

Lesson Plan – PEACE International Exchange

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Problem Statement

Eva is an area manager for PEACE International Exchange, a non-profit foundation that manages a cluster of community coordinators throughout the process of foreign student exchange. Prior to this year, Eva was the only community coordinator in her metropolitan region. Eva is passionate about student exchange, knowing each placement makes the dream of one more student a reality; she is confident her efforts have a positive impact on foreign relations as well. After researching area high schools in several districts and their willingness to host students, Eva embarked on a campaign to recruit and train several community coordinators to expand PEACE's footprint in the region. In addition to providing necessary information, support, and suggestions to her coordinators, Eva also hopes to communicate her passion for the program to trigger their intrinsic motivation as well.

Basic training needs required by the U.S. State Department have already been established and delivered via electronic means prior to the finalization of the hiring process of each community coordinator. Eva now needs to provide regional training specific to the needs of her area in order to ensure a successful placement season and school year.

Target Audience

This lesson initially targets a dozen newly-hired PEACE International Exchange community coordinators, but can be adapted each year for both new and returning coordinators. The new coordinators, hired in the past month, come from many backgrounds and have a variety of motivations.

- The age range of the coordinators is 27 to 53 years of age.
- The coordinators all live within six metropolitan Atlanta school districts (Paulding, Cobb, Bartow, Fulton, DeKalb, and Gwinnett).

- Nine of the coordinators were born in the United States; two were born in European countries; one was born in Ecuador.
- Seven of the coordinators are women and five are men.
- Ten of the coordinators work full time; one works part time and one is not currently employed other than her PEACE consulting work.
- Three of the coordinators have hosted foreign exchange students in the past.
- All coordinators demonstrate satisfactory skills with computers, including the abilities to navigate the internet, create and manipulate Word documents, and work with PDF files.

Instructional/Learning Model

Eva decides to develop a lesson and ongoing development plan using Vygotsky's Social Constructivist theories with the additional aim of developing a strong community of practice.

Explanation of Instructional/Learning Model

Vygotsky valued active learning and identified tools that are vital to further advancement of learning, particularly psychological tools. The most important of these tools include language, talk, and conversation. To train using Vygotsky's approach requires objective-oriented action, the internalization and externalization of learning, the use of tools, structured activity, and continuous improvement. These principles lend themselves well to adult learning in business and industry.

Communities of practice provide a context for socially constructed learning, focusing on the development of experience and the integration of the unique schema of each member of the group. A community of practice is comprised of individuals with varying amounts of expertise who share common goals and learning activities. The contributions of each member of the group are appreciated by all participants. Learning activities in such a community tend to blend valuable individual learning

alongside collaborative construction of knowledge and experience. The instructor in this community serves as facilitator and organizer as opposed to traditional teacher; participants bear the majority of the responsibility for learning within the context of group activities.

The application of Vygotsky's theories and principles in conjunction with the establishment of a strong and vital community of practice tends to result in a less formal training environment. This process is characterized by active exploration, experimentation, and problem solving, activities which tend to be rewarding for adult learners and effective in the advancement of understanding. These approaches tend to be appropriate for business applications due to the complexity of employees as people and the manner in which they are tightly linked to and bound by social connections through language and action.

Relationship of Instructional/Learning Model to Problem

PEACE Community Coordinators each come with their own unique set of instructional needs and challenges just as they bring a distinct set of gifts and motivations to the team. As adult learners, coordinators will more likely respond positively to active learning in a social environment designed to create a community with shared goals. The process of placing foreign exchange students into American host families lends itself naturally to theories that emphasize language and social interaction. Further, PEACE coordinators tend to experience more success and personal satisfaction when they work together as a team. The nature of communities of practice with active learning and appropriate support will set the coordinators up for a successful placement season.

During the process of active learning in a community of practice, the learners are focused on three levels: the problem they face, what they learn about themselves in the process, and what they learn about learning as they explore questions and brainstorm answers and solutions. These shared experiences form a joint enterprise aimed to meet everyone's goals. Given the wide range of ages and

levels of experience, it is particularly important to develop mutual engagement where the contributions of each member of the community are welcome and valued. Each coordinator will use a personal approach toward placement and management of their students; however, during this training process they will build a shared repertoire of procedures, strategies, and stories to enrich everyone's experience. Vygotsky's concept of a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) applies in this scenario as each coordinator progresses to more ambitious goals and improved experiences for the students and families in the program. The use of various Most Knowledgeable Others (MKOs) provides valuable scaffolding to support coordinators through the many challenges they will likely face during both the placement and management phases of the exchange program.

As they further develop their skills, coordinators accomplish a more important task they may not have originally anticipated: they begin to construct their own individual identity as a coordinator within the confines of the processes they must follow. Each coordinator will have a unique style in locating prospective families, determining which students to recommend to a family, and facilitating the experience to ensure both the host family and the student enjoy a positive and rewarding experience.

