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## Teaching Tools & Techniques

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### Applying Problem-Based Learning and Community Mapping to Teaching Family Resource Management

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#### *Purpose*

- To teach students how to recognize and use resources they may currently have or cultivate in the future
- To encourage students to take a “hands on” approach to exploring community resources
- To encourage students to reflect on their own values and priorities
- To allow students to understand family resource management in an entertaining format

#### *Objectives*

The use of this technique provides students with the opportunity to:

- Develop collaborative skills through group work
- Develop investigative and research skills in gathering materials
- Develop critical thinking and creative skills as they prepare information for presentation
- Develop a greater understanding of how to identify and use family resources

#### *Rationale*

Family Resource Management, one of the ten substantive areas addressed in Family Life Education, can be a difficult subject in which to interest students. Students often look at the topics covered in Family Resource Management classes as somewhat dull and boring. Topics generally covered in the Family Resource Management course (budgeting and financial planning, housing, insurance, credit, savings, decision making, time and stress management, retirement, environmental resources, and taxes) involve learning practical skills and are areas in which most people need knowledge in order to manage a family well (University of Tennessee at Chattanooga catalog, 2006-07). This course was designed to help students acquire practical

skills, information, and experience in securing and managing resources for themselves as well as for others.

### ***Procedure***

Two relatively new techniques were chosen to use in teaching this class. The first technique involves changing an existing class from a traditional format to a problem-based learning format (Duch, Gron, & Allen, 2001). Using this technique places more responsibility for learning on the student. The teacher formulates the problems to be solved and serves as a facilitator and resource person for the class. The second technique, community mapping, is a specific strategy that allows students to explore and learn about their community. The community mapping technique is an assets-based approach to learning about a community in contrast to the traditional needs-based approach (Kretzmann & Knight, 1993).

To create groups that would function well, a questionnaire created by the instructor was given to each student asking them to rate their abilities using a Likert scale, on specific skills—research, presentation, writing, organization, and technology. For example, students rate themselves very strong, strong, neither strong nor weak, weak, or very weak in their evaluation of their own performance on each of the specific skills. Using the completed questionnaires, the instructor assigns groups with five or six members so that each group has members who are confident of their strengths on different skills.

Instead of using the traditional textbook, the instructor compiles a packet for the course which contains foundational information on the basic topics to be covered in the course. This includes such items as journal articles, magazine and newspaper articles, budgeting forms, internet articles, tax information, goal setting and decision making processes, as well as quizzes for self-analysis.

Four problems are formulated by the instructor to address the information previously covered through textbook lectures. The specific topics, budgeting and financial planning, housing, insurance, credit, savings, decision making, time and stress management, retirement, environmental resources, and taxes, are grouped together so that each problem has a particular focus. Problem one includes the community mapping technique. The problem asks students to choose a specific area around Chattanooga to visit on the premise that they are planning to move their family there, and to complete a number of tasks as they explore the neighborhood. Tasks to be completed include drawing a map of the area, itemizing the number and types of homes, and locating community amenities such as grocery stores, medical facilities, banks, churches, schools, parks, historical markers (O'Sullivan, 2001). Students interview people living in the selected neighborhood, research the history of the area, collect brochures of available activities and organizations in the neighborhood, and take photographs or make a video recording of their visit.

Problem two has a primary theme of goal setting and incorporates purchasing a home and a car plus setting three additional goals which are chosen by the group members. Students review the goal-setting steps in *The Ten Commandments of Goal Setting* (Blair, 2000). Blair suggests that you choose a goal, list three reasons why you would like to achieve the goal, and formulate five steps you will take to reach the goal. For example, in order to complete this problem in a realistic way, students must research entry-level salaries for persons in their fields of study and prepare a workable family budget. So, creating a family budget could possibly be the first step. Then, they explore home mortgages, rental properties, car lease versus purchase, as well as savings for trips, educational funds, retirement, etc. Subsequent steps may include conducting

research on the homes and cars under consideration for purchase, investigating loans and mortgages, making an informed decision on the purchase, and evaluating the purchase.

Problem three has a primary theme of family life which includes work, time management, stress, fatigue, scheduling, spending time as a couple, and spending time with children. One exercise for this problem includes the creation of a grid showing all family activities for a week and accounting for the time of each family member. Students are reminded to include travel time for transporting children to school and activities, and to incorporate good parenting characteristics, such as reading bedtime stories and other quality time activities.

The primary theme of problem four is global environmental concerns and long-term investments. Students choose a concern such as recycling, global warming, or overpopulation. Students explore what they can do to support this issue over their lifetime personally, professionally, and politically. They examine organizations currently in place that support their chosen issue and look at current ways they can become involved. They collect newspaper articles and information from the internet so they can share up-to-date information with the class on their concerns. Additionally, in this problem, students also examine savings options, retirement plans and traditional investment approaches such as stocks, bonds, certificates of deposit, and mutual funds. They examine and define the best options offered when looking at employment packages.

Speakers on pertinent topics are secured and some instructor mini-lectures are prepared. For instance, a real estate agent and a mortgage banker, a credit education counselor, a stress management expert, a life coach, a financial planner, and an automobile salesman are invited to share their expertise with the class. Sometimes speakers come to the class, other times the class convenes at their place of business.

The information and materials collected and created by each group for each problem are presented to the class about every four weeks during the semester. Students choose the presentation format they feel showcases their information best. The length of time for presentation is 20-30 minutes. Every group member is required to participate in the presentation.

### ***Other Possibilities***

Both teaching techniques, problem-based learning and community mapping, may be incorporated into other courses. The community mapping technique may be used when working with preservice teachers to explore the communities surrounding local schools. Problem-based learning works well in a class that involves looking at families through history. Using this technique, problems are formulated around selected families over a selected number of years. Students explore the dynamics of their assigned family as well as their contributions to society.

### ***Assessing Effectiveness***

Using traditional methods of assessment, the effectiveness of these teaching techniques is somewhat difficult to assess. However, self-evaluation and group member evaluation forms created with another professor are used to gain insight into the thoughts of the students in regards to their own performance and the contributions and performance of each group member. Both evaluations are confidential and students are encouraged to be forthright and complete with their answers. As in any class where group membership is required, some groups work more cooperatively than others. Overall, these evaluations suggest that students really enjoy the “hands on” approach used in this class. Students have the opportunity to sharpen their presentation skills, explore the community, raise their awareness in regards to community resources, as well as learn practical skills that they can use in their own lives as well as teach others. Students also share that they really have fun in the class!

A grading rubric, customized for each problem, makes grading presentations easier. Each rubric focuses on completeness in answering the questions posed in the problem, technical correctness, and presentation. All of these evaluations, both the self and group evaluation and the grading rubric, are taken under consideration when formulating grades. Upon completion of the course, students are given an anonymous course evaluation that is used by the instructor to update and change the course as needed.

The student evaluations comments below indicate that this “hands on” method is a very effective learning technique when applied to Family Resource Management. (Student evaluations of HECO 448, 2006)

“I liked having the chance to actually be in the community and to collect information first hand.”

“This class was so different from my other classes. It was fun learning in a different way. ”

“This class was so cool. I like figuring things out myself with my ‘family’. ”

Many other students indicated that they were pleasantly surprised that they not only enjoyed the format of the course, but, that they learned information that they will use again and again in making life decisions and in solving problems encountered in life.

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