

Health Academy: An Elementary School Health Education Experience

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Abstract

Health Academy is a day of active, age-appropriate health education for students in grades kindergarten through sixth. All the lessons are designed and taught by university students who are planning to be elementary teachers. Health Academy provides our area children with an intensive and diverse health education experience while providing our prospective teachers with an opportunity to plan and teach lessons through the course of a school day.

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Keywords: health education, elementary school, teacher preparation, service learning

Introduction

In California all university students who are interested in earning a California Multiple Subject Credential to teach the elementary grades must complete a health education class. At California State University, Chico, the health requirement is a three unit upper division content and process course called "Health Education for Elementary Teachers." The course addresses the comprehensive school health program, the scope and sequence of health education, lesson planning, and teaching methods in health. We feel that this course requirement is an opportunity to excite prospective elementary teachers about teaching health and thus increase the chances that they will incorporate more health education into their classes once they start teaching.

Health Academy Description

We started Health Academy in the spring of 1994. Originally, we assigned groups of four university students to a classroom and each university student taught the full class of children once during the day and assisted the other students in their lessons during the rest of the day. While this format "worked" we have found that the experience is better for the university and elementary students when everyone spends the day in small groups. In the current configuration, a group of four university students is assigned to an elementary classroom

for the day. The group begins the day together introducing themselves and Health Academy to the children. After thirty to forty minutes of introduction and "getting to know you" games, the university students divide the elementary students into equal sized groups and set up learning centers. With their small group of children (4-6), the university students teach their original lesson for the set number of minutes. When the time is up, the groups of children change to another university leader and the university students teach their lessons again. This continues until all the children have experienced all the lessons. With this configuration the university students get a chance to practice their lesson multiple times with less likelihood of discipline problems and the children get more attention. The full group comes together again at the end of the day to review and celebrate.

Health Academy Content

Health Academy starts with introductions, rules and "getting to know you" games. Our rules are simple:

- Show Respect
- Listen
- Follow Directions
- Have Fun

During the Health Academy Day the regular classroom teachers are free to participate, meet with their grade level peers, or do preparation for the next week. With the exception of the kindergarten and first grade teachers, most of the teachers choose to leave the room during the Health Academy. The university students are responsible for managing their classroom. Since most of them have not had independent classroom experience we discuss discipline in preparation for the day and give them training in how to manage behavior.

“Getting to know you” games follow the rules. We provide a name tag for each child and use games to help everyone feel comfortable, laugh and get ready for the day. The university students chose the games that are played and every classroom is a little different. Name games, tag games, team building games, parachute games and any other activity that is age appropriate, non-competitive and fun is acceptable.



Figure 1
Kindergarteners Playing Simon Says



Figure 2
Fourth Grader Playing A Coordination Team Building Game

After the games the university students divide the children into equal groups. We usually do this by putting symbols or colors on their names tags and saying “Everyone with a bear on their name tag go with Ms....”. The groups then assemble wherever the university student has created a learning center. Some students like to sit at a table, others in a corner on the floor, and others choose to go outside. In the planning process the university students have determined how long each section of the day will be so each of them is responsible for making sure their lesson ends on time for the children to go the next teacher. The university students learn quickly that the perfectly written lesson plan does not always go as expected and that each group of children brings something a little different to the lesson.

The university students choose their lesson topics from the *Health Instruction Framework for California Public Schools* (CDE, 2003).

Sometimes the schools ask for certain topics to be taught in certain grades, but most often the schools leave that decision up to the students. During every Health Academy there is a wide range of health topics addressed. While the university students are free to teach the topics that most interest them and they feel are the most interesting to the children, we ask that each group of university students include a lesson on dental health, physical fitness and healthy snacks.

Examples of Some Health Academy Topics

We require each group to include dental health as topic because of the high incidence of tooth decay among our school children. A mouth of silver teeth is common among our first graders and those are the lucky ones that got dental treatment. We give each child in every grade a toothbrush, toothpaste and floss and spend time practicing dental hygiene in each grade.



Figure 3
Dental Health Lecture



Figure 4
Tooth Brushing

Incorporating the creation of a healthy snack into the day is also required of each group. This is important as a modeling activity for choosing and making snacks as well as a nutritional boost for the children (Figures 5 & 6). In addition to the cooking activity most groups include a content-based lesson on nutrition as well.

Our third requirement is the inclusion of a physical fitness lesson that presents content on

what fitness is and why it is important as well as a comprehensive workout with flexibility, strength and endurance components (Figure 7).

First aid is a frequent topic choice for the university students and one that is well received by the children (Figure 8 & 9).



Figure 5
Learning About Foods



Figure 6
The Nutrition Song



Figure 7
Students Finishing Their Workout With Meditation Stretches



Figure 8
Immobilizing A Bone



Figure 9
Adding Drama To First Aid

Among the drug prevention topics, smoking is the most popular topic (Figure 10). Role playing to resist pressure to use tobacco and experiments are interesting to the children.

