



Making Learning Fun

4-H is Where There's Fun In Learning and Learning in Fun

Learning by Doing in 4-H



Written by Keith G. Diem, Ph.D., Director of 4-H Youth Development, 2005. Portions adapted from a variety of 4-H publications. (See References.)

As a 4-H volunteer, one of your most important roles is helping youth learn. Especially because membership in 4-H is voluntary, learning in 4-H must be fun. Even if you're not a teacher by profession, you can successfully guide youth to learn leadership, citizenship, and life skills as well as subject matter through their 4-H projects and club participation. Sometimes, youth learn better in 4-H than in formal education setting. Their success in learning in 4-H may very well motivate them to learn better in school. That is how the nonformal learning done via 4-H can complement the formal education of school. 4-H learning methods and appealing curriculum materials are well-suited to small groups of youth in home-schooling and "alternative" learning environments.

Using a variety of creative teaching methods is essential for getting the attention of youth audiences, but adults can benefit from more interesting styles of teaching as well. Simply using multiple senses—sight, sound, touch—has been shown to increase learning.

As indicated by the following quote by Seaman A. Knapp, (considered founder of the Extension concept), greater involvement of, and participation by, learners also helps in retention.

What a person hears, he will probably doubt.

What a person sees, he may possibly doubt.

But what a person does for himself, he cannot possibly doubt.

“Learn by doing” is the slogan of the 4-H program because it has been the core 4-H philosophy behind its approach to teaching youth since its beginning in the early 1900’s. Children are more willing to learn and be attentive when there is something to do, rather than just to listen.

Learning by doing is called “experiential learning” because it is based on learning from experiences. Sometimes it is called active learning or discovery learning. The “learn-by-doing” approach

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allows youth to experience something with minimal guidance from an adult. Instead of being told “the answers,” they are presented with a question, problem, situation, or activity which they must make sense of for themselves. As a group leader, the adult should help guide youth in a process through which they can propose hypotheses and determine their own “solutions.”

The National 4-H Experiential Learning Model encourages youth to first experience, then reflect on the new knowledge, and finally apply knowledge and skills learned to other life situations. (Refer to *Learn by Doing the 4-H Way*.) Experiential learning is more of a approach to learning than a specific method. A variety of teaching methods introduced below can be used in the different steps of the process.

Learning in 4-H can happen in a variety of settings. Here are some principles to keep in mind that will help you be successful with youth wherever and whenever learning takes place:

- Young people learn best in an atmosphere of warmth and acceptance.
- Members want to be actively involved in setting their own goals and in planning their activities.
- Each 4-H'er has different abilities and learns at his/her own rate.
- Motivation is the key to real learning. This includes self-motivation and external motivation.
- Self-evaluation is the most meaningful kind of evaluation.

Preparation

Preparation is the key to successful teaching. Keep these points in mind when planning your club activities:

- Know the purpose of the program. What do you want to accomplish?
- Know your audience. What is the size and age range of the group?
- Know the physical set-up. Is the atmosphere conducive to learning? (How are the chairs and tables arranged? Is the lighting adequate?)
- Know what equipment and other materials you will need. Be sure they are all in working order.
- Know the subject you will be teaching. You don't need to be an expert, but you should have resources available.
- Be comfortable. If you are well prepared, you will enjoy teaching young people, and will have fun learning along with them!

Teaching Methods

Below are descriptions of a variety of methods you might use to help members learn. By knowing your audience, you probably already recognize the importance of involving 4-H'ers in ways that will motivate them to learn. Try to vary the teaching methods you use. Not only does this help accommodate different learning styles, it also makes it more interesting for "teacher" and "students!"

Lectures and Speeches

A lecture is the imparting of information by a presenter who relies mostly on speaking. It tends to be overused. In general, you are discouraged from using this method with 4-H youth. Although it is very efficient at delivering information, it is often boring, and therefore not likely to be a very effective instructional method for youth, especially young children. Gifted orators can, however, deliver formal speeches that are captivating and meaningful to teens and adults. The use of gestures, eye contact, relevant stories and anecdotes, dramatic pauses, and varying voice tone and volume are helpful ways to enliven such formal talks.