Statement of Lesson Plan Objectives

In order to maximize growth in the first season of placements, Eva has several goals for her regional training program:

- Establish a collegial network amongst the community coordinators to foster an atmosphere of teamwork and collaboration.
- Model the creation of a positive community spirit similar to what the coordinators will want to engender in their own mini-cluster of students.
- Familiarize the community coordinators with the policies of the school districts in the metropolitan region.

- Provide an opportunity for coordinators to brainstorm strategies for locating host families.
- Review procedures for placement, answering questions as needed.
- Communicate a message of support to her community coordinators so they feel they can rely on her when they have questions or concerns.

The regional community coordinator training will build upon the training required by the U.S. State Department that each coordinator has already completed. By the end of the training for Eva's first placement season, the community coordinators will be able to:

- Develop a varied list of strategies for locating potential host families.
- Perform the necessary tasks during the placement process:
 - ✓ Initiate a host family criminal background check (CBC).
 - ✓ Coach prospective host families through the completion of an online application.
 - ✓ Complete a host family interview and its related paperwork.
 - ✓ Check host family references and document results.
 - ✓ Gather the photographs required for placement.
 - ✓ Forward interview paperwork, reference checks, and photographs to corporate office along with district contact information.
- Implement the procedures that must be followed for special case placements
- Compare and contrast the unique placement policies of the area's six school districts.

Lesson Plan Details

Regional training is a year-round process. Hold six monthly face-to-face sessions, one two-hour kick-off meeting followed by five hour-long monthly meetings. Following the placement season, conduct six synchronous meetings online, supplementing with weekly bulletin board updates.

Begin training with a face-to-face meeting in a comfortable, informal location such as a meeting room in a restaurant. As the coordinators mingle and become acquainted with one another, perform an informal needs assessment by spending time with each coordinator to ascertain his or her background, comfort level with the U.S. State Department training that has already been completed, and personal goals for the training session.

Bring the group together to start the kick-off meeting with an overview of PEACE International Exchange. Present your own personal story from the exchange student your family hosted when you were a teen to your motivation to become a coordinator, through your many exchange experiences as a host parent and coordinator, to your current position as area manager. Include photos and anecdotes in your presentation to provide context and motivation. Emphasize your view of the best part of placing exchange students: making dreams come true. Express your satisfaction at giving the students you place, as well as the students you host, the opportunity to become both an American high school student and a beloved member of an American family.

Lead the coordinators through a lively ice breaker activity to find other coordinators with common motivations, characteristics, foreign language ability, and travel experiences. Host a Spin-Teaming session for coordinators to learn even more about each other. Have coordinators form groups of three or four. As they choose groups, circulate, ensuring each group includes a combination of novice and experienced, younger and older, male and female, outgoing and introverted. Instruct each group to select a patron country and a cultural name to foster cohesiveness. Distribute sample student profiles with pictures and essays, encouraging each group to select three students they would like to “claim” and place. Following this process, collect each list of team members, team name, patron country, and the selected student profiles; post these results on the regional PEACE online bulletin board.

Task each group with discussing their goals as a coordinator. How many host families would they like to locate and how many students would they like to place? Would they like to host a student in their own home? How many school districts should they approach to meet their goals? Are these goals realistic? As they work through this activity, circulate the room to monitor progress, facilitating discussion and providing support as needed. Remind the coordinators that these goals may be fluid as they gain more experience and get to know the region in which they will place students.

Share your goals as area manager as they align with the goals of the regional director:

- Region: place 90 foreign exchange students in states in the Eastern part of the United States for the upcoming school year; local: place 30 of these students in your area
- Region: recruit 15 community coordinators during the coming school year; local: you have met and exceeded your recruitment goal early, but communicate that you are open to any new coordinators that may be recruited in your area
- Region and local: provide the necessary support to help community coordinators achieve their personal goals in terms of PEACE coordinator trips and other incentives

Lead the coordinators in an active process to develop further understanding of and appreciation for the role of a community coordinator. As the coordinators discuss various stages of the process, provide just-in-time mini lessons as needed for the whole group or individual groups for areas that should have been covered in the U.S. State Department training.

1. Factual Questions: pose questions to the group to begin to help them gather information as they begin the placement process.
 - a. What percentage of your time should you spend on recruiting host families?
 - b. What are your major sources of prospective host families?