We encourage our students to incorporate children's books into their health lessons (Figure 11). There are good stories for just about every topic and children respond well when stories are read.

Some university students go beyond the regular scope of the California Health Instruction Framework and present experiences that tie

together several health concepts. In Figure 12, the girls have created a type of shelter that is commonly used among the homeless people in our area. The lesson surrounding this activity touches on the topics of mental health, compassion, community resources and serving one's community.

Some university students create a lesson that incorporates another subject area. Environmental health lessons are often combined with science and give students an opportunity to touch, feel and do something to help their environment (Figure 13). We

encourage our students to incorporate music, art, drama, reading, writing, physical education, social studies and math into the lessons whenever possible.

Health-related careers are a topic often left out of regular health education instruction (Figure 14). We try to entice our students into presenting lessons on health careers in the upper elementary grades.



Figure 10
Smoking Experiment



Figure 11
Reading A Health-Related Story As Part Of The Lesson



Figure 12
Sixth Grade Girls Demonstrating The Use Of Their Shelter Made From Materials Found In The Environment



Figure 13
Girls Planting And Learning The Value Of Living Things



Figure 14
Boys Learning About Health-Related Careers

These are just a sampling of the topics presented in a Health Academy Day. Other topics include: conflict resolution, body image, water safety, fire safety, bike safety, HIV prevention, drug prevention, emergency and disaster preparation, disease prevention, label reading, consumer skills, communication skills, going to the doctor, community health helpers, poisons, decision-making, indoor air pollution, sun safety, hygiene, making friends, managing peer pressure, food choices, analyzing media, making a personal physical fitness plan, and many others. The only topic we do not discuss is puberty/sexuality.

Putting Health Academy into the Curriculum Health Academy is just one day of teaching by the university students but it requires many weeks of preparation. We like to schedule the Health Academy in the seventh or eighth week of the semester. This gives enough time to prepare while being early enough in the semester that there is no competition from big semester projects in other classes. While the university students are apprehensive and anxious before teaching at the Health Academy, they finish it feeling energized. When they return to class their enthusiasm for being a teacher is increased and they bring a different perspective to the course material. For many of the students this

one experience makes their college preparation classes more meaningful.

Along with the day of teaching, each group assembles their individual lessons into a curriculum guide. Prior to the Health Academy each group orally presents their plan for the day and asks for feedback or suggestions. After the Health Academy, the groups revise the lessons based on what they learned and turn in the complete curriculum guide. This guide becomes a resource they can use in their teaching. A copy of the directions for writing the lesson plans that we give our students is found in [Appendix A](#). See the Health Academy Photo Essay ([Slideshow 1](#)).

During class in the weeks prior to Health Academy we present the following topics:

- How to write objectives
- How to write a lesson plan
- How to use the Health Instruction Framework for California Public Schools
- Methods and strategies in health education
- Growth and development characteristics of children
- Evaluation strategies in health education
- Managing behavior

Our department has assembled a library of curriculum materials and teaching aids that the

students are welcome to borrow and use. Samples of past projects are included in this library. In addition, we have created a lab/workroom with materials, a computer/printer, laminator, lettering system, paper cutter, etc for students to use during the regular workweek. Some class time is allotted during each class session for the groups to meet and discuss their progress.

Putting Health Academy into the Schools

In 1994 we approached the principal of a local school with the idea of the Health Academy and presented the concept to all the teachers at a faculty meeting. They approved of the idea and our first Health Academy was scheduled in the last weeks of the school year. Over the summer some of the teachers must have talked to their friends who taught at other schools because we got several requests in the following fall. From that time on the requests have outnumbered our ability to schedule Health Academies. We have scheduled Health Academies at local city schools with enrollments of 500 to 900 as well as small mountain schools with enrollments of 60 to 100. In every case we have gotten positive feedback from the teachers, administrators, children and university students, and thousands of additional minutes of health instruction have been presented.

References

California Department of Education. (2003). Health instruction framework for California public schools: Kindergarten through grade twelve. Retrieved November 24, 2003, from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/cdepress/health-framework/2003-health-framework-pdf>

Summary

Becoming a health educator takes practice. The practice can take place in the safety of the university classroom but the added effort needed to take the practice into a real world arena makes the practice more efficient, relevant, meaningful and important. Health Academy allows prospective teachers to write objectives and lesson plans, review and adapt curricula, be creative, and teach children. The same material studied through textbooks, lectures and videos leaves university students wondering if they are ready, or able, to be teachers. Health Academy assures those that have a genuine desire to be teachers that they have chosen the right profession while gently nudging those without true interest in teaching to consider a different major. For the university professor, Health Academy is a laboratory for experimentation and practice as well as a way to keep current and grounded in elementary education. Educational merits aside, Health Academy is an opportunity to see one's class in a different way than is possible in the regular classroom. At Health Academy one sees personalities emerge, creativity flourish, and talents shine. For us, Health Academy is restoring.

