

TEACHING SELF HELP IN LIMITED RESOURCE NEIGHBORHOODS

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INTRODUCTION

A field study was designed to test the proposition that low income neighborhoods can provide resident homemakers who are trainable as teachers, to improve home management skills of other homemakers. The testing and development of such local resources was necessary to extend the influence of and effect of the limited resources of the home economics extension specialist. The *teacher multiplier* concept requires that the extension specialist train ten or more homemakers in a low income neighborhood, and that each trainee then teach ten or more other homemakers in the same neighborhood. To provide a reasonable prospect of success, it was assumed that the method of teaching should consist of face-to-face explanation and direct demonstration of helpful homemaker techniques which could be supported on a very limited budget.

LIMITED RESOURCE FAMILIES

Families with very limited resources face many of the same problems that face other families. In addition, they frequently live in neighborhoods where safety, sanitation, and housing are below standard. Both the community services and educational and recreational facilities are inadequate. Many families live in dilapidated houses, lack decent clothing, depend on folk health remedies, and have limited transportation to jobs and community services. However, many of the people with limited resources do have positive values, ideals, and goals. They really want improvement, and their behavior is not so much due to their culture as to the grinding elements of deprivation and stress placed on them by their environment.

Extension home economists particularly face the very challenging problems of reducing the gap that exists between the haves and the have-nots in the delivery of social goods and services. To do this, it is important to provide educational programs for the disadvantaged which will raise their standard of living. Thus the kinds of educational programs which will be most effective in this respect concern both

the home economists and those who will benefit from the program. It is also necessary to find sufficient leadership personnel among the disadvantaged families who can understand their language and their problems.

SELF-HELP DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

A demonstration project was developed to determine the extent to which homemakers with limited resources, who were taught skills in home management, could teach the same skills to others among their peer group. Two neighborhoods were located where there was a high incidence of families with very limited resources. One urban area included 25 city blocks, and the second was an urban fringe area which included about 35 square miles. The neighborhoods were racially mixed, with some unpaved streets. Criteria for choosing communities for the study were: 1) approval could be obtained from community leaders; 2) facilities could be provided; 3) meeting rooms were convenient for the interested homemakers; 4) people were receptive to the idea of a leadership development program; 5) communities were typical of disadvantaged neighborhoods in Oklahoma City.

GUIDELINES FOR TEACHING SELF-HELP Program Planning:

- 1 Inform other agencies which have interest in working with the same or similar audience.
- 2 Find those to whom people go for specific kinds of help.
- 3 Avoid criticizing other organizations and agencies which are also trying to help families.
- 4 Enlist the help of public information personnel.
- 5 Define the target area.
- 6 Learn the competencies of people for whom leadership will be provided in the target area.
- 7 Involve homemakers in the early stages of planning.
- 8 Start where the people are. Build on interests which the people themselves express.
- 9 Let them decide what they want to learn.
- 10 Use knowledge and skills which homemakers already have.

11 Time and place are important. Whole families can usually attend if meetings are held in the evening.

12 Arrange for care of children during meetings.

13 Begin with small groups, not to exceed 15 to 20 persons. Divide larger groups.

14 Develop one idea at a time.

15 Teach on the homemaker's knowledge and skill level.

Teaching Materials:

16 Help supply resources, or whatever is needed.

17 Use tangible teaching materials when possible.

18 Plan for short-term projects which can be completed in a few lessons.

19 Plan for a practice time for the homemaker.

20 Be alert for readiness to learn – *the teachable moment*.

21 The language must be mutually intelligible to teacher and learner.

22 Be sincere and show that you are concerned.

23 Be generous with praise. Give credit where it belongs; provide rewards.

Evolving Leadership

24 Let homemakers share some personal experiences.

25 New leaders who teach groups in their own neighborhoods feel more secure if they work as a team.

26 Recruit those with potential that can be recognized.

27 Homemakers with similar problems may communicate better.

Evaluating Results

28 A change in one homemaker may influence change in another individual or group.

29 Evaluation must be continuous and related to the objectives.

THE DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

Ten persons, representing agencies concerned with assisting low-income families were interviewed to gain their approval and assistance to work in the two communities. These agencies included: 1) county extension personnel; 2) Director of the Community Action Program; 3) Project Director, Urban League Housing Counseling & Information Center; 4) Director, Community Counsel; 5) Coordinator for Senior Workers Action

Program.

The initial plan was to involve at least ten leaders in a selected community. The group was not to be limited as to who could attend the lessons. The group was taught a series of six lessons over a period of eight weeks. Further reinforcement and training was to be provided beyond the first few group sessions for homemakers who showed potential for leadership. The major objective was to teach homemakers how to use their personal resources to stretch their income. The homemakers who were taught, and who emerged as leaders were asked to teach others in their neighborhood. The idea seemed to give the leader group prestige. Those taught by the homemakers included family members, relatives and neighbors.

