

SECTION FOUR

HEALTH EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

Anthropology has an important role to play in contextualizing health education and transforming it from the passive handmaiden of a reductionistic biomedical tradition to a decentralized approach to community health problem solving. I have suggested in previous essays that an anthropologically informed health education will better be able to convey meaning and engender trust by: 1) addressing popular images of ethnophysiology; 2) acknowledging popular health concerns; 3) working within local illness classification systems and established patterns of folk dietetics; 4) maximizing cultural resources (both material and conceptual) and 5) identifying perceived and biomedically recognized risk factors for disease. I have also highlighted the role of the health educator in consumer education. Patterns of self treatment and over-the-counter drug use need to be identified and assessed culturally as well as biomedically.

In this section two additional contributions of anthropology to health education are noted. The first is the evaluation of existing health messages and how they are interpreted. The second contribution is helping health educators communicate health concepts more effectively. I suggest that health educators need to build upon the familiar to describe the new. As distinct from linear didactic teaching, an analogical method of health communication is proposed.