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Appendix A

Directions For Writing Lesson Plans For The Health Academy

(Appendix A available in Rich Text Format)

Lesson Plans

Each time you shift activities you need a lesson plan. Younger children need to shift activities sooner than older children, so the number of lessons may be larger in plans for the primary grades than in the upper grades. Each lesson plan (regardless of length) has the same components. Use the following format for each of your lessons:

I. Topic

Provide a title for your lesson that identifies the content to be covered.

II. Objective(s)

List the objective(s) for your lesson. Don't write a paragraph, just list the objectives. As you plan your Health Academy day, include lessons that touch on all three domains of learning.

The three domains are:

1. Cognitive domain (thinking, facts)
2. Affective domain (feeling, values, attitudes)
3. Psychomotor domain (action, doing)

The objectives for each lesson must:

1. Use measurable terms
2. Be learner-centered
3. Have one topic area
4. Have one verb
5. Be one sentence
6. Be realistic and appropriate
7. Represent valuable learning

III. Content Outline (Background Information)

Provide a content outline of all the information needed to teach the skill and understand the content of your lesson. The content includes all the facts, examples, and descriptions that will be presented, as well as any extra information you may need in order to answer spontaneous questions. The content sections will be larger for the upper grades than the primary grades.

This section should look like an outline with roman numerals and all the other paraphernalia of an outline. The material in each part of the outline should be in full sentences.

Since you will have to research the material for the content outline, the sentences (when appropriate) in the outline must be referenced. A wide variety of materials have information relevant and appropriate for your target population, so your references do not have to be limited to professional journals. Pamphlets, books, curriculum guides, web sites, workbooks, etc. can have valid and reliable information that you can use.

When preparing this section imagine that the reader has no prior experience or knowledge of the topic. Don't consider the information to be common sense or universally known by adults. Instead, imagine the

type of content outline you would like if you were faced with teaching a lesson about a topic you knew nothing about.

IV. Learning Opportunity (What Actually Happens)

In a step-by-step fashion, describe what will happen during your lesson. Give the reader a clear picture of what will happen from the time you introduce your topic to the time the lesson is over.

Provide a sample program script which shows what happens when. **List the questions you will ask. Include directions for activities and demonstrations.** Indicate when you will ask for volunteers. **Describe examples you may use** when explaining a point.

Give directions clear enough that you would feel comfortable having someone who had not been involved in the planning teach your lesson. This section is very much like a **script**.

Health Academy is designed to be a fun way to learn health. Every group should have active, involving things to do. Include music, dance, poetry, games, role play, puppets, stories, and art whenever possible.

Within its learning opportunity, every lesson should have an:

information section (see/hear it) ((I do))
an activity section (practice it/ try it) ((We do))
a review section (review it) ((You do))

Don't just lecture during the information section, ask questions, do a demonstration, perform a role play, ask the students to read facts for cards, show a video, play a game, etc. When you do lecture, only talk for **3 minutes** before involving the students in some way.

For the activity section, choose activities that allow every student to participate. Choose active, moving things rather than sitting, writing things if possible. Incorporate other disciplines like music, art, physical education, literature, reading, writing, math, etc. Be creative. Take a few risks. Have enough equipment, supplies, etc. for all students to participate with minimum waiting.

Finish each of your lessons with some type of review to make sure the students learned what you think they learned.

V. Space and Resources

In this section, list the resources you will need in order to fully implement your lesson. Imagine yourself in an empty cell. What would you need? List everything, no matter how obvious it may seem.

Indicate how much and what type of space you need. You may stay in the classroom or use the outdoors.

VI. Student Materials

In this section, attach a copy of all the materials you plan to give the target population or use during the lesson. Also attach the directions and/or templates for any products you ask the students to make or use. If you will use a worksheet, attach it. If you will have the students cut out objects, attach masters of the objects. If you will prepare a food item, give the recipe.

VII. Bibliography

In this section, list the references you used in planning the lesson. There are many wonderful resources for teachers that describe lessons or activities that would be perfect for the Health Academy. You are encouraged to use these materials just be sure to give credit to where the ideas came from.

Putting Lessons Within the Plan

Each lesson presented whether it is 10 minutes long or sixty minutes long must have each of the sections described in I-VII on the previous pages. “Getting to know you” activities and team building activities do not need a lesson plan but they do need full directions that are clear enough for another person to follow. Arrange the lessons in the written plan to reflect the order of the day. Identify the creator of each lesson in the upper right hand corner of its first page. Each group will receive a grade for the complete plan as well as an individual grade for the lesson(s) contributed. The individual grade is greater in weight than the group grade.