well be the result of poor nutrition. Teacher can also help in finding out the social and economic circumstances associated with malnutrition. Those working in rural areas and who are usually well known and respected in the community are specially in a good position to do this. More over in every country of the world schools reach more of the population directly, than do health or agricultural services. If a small village has a public building at all it is likely to be a school. Thus nutrition education can reach more people through schools than through any other channel. Whether this can be done effectively depends on the good will, training and capabilities of the teachers. Nutritionists must realize that the curriculum of most schools is overloaded and that specialists in many subjects compete for a share in it. There is, therefore, a risk of overburdening the teachers. Their support must be won by convincing them of the importance of good food, particularly in some areas where malnutrition is a serious problem and by helping to introduce special teaching about food and nutrition. Nutrition education is a new and important concept which has a definite role to play in education. Although in many cases the role can be evolved gradually without overloading the school curriculum in some countries particularly in economically and technically less developed

countries, there is a desperate need for nutrition education and food and nutrition may have to be given priority over some other subjects already been taught.

If anyone resists the inclusion of teaching about food and nutrition it may be because he is concerned more about the overburdening of the existing curriculum, or is less interested in the usefulness of the effort. If after suitable training the teachers are personally involved in studying the food and nutrition problem of the children they are more likely to understand the purpose of the programme and would enter enthusiastically into activities relating to it. There are many advantages in teaching nutrition to school children. Children are not yet set in their way. They are more open minded than adults and more used to accepting new knowledge and new habits. They usually have great curiosity about things and are eager to learn and their interest is continually widening. They want to be liked and accepted more. In many societies they form a useful bridge in approaching their families. They are at an age when poor foods have a permanent effect on their health and development and in a few years the older school children will themselves be parents and influential people in the community. They are a captive audience and can be more easily reached than at any other time of life. The introduction of nutrition education in schools means the official introduction of the subject in the curriculum of teacher's training college and the additional training of teachers will need constant help through refresher courses, supervisory visits, textbooks and teachers guides etc. They may also gain much by pooling ideas with the extension and health workers collaborating

in the programme.

Text books, manuals and teaching aids should provide guidance not only on the principle of good nutrition but on how to teach the subject. Many countries at present rewriting or planning to rewrite their standard school books and teaching manual on nutrition should examine those in current use find out when revisions are to be made and try to motivate authorities to include suitable material. Most teachers have an opportunity of reaching the parents and enlisting their cooperation. This cooperation is essential in a food and nutrition programme if contradiction between home and school is to be avoided. Parents may moreover give valuable help to the school meal. The general goals of nutrition education in schools may be as follows: 1) To promote good health and development in school children. 2) To establish good food practices. 3) To develop a healthy attitude to food and enjoyment of well prepared nutritious meal. 4) To teach them the principles of good nutrition and importance and application of those in daily life. 5) To help them acquire skills in the production, storage, selection, preservation and preparation of food which will assist them in obtaining a good diet.

Schools can help to achieve these goals by providing sympathetic, happy and clean environment in which the teacher sets a good example from the health and nutritional standpoints and in which children are encouraged to explore problems and try out for new things. Children at school can learn through daily performance to follow rules of health and hygiene and to eat a good diet having stimulating learning experiences related to food and nutrition. As education in nutrition attains sort of extra curricular knowledge

it is generally considered better to teach it in primary schools at least, as an integral part of the total school programme partly through classroom project and units and partly through practical work outside class room. In this way the danger of crowding in the curriculum with an additional specialized subject is reduced. Classroom teaching may be included primarily in home economics, general knowledge, social studies or in several of these but the subject may also be taught indirectly through history, geography, arithmetic, music, physical education and in fact almost in any other educational field. Children like adults start to learn from what they know, not from a hypothetical starting point. This means that a teacher must find out what his pupils eat at the beginning of the programme and what they think about different foods. The teacher can visit the homes of the pupils for discussion with the parents and to observe the circumstances and habits. The collected data provide information for planning the teaching and a base line for subsequent evaluation, which can be repeated at intervals.

It is particularly important in countries where comparatively little number of children remain at school beyond the primary stage that teaching about food and nutrition and home-making be introduced in the early primary classes. If it is left until the period of Secondary Education most children will never have benefit of it.

Continuing the subject in secondary schools, colleges and universities not only consolidates improvements but is important because the pupils who continue to study it will be the policy makers and professional workers of the country in future.