- c. What knowledge and skills do you bring from prior experience or the U.S. State Department training that you believe might help you in the placement process?
 - d. How much do you know about the policies of the school districts in the region?
 - e. What steps should you take once you have found a host family?
2. Feeling Questions: lead the groups through questions to uncover possible obstacles to successfully meeting their goals.
 - a. How do you feel about the time you have available to secure placements to reach your goals?
 - b. Do you feel well prepared for the processes required to finalize a placement?
 - c. What assistance do you feel you will need in order to be comfortable with the process during this first season of placement?
3. Possibility Questions: help the coordinators brainstorm for possible activities to help them meet individual and team goals. They begin group work by simply asking one another questions, recording them as they go. After several minutes of questions, the team members begin thinking and answering these questions.
 - a. What is the best-case scenario for what you believe you can accomplish? How about the worst-case scenario?
 - b. What are three creative strategies you might employ not only to find host families, but also to make the best match of student and host family?
 - c. What is the craziest idea you have for locating families or approaching schools?
 - d. What common objections do you predict you will face?
 - e. What resources or networks do you have to help you in this process?
 - f. What strategies do you plan to use to track your placements and manage contact with your students?

4. Decisional Questions: lead the team to identify tangible actions as they plan their strategies for the placement season. Begin with questions for discussion and circulate, sharing your insights as needed to promote additional discussion.
 - a. How will you address common objections?
 - b. How will you handle a situation if you interview a family and do not feel comfortable placing a student in the home?

Following this series of questioning and brainstorming, distribute copies of exchange student policies from each of the school districts in the region. After giving coordinators time to review the various policies, provide group time to discuss and compare the policies as well as to predict possible challenges.

Direct the coordinators to the PEACE website or handout to view common objections raised by prospective host families. Invite large-group comparisons to the objections generated by the coordinators as well as their creative responses for the objections.

Have coordinators create plans to achieve their goals including specific actions and strategies. They should work on these plans after the meeting and submit them to an online bulletin board for feedback from the rest of the team. Prior to ending the training session, allow for reflection, answer questions, and make plans for the next meeting.

Prior to the second meeting, recommend coordinators bring a laptop (or they can use computers if the meet is held at the local library) so they can step through the technical aspects of student placement and reporting procedures. Bring a nearby area manager, your regional director, and nearby experienced community coordinators to act as MKOs to analyze and develop the ZPD of each coordinator. They should also provide the necessary scaffolding as the coordinators move from verbalizing their understanding of the U.S. State Department policies and procedures through

application placement and management skills ultimately to being able to assist other members of their team and new coordinators as needed. As these members of the team work together, they benefit from alternative views on the problems they face and questions they pose.

Continue the training process monthly through the coordinators' first six-month placement season. During each subsequent meeting, the coordinators should share their experiences, both challenges and successes. Continue to enlist the help of a variety of MKOs including current host parents, host siblings, exchange students, and community coordinators to further build the knowledge and self-efficacy of the new coordinators. Incorporate role play activities at each meeting for coordinators to practice approaches to prospective host families and methods for managing student issues and concerns. Prior to the end of each meeting, recommend the coordinators discuss how to recalibrate their efforts to enhance their results and prepare for the next stage of coordination of the students they have placed.

As each placement is made, post a congratulatory message on the online bulletin board and add the new host family and foreign exchange student to a private social networking group created for the region. Post a monthly Great Idea in Action on the bulletin board to encourage creativity and novel solutions and strategies for successful placements. Once the placement season ends and students arrive, continue a low level of training using monthly synchronous meetings online and weekly bulletin board updates including discussions about effective strategies for serving as a student's advocate, stories from students, and suggestions and recommendations for enrichment activities.

Evaluation/Assessment Component

Prior to the first meeting, Eva gave a copy of her training program and materials to her regional director and several experienced community coordinators for their feedback and input. Her goal was to ascertain whether her methods would result in adequate, valuable learning for her coordinators. She

adjusted the proposal based upon their recommendations and began to finalize the details to begin her training.

Eva incorporates various activities at each meeting to motivate coordinators and informally assess their knowledge and skills. These activities include State Department Jeopardy, District Policy Tic Tac Toe, Academy Awards for Role Play Success, and Emmys for Story Time. Winners of these activities are treated to PEACE memorabilia, coffee house gift cards, and entries to the grand prize for the year, tickets to a local cultural event or venue (e.g. Midtown Art Cinema, Whole World Improv, and International Fashion Week). Throughout the training, Eva looks for examples of coordinators applying the skills and strategies and highlights them in her weekly bulletin board update and in subsequent meetings, often inviting the coordinator to share the experience with the group.

Eva begins the first training session by distributing a short pre-test covering the material required to meet the objectives of the training. She ended the pretest asking participants to record their hopes and expectations for the course as well as for the upcoming placement and monitoring season. She collects these pretests for later use.

