

Financial Literacy: Problem-Based Learning



This particular task can be used as a stand-alone, when addressing income and earning concepts, or within a career unit. Dedicate an hour for teams to complete the activity or schedule time for a series of brief “work meetings” during several class periods for teams to complete the activity in stages.

Individuals will change jobs many times during their working years. Change can be stressful, especially when the change might not be an individual’s decision or when there is the potential for a temporary gap in an income source. This activity engages learners in proactively thinking about backup plans aimed at minimizing the impact of a gap in income while looking for work or enrolled in classes or training programs for skill development. Rather than leaving a job search to chance, it is important to follow an intentional process and focus on viable options. In addition, knowing where to access information about jobs and skill development can help individuals transition into new job situations that align with their preferences, circumstances, and aspirations.

Ideal class: English Language Arts

Ideal level: Low Intermediate to High Adult Secondary Education

Process for Students	Role of the Teacher	Activity/task descriptions and possible materials	The Skills That Matter Addressed or Evident
<p>Build understanding of problem-based learning.</p> <p>Warm up to the topic/issue at hand.</p>	<p>Preteach. Summarize the problem at hand.</p> <p>Make sure students understand the goals and benefits of a problem-based approach to language. If this is an English class, emphasize the areas of English that are developed in the problem-solving activities.</p>	<p>Begin with a personal story. “A friend of mine [or make it about one of YOUR personal experiences with job change] recently became very unhappy in her job, and she started thinking about leaving. One day she was so frustrated, she quit! She didn’t have a new job in place and didn’t even know what she wanted to do next.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think of that decision? • What are the effects of leaving a job like that?” <p>After a couple of students share initial thoughts, have students talk to a neighbor or small group about their connection to the story. Ask them to share their own experiences about adjusting to changes in job status or participating in training or school programs while working. Elicit one or two examples from the class. Ask the class to consider what was helpful (or not) in their experience.</p>	<p>Communication</p> <p>Interpersonal skills</p>
<p>Meet the problem.</p>	<p>Fully introduce the problem.</p> <p>Introduce the students to the problem using a somewhat controversial picture, video, or text.</p> <p>Ask the students about previous personal experiences with the problem.</p> <p>Introduce vocabulary related to the problem as challenging or unknown words come up.</p>	<p>Present the students with a scenario in which financial problems arise because of a job change (Appendix A). A widowed mother, Carmen, anticipates losing her job and needs to make life changes to ensure she has the ability to cover her family’s financial obligations. (Treat the scenario as if it occurred in the local community or county.)</p> <p>Provide prerequisite instruction or reinforce previous learning about topics to support learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Estimate how many months of cash outflows are covered by savings. – Tour pertinent sections of CareerOneStop.org: Resources for Laid-Off Worker, Explore Careers, Job Search, Finding Training, and Find Local Help. <p>Use “bank teller” as an example to demonstrate how to investigate career and job descriptions, skill requirements, and related training options.</p>	<p>Processing and analyzing information</p> <p>Communication</p> <p>Critical thinking</p> <p>Navigating systems</p>



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<p>Explore knowns and unknowns.</p>	<p>Group students and provide resources.</p> <p>Make sure that students understand the problem and the expectations of them.</p> <p>Emphasize that there is no single answer or solution and that students need to choose what appears to be the most viable solution to them and be prepared to explain why they chose that solution.</p> <p>Group students according to their strengths. As with project-based learning, learners can take on varying roles based on their strengths.</p> <p>Provide access to resources such as the internet, Wi-Fi, and a shared online discussion forum where they can share their work, like the class secret Facebook group.</p>	<p>Working in teams of 4 or 5, the students are to use what is known to assess the family's financial situation and the mother's earning potential.</p> <p>To decide on a course of action given the pending job loss, the students should consider factors mentioned in the scenario and clarify assumptions to designate criteria for an acceptable outcome before investigating viable solution options.</p> <p>Each team will present and defend to the whole group two worthy possible courses of action that the teacher records on a board or screen. Those listening ask questions to clarify or flesh out the viable options.</p> <p>The full class now votes to narrow the choices down to 3 or 4 options for Carmen.</p> <p>The students then self-select an option to work on, forming new "solution teams" (teams that will determine the steps for their solution's success).</p>	<p>Processing and analyzing information</p> <p>Critical thinking</p> <p>Navigating systems</p>



