Creative Problem-Solving Exercises and Training in FCS

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Abstract
Creative problem-solving has been linked to successful adjustment to the demands of daily life (Chen & Kaufmann, 2008). The ability to recognize problems as opportunities can be an essential skill when dealing with uncertainty and adapting to continuous changes, both in personal and professional lives. Family and consumer sciences (FCS) professionals should strive to prepare students to live, work and be successful in the increasingly turbulent global world. The purpose of this article is to share our successes in helping students develop these essential skills through implementing creative problem-solving exercises and training in the FCS classroom.

Disciplines
Fashion Design | Fiber, Textile, and Weaving Arts

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Creative Problem-Solving Exercises and Training in FCS

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Creative problem-solving has been linked to successful adjustment to the demands of daily life (Chen & Kaufmann, 2008). The ability to recognize problems as opportunities can be an essential skill when dealing with uncertainty and adapting to continuous changes, both in personal and professional lives. Family and consumer sciences (FCS) professionals should strive to prepare students to live, work, and be successful in the increasingly turbulent global world. The purpose of this article is to share our successes in helping students develop these essential skills through implementing creative problem-solving exercises and training in the FCS classroom.

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The literature suggests that the skills of opportunity recognition, idea generation, and idea evaluation are essential elements of successful creativity training. We developed these three learning modules on these topics, each containing four to seven distinct exercises. To help students discover and engage in unconventional ways of thinking, the exercises were adapted from various sources (see Resources) and utilized experiential approaches. The exercises were introduced in four courses within the College of Human Sciences. The students represented a variety of majors, including FCS education and studies, hotel and restaurant management, and textiles and clothing, and they ranged from freshman to graduate students. Three instructors implemented 12 exercises from the developed modules as short (5 to 20 minutes), in-class activities over a 12-week period.

In one divergent thinking exercise, students worked in small groups to build the tallest structure using their shoes. The tallest was determined by measuring the distance from the top of the table surface to the highest point of any shoe. Following the identification of the tallest, students were guided in a debriefing of the exercise, discussing the process of construction and reconstruction, the emergence of leaders within the group, and the importance of “doing” to stimulate “thinking.” This exercise encouraged students to become more aware of the number of ideas it takes to find possible solutions.

In an opportunity recognition exercise, students viewed evocative images (i.e., a man and a dog riding on a motorbike) and were asked to describe the picture using their five senses. An example: What would the image smell like, taste like, sound like, and feel like? Students then brainstormed types of images that could be used to effectively introduce a product or idea to a target group or market. This exercise encouraged
Iowa State University Fashion Show:
Why Do They Attend?

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The popularity of the Peabody award-winning television show Project Runway has sparked public interest in and awareness of the fashion industry ("Project runway," 2009). Coupled with increasing enrollment in textiles and clothing programs (Arthur, O'Neal, Jordan, Kadolph, & Johnson, 2003) and sold-out events, many colleges and universities have witnessed enhanced interest in student fashion shows. Fashion shows have the potential to engage current and future students and to inspire them to consider majors in apparel related disciplines (Cox & Dietz, 1993). Events such as fashion shows, which provide memorable experiences for current and future students, may differentiate schools from their competitors (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Our purpose was to explore the types of promotional efforts that reached the majority of the audience and to understand why audience members attended the Iowa State University (ISU) fashion show.

Fashion shows have the potential to engage current and future students and to inspire them to consider majors in apparel related disciplines.

A total of 4,250 individuals attended the 25th and 26th annual fashion shows (one performance each) in March 2007 and April 2008. A total of 740 surveys were returned with 442 being usable, producing a 10.4% response rate. Most of the respondents (n = 376) were female (85%) with the largest concentration within the age group 18 to 24 (n = 175, 40%). Respondents learned about the show from a variety of sources. The majority (n = 266) learned about the event from friends, family, and teachers (60%). Thirty percent (n = 133) learned about the show through advertisements placed in student, local, and regional newspapers; 8% (n = 35) learned about the show through email, Facebook, and the ISU website. The remainder (n = 9) learned about it from campus visits, recruiting events, or signs placed in local retail outlets (2%).

Given the importance of interpersonal communication and the role of newspapers in promoting the fashion show, planners should weigh the costs and benefits of buying expensive media coverage. For the 2009 event, students associated with the fashion show—whoever planners, models, or designers—were instructed to notify a group they were associated with, such as a sorority, a church, or a club, about the event. ISU planners also collaborated with the student newspaper to design a contest called "Shred and Tear" in which students were challenged to create a garment out of newspaper. The winning garments were displayed at the show. When asked why they attended the show, respondents overwhelmingly stated they enjoyed the atmosphere and excitement, enjoyed sitting and chatting with friends and family members, and that the show was inspirational. Future ISU fashion shows will include an "audience choice" award to actively involve...