LEADER TRAINING SESSIONS

Although 20 were expected, more than 40 persons appeared for the first session, and 24 remained in the project to become neighborhood leaders. Ten leaders completed all phases of the program as originally designed. A professional home economist trained the homemaker leaders. Following the first two lessons, the homemakers were enthusiastic, and encouraged others to attend. They trained others to do the skills which they had been taught. During the early sessions there were 6 white leaders and 18 black leaders. After the first leaders were trained, the number had increased and the group was about half white and half black, since a group of white homemakers who had been traveling to another town for training decided to join this group.

A series of six lessons were developed on the basis of needs identified by agency directors, and the needs expressed by homemakers who attended the first session:

- 1) Stretching your dollars;
- 2) Comparative shopping for food;
- 3) Cutting cost of home decorations;
- 4) Creative home accessories;
- 5) Making low cost table & bed covers;
- 6) Making yeast rolls.

Viewing class projects and touring homes was part of the last lesson. Leaders were identified by criteria established prior to the class meetings. Three leader homemakers were in the urban community and seven were in the urban fringe community.

TABLE 1: HOMEMAKER CONFIDENCE IN TEACHING SKILLS BEFORE & AFTER TRAINING SESSIONS

| Confidence Level | Before | After |
|--|--------|-------|
| Can do well and can teach someone else | 10 | 97 |
| Can do it, but dont feel I could teach another | 50 | 192 |
| Can't do it; would like to learn | 195 | 60 |
| Can't do it; don't care to learn | 60 | 36 |

TABLE 2: SCOPE OF TRAINING PROJECT

| Leader | Type Project | Projects Done | People Taught |
|--------|--|---------------|---------------|
| 1 | Learn to sew; make table & bed covers | 3 | 12 |
| 2 | Wall hangings, place mats, rolls | 4 | 12 |
| 3 | Place mats, leather work, serve snacks | 4 | 15 |
| 4 | Table cover, cardboard table, leather work | 3 | 10 |
| 5 | Ceramics, place mats centerpiece | 11 | 325 |
| 6 | Place mats, pillows, key case, leather work | 7 | 30 |
| 7 | Table cover, cardboard table, place mat, pillow house plans | 8 | 20 |
| 8 | Bed cover, lap robe place mat, cardboard table, table cover | 8 | 325 |
| 9 | Bulletin board, cardboard table, wall hanging pillows, ceramics leather work, curtains | 13 | 325 |
| 10 | Curtains, pillows, place mats, bed cover, lap robe | 10 | 300 |

In Phase 1, the new homemaker leaders were encouraged to teach their newly acquired skills to their peers. They spread the word about the home management class meetings, and encouraged others to come to the centers for instruction in new ways of doing things. A total of eight homemakers in the urban community and sixteen homemakers in the urban fringe community took part in some of the six lessons.

The new leaders were encouraged by receiving help in preparation of teaching materials, and with compliments when a job was well done, and when they succeeded in teaching a new skill to a class member or to someone outside the class.



Homemaker leaders display completed projects to Director John Hopplis (deceased), Special Unit on Aging, Oklahoma Department of Institutions, Social and Rehabilitative Services.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Some results following the sessions taught by the Home Economist include the following:

1. Homemakers in the neighborhoods made 14 requests to the county director and the extension home economist, and 9 calls for assistance to the human resource development specialist.
2. A bus tour and a walking tour were conducted for 81 participants to see improvements made in the homes of the families who completed the program. Homemakers were gratified and happy to share the problems and pleasures encountered while making the improvements. These were discussed during the tours. The homemakers participated in a Community Action bazaar where they demonstrated home management skills and explained the homemaker leader program to others.
3. Requests have been received from other agencies for assistance in teaching homemakers in other areas of the city and county. Requests from the office of the Governor were also received to help in working in other areas of the City, County, and State.

TABLE 3: PARTICIPATION TOTALS
(Total N # 574)

| Category | N |
|-------------------------|-----|
| Leaders | 10 |
| Persons at bazaar* | 200 |
| Persons in study groups | 388 |
| Family members | 41 |
| Neighbors | 141 |

*A bazaar where some skills were taught by homemaker leaders.

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

We have affirmed the proposition that homemaker leaders can be trained to teach home management skills to other homemakers in their own neighborhoods. There were few dropouts during the program. The time used with direct contact was about six months. The cost for demonstration materials was about \$250. Cost for time, travel and professional services are not included.

The homemaker leaders accomplished the following:

- They became more successful homemakers
- They improved self confidence
- They became aware that they could teach
- They gained personal satisfaction in associating with others and by their accomplishments
- They enhanced neighborhood cooperation.

A similar program using the methods described here could be tested in other subject matter areas. The techniques and materials used during the study need further testing in other communities. **We have also demonstrated that the influence of the home economics specialist can be increased by a factor exceeding one hundred in the teacher-multiplier project.**

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