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<p>Generate possible solutions.</p> <p>Consider consequences and choose the most viable solution.</p>	<p>Observe and support.</p> <p>Observe students and provide support as needed, but do not attempt to direct their efforts or control their activity in solving the problem. Observe, take notes, and provide feedback on student participation in the activity and on language used during the activity.</p>	<p>Students:</p> <p>Within their small groups, students focus on a specific course of action for Carmen and together do research to determine in detail what needs to happen in the next 6 months for this solution to come to fruition.</p> <p>The students in each group also create a document with additional information supporting their choice as the wisest one, along with a table of the pros and cons. (See below for an example.)</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td colspan="2">Carmen should get another full-time bank teller job.</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">Detailed steps to take during the next 6 months:</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">What else do we need to know to be certain this would be the wisest choice?</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pros (advantages of this choice):</td> <td>Cons (disadvantages of this choice):</td> </tr> </table> <p>The options chosen may be along these lines:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Carmen simply finds another full-time bank teller job. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the detailed steps Carmen needs to complete during the next 6 months to carry out her decision? What would we need to know to be confident this decision was the wisest one? What are the pros and cons of this decision? 	Carmen should get another full-time bank teller job.		Detailed steps to take during the next 6 months:		What else do we need to know to be certain this would be the wisest choice?		Pros (advantages of this choice):	Cons (disadvantages of this choice):	<p>Processing and analyzing information</p> <p>Critical thinking</p> <p>Self-awareness</p> <p>Communication</p> <p>Interpersonal skills</p>
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<p>Generate possible solutions. (continued)</p>		<p>Students: (continued)</p> <p>2. Carmen goes back to school to become an LPN nurse.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the detailed steps Carmen needs to complete during the next 6 months to carry out her decision. • What would we need to know to make this choice? • What are the pros and cons of this decision? <p>3. Carmen finds part-time work while going back to school part time to complete her nursing degree ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the detailed steps Carmen needs to complete during the next 6 months to carry out this decision. • What would we need to know to make this choice? • What are the pros and cons of the choice? <p>Teacher:</p> <p>Observe while students are discussing and researching.</p> <p>Assist as necessary with finding and understanding resources.</p> <p>Ask questions like these to prompt critical thinking and investigative tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – If Carmen has no income coming in, how many months (or weeks) before her savings fund balance falls below \$500? – What types of work might involve skills that are similar to those required for a bank teller position? – What are the work conditions and trends in the local community or county? – How could Carmen pay for any training she might need for skill development? 	



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	<p>Follow up and assess progress</p> <p>Provide students with opportunities to present and share the results of their work. Provide follow-up activities based on your observations, possibly instruction on grammar, academic language, pronunciation, or pragmatic issues. Assess students' participation and success in the activity and provide opportunities for peer assessment.</p>	<p>After completing their research, identifying the potential next steps, and determining the pros and cons of each possible solution, each team will present and defend to the whole group two worthy courses of action.</p> <p>After all teams have presented recommendations, the whole group will collaborate to reach consensus on the most feasible course of action, identifying at least two alternatives to address possible changes in circumstances.</p>	<p>Communication</p>

Recommended steps for problem posing adapted from *Problem-Based Learning and Adult English Language Learners*, by J. Mathews-Aydinli, 2007, Center for Adult English Language Acquisition, Washington, D.C. (http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/briefs/Problem-based.pdf).



Appendix A. Job Change

The Problem

Carmen has heard rumors that the bank where she works is preparing to cut jobs. For the past 10 years, she has worked as a teller and was being groomed to take on head teller duties. As a widowed mother of children aged 12 and 14, Carmen is faced with the reality that she could be out of a job within the year.

At age 36, with sole responsibility for the family income, Carmen worries about the challenge of transitioning into a new job. Before her children were born, she had completed a semester of coursework for the licensed practical nurse program at a college, but she didn't finish with any credential.

She's grateful that her parents live in the same neighborhood. Although her mother works weekends and her father is a semiretired insurance agent, they have been available to help with childcare after school and during school breaks to allow Carmen to work full time. She is comforted to have their support, but she is uncertain about how her life change might impact her parents' routines.

The Solution

Guide Carmen through the decision whether to take on a new job or career. Consider the following questions and help Carmen prioritize needs to make the best possible choice for her family situation.

- What could Carmen do to prepare for the possibility of losing her teller job, which could occur within the next 6 months?
- What must-have and deal-breaker criteria might Carmen consider as she weighs her options for action within the next year?
- What information will help Carmen decide on a solution?

Household Financial Data

Carmen's annual salary is \$40,000, and she has health insurance coverage as a job benefit.

Her usual monthly spending includes the following cash outflows:

\$70	internet
\$90	TV
\$120	utilities
\$350	groceries
\$130	auto insurance
\$50	gas for car
\$950	home loan (with another 22 years of payments due)



- Occasional family spending—such as spending for clothing, school fees, dining out, and entertainment—varies throughout the year.
- The costs of home maintenance, auto care, and vacations are usually covered by her savings.
- Her savings account has a current balance of nearly \$25,000.
- Carmen has a small balance on her credit card (\$275) and is in the habit of paying off the balance every month.
- She owns a 10-year-old Subaru Outback with 98,000 miles on the odometer.
- Last year's property tax bill was \$1,200.