During the social time of each meeting, Eva spends one-on-one time with each coordinator discussing progress, concerns, strategies, and successes. Through these individual meetings and further discussions Eva assesses the development of each coordinator, holding them accountable and making pertinent suggestions to help them achieve their goals and experience satisfaction in their work. She works directly with each coordinator to track these characteristics using the Community Coordinator Progress Tracker in Table 1, capturing a snapshot at each training meeting. Eva maintains an electronic notebook for each coordinator to collect her data and track their progress, issues, goals, and plans for further progress.

Table 1: Community Coordinator Progress Tracker

	Exemplary (5)	Developing (3-4)	Formative (1-2)
Foreign exchange policies and procedures for all districts in the region	Fluent in and adheres to all district policies	Familiar with the basics of procedures; unfamiliar with the details	Very little understanding of policies and procedures
Training and resources available on the peaceexchange.org website	Readily able to access and apply all resources on the website	Familiar with some resources; applies some to placement and reporting tasks	Little or no ability to apply available resources to coordinator tasks
Procedures required for special placements	Accurately describes and applies special placement procedures	Requires support in order to perform special placements	Special placements must be completed by area manager
Common objections and placement challenges	Able to identify and relate stories for many objections; addresses them effectively	Able to recognize some objections and challenges but requires support	Unfamiliar with and uncomfortable addressing objections and challenges
Coordinator reporting requirements	Fully competent in meeting reporting requirements and deadlines	Some support required; missed some reporting deadlines	Significant support required to meet reporting deadlines
Enforcement of PEACE rules for host families and students	Effortless in identifying and applying all rules and necessary follow-up	Comfortable identifying rules; requires some support for follow-up	Incomplete or seriously inconsistent in enforcement of PEACE rules
Placement goals	Realistic and detailed placement goals that support the goals of the cluster and region	Goals may require some adjustments as coordinator gains experience	Vague or unrealistic goals that do not support the goals of the cluster and region
Strategies for meeting placement goals	Varied effective and realistic strategies	Some strategies; may need to develop more	Limited strategies; may not reach goals
Participation and support for the cluster	Active participant in all areas	Participates at times; not always active	Inactive or unreliable participation

Following the activities included in the first training session, Eva redistributes the pretests and goes over each question as a group. This gives each coordinator the opportunity to evaluate progress in terms of the main procedures and guidelines all coordinators are required to follow.

At the end of the first placement season Eva sets up a questionnaire on the social networking page set up for her cluster. On this page she encourages the new coordinators to reflect upon their achievements and make suggestions for next year's placement season. In the questionnaire Eva includes a few basic prompts, requesting that coordinators respond on a scale of one to four (one = poor, two = fair, three = good, four = excellent):

1. Appropriateness of the course materials and activities
2. Current level of preparation for the placement season
3. Confidence in performing coordinator duties after training
4. Instructor's ability to motivate the team
5. Instructor's level of support for coordinators to meet cluster and personal goals

Defense of Instructional/Learning Model

Several models could be used to train community coordinators in this scenario. For example, Eva could have used Problem-Based Learning or Case-Based Learning since the challenge of placing students can certainly be described as a problem to solve and previous cases can be invaluable. Like in Problem-Based Inquiry, this training scenario calls for activity grounded in questions with multiple answers and strategies. For effective results, the learning should be student-centered with Eva acting as a facilitator or coach. For the team to best support one another, collaboration is vital. Finally, learning is driven in this scenario by the context of the problem. I believe Vygotsky's ZPD best captures the variety of experience and skills each coordinator brings to the team. I also feel the various MKOs could add significant motivation as well as instructional support to the process. I am confident the social aspect of Vygotsky's approach aligns best with the nature of the position of community coordinator.

I initially chose the Action Learning model; this created a challenges since I could only provide one facilitator or coach in this scenario; each group would not be able to have a learning coach. Also,

action learning tends to be geared more towards a project level; a community of practice is more appropriate for the ongoing training necessary for community coordinators. Finally, action learning typically requires the group to work on actual problems in the work environment. During a significant portion of this process the coordinators may not have real placements to work on. Even though I did not choose this model as my main focus, I suspect it has infiltrated my plan nonetheless. I several steps and characteristics of the model useful for the task of placing foreign exchange students while developing the rich gifts and talents of the people who chose to become community coordinators.

I am confident in the use of Vygotsky's theories for this training; however, there are disadvantages for the use of discussion-based active learning in the creation of a community of practice. Due to the lively nature of discussions, some coordinators may find it difficult to focus and apply what they are learning to their work. Group dynamics can also become a challenge; Eva must take care not to allow a sense of competition to interfere with the collaboration that is so valuable in a community of practice. The benefit of the MKOs may be diminished depending on who is available to participate in the training. Despite the challenges this plan might raise, I feel Vygotsky best connects the learning required for the community coordinator position, the various skills and backgrounds of the coordinators themselves, and the work that lies ahead for them in their first placement season. This approach of individual and collective construction of knowledge will help Eva's team build a strong and successful community of practice.