Illustrated Presentations

The use of visual aids such as charts, posters, slides, photos, models, photos, etc., can significantly enliven a presentation. This allows the audience to use more of their senses, which attracts their interest and enables them to learn more. Computerized multimedia presentations can be stunning, and offer maximum flexibility to make timely changes and customize content and style to varying audience needs.

Group Discussion and Questioning

This method helps members express their own thoughts. Use open-ended questions to encourage all members to share more information. Open-ended questions usually begin with "how," "what," "why," or "could." The Reflect (Share and Process) and Apply (Generalize and Apply) steps of the 4-H experiential learning model rely on such open-ended questions. This technique can improve lectures or illustrated presentations by inviting more audience participation.

Brainstorming

In this method, creative thinking is more important than practical thinking. As members present ideas, none are to be criticized. In fact, the group is encouraged to list everything, no matter how wild. Hearing other ideas can spark more creativity. Quantity is the goal. All ideas are written down and edited later. Brainstorming could be a good way to think of possible service learning projects, a theme for the annual club banquet, etc.

Record keeping

Besides being a good business practice, record keeping is the best way to measure progress of group and individual goals. Members learn more about their projects through record keeping. They

	<p>learn about costs, materials, and how to evaluate finished products. Record keeping doesn't have to be boring. Besides record books, members can show progress through a scrapbook or a portfolio. This is a good way to help a member keep an ongoing record of his or her 4-H career.</p>
Demonstration	<p>There are two types: method and end result. The method demonstration is a step-by-step procedure showing the process by which something is created. This type may be quite time-consuming. That is why the end result demonstration is often used. It shows a completed product and reviews the steps taken to achieve this end result. A combination of these two types is commonly used: the demonstrator goes through each step of the process but also has a pre-completed product ready to show.</p>
Guest Speaker/Panel	<p>Bringing in outside experts can add credibility and objectivity to an educational program. Whereas a guest speaker might only be a talk by a single person, a panel discussion involves a dialogue among a group of four to eight experts on an assigned topic in front of your group. A moderator ensures that order is maintained, each resource person gets equal time, and the topic is covered in depth. When inviting outside speakers, be sure to give them the objectives of the program, the purposes of their participation, the roles you would like them to serve, and any helpful background information about the local environment, program participants, etc. It may also be beneficial to prepare the audience by inviting participants to study the topic and the professional expertise of the presenters.</p>
Buzz Session	<p>The audience is divided into small discussion groups (3–5 members each). All members are involved in the discussion. After a limited time (about 5 minutes), the small groups might each report back to the total group with a summary of the main points of their discussions. Just about any topic can be discussed using this method (one per session, of course).</p>
Brainstorming	<p>This is a way for learners to suggest numerous ideas related to a topic. Spontaneity is essential. All ideas are written down by a recorder. Initially, creative thinking is more important than practical thinking. Therefore, an accepting environment must be provided so all participants feel welcome to contribute. Only after a certain time, when all ideas have been recorded, does the group review the list and determine the most promising idea(s) to pursue to solve the problem at hand.</p>

Committee

Besides accomplishing business, committees can be an educational opportunity. A committee is a small group of members selected to fulfill a function or perform a task that cannot be done efficiently or effectively by the entire group or by one person. Remember that any act performed by a committee (especially something which may be controversial or requires the spending of money) must first be voted on and approved by the entire body at a regular meeting. That is why a committee generally makes recommendations to the organization and does not act completely independently. Committees can be appointed by the president/leader and/or made up of group members who volunteer.

**Collage/Bulletin Board/
Graffiti Mural**

An artistic composition of fragments of printed matter or other materials pasted/fastened to a surface, a collage can be used to convey an idea or theme to others. It can be created by a group or an individual. Materials which might be used include magazine and newspaper clippings, tissue paper, construction paper, etc. Related methods include a group scrapbook, a bulletin board, or a graffiti mural where participants write their comments, suggestions, and feelings.

Debate

A debate is a good technique to bring out two sides of an issue. Therefore, it can create sensitivity, understanding of, and empathy for opposing viewpoints. Examples of opposing issues: advantages and disadvantages of the two-party political system, animal rights, etc.

Field Trip or Tour

Instead of just talking about a topic, take your group to where it's actually happening! Plan ahead to arrange the location, transportation, chaperones, permission slips, etc. Also, have your students be prepared with questions, cameras, etc. If you're creative, you may also be able to simulate a tour experience without actually leaving home—by effectively bringing the “field” to your location with slides, video recordings, artifacts, etc. A guest speaker can add to this method. Be sure to brief the speaker about the topic you want presented, as well as the ages and interests of your group. (Refer to *Conducting a Successful Field Trip*.)

**Educational Games and
Simulations**

Games can be useful for both fun and learning. They are especially helpful as lead-ins to other activities. There are many types of games available. There are thinking games, action games, board games, simulations, and many more. Also, be creative and combine ideas or even invent your own. For instance a “TV-style game show” can be an entertaining way to learn. If you are work-

	<p>ing with a group that has a social or recreation director, be sure to involve him or her in suggesting and leading games.</p>
<p>Experiments</p>	<p>A true experiment involves studying the effects of changing one variable while keeping other factors constant. This is a good method for “discovery” learning, where the group proves or disproves its own hypotheses. By breaking up participants into several groups, different variables can be altered simultaneously in order to collect evidence to make conclusions.</p>
<p>Identification/Matching</p>	<p>This method is good as introductory activity or as pre-test/post-test to see how much youth learned. It can be done as a written “test” or as an activity using real objects. Examples: tool identification, matching correct tool for each job, matching photos with names.</p>
<p>Role-Playing</p>	<p>A small group of participants acts out a real-life situation in front of the entire group. There is no script. The participants make up their parts as they act. The performance is then discussed in relation to the situation or problem under consideration. Both the performers and spectators get to share their feelings and reactions to the role play.</p>
<p>Skits</p>	<p>A skit is a brief, rehearsed dramatic presentation involving two or more people. Working from a prepared script, the participants act out an event or situation which is often taken from a real-life experience.</p>
<p>Choosing a Teaching Method</p>	<p>This list of teaching methods is certainly not complete. Feel free to use others or a combination of those listed here. Here are some points to consider in choosing a method to use:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Purpose of program 2. Number of participants/space available 3. Age(s) and interests of participants 4. Equipment, materials, assistance, funds available 5. Time available
<p>Planning Tips</p>	<p>To help ensure the success of your teaching efforts, don’t forget the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be prepared by planning ahead. Lack of useful content or logical organization cannot be overcome by creative teaching methods. 2. Each method has advantages and disadvantages. Choose methods that are appropriate for the audience and program content. 3. Practice! Get comfortable with different methods, especially

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ones you're not as familiar or comfortable with. Experiment! Improvise! Combine methods! Making teaching fun will make learning fun!

4. Involve group members, especially officers, in both planning and delivery when possible. Be sure your club knows what you expect of them. Get as many participants as possible involved in the learning activity.

5. Use an action-oriented, learning-by-doing approach as much as possible. Refer to the 4-H experiential learning model for guidance. Processing the experience is when much of the learning takes place. Discussing the activity helps members understand how it relates to them.

These teaching methods allow you to help members learn in a variety of ways. As you teach members both project and life skills, remember the following hints:

- Catch the interest of the members.
- Focus their attention on the subject.
- Establish a rapport with the group. You don't have to be a buddy, but you need to have mutual respect. It's okay to admit you don't know the answer and for you to learn along with them!
- Recognize and reward positive behaviors of participants. (Refer to *Positive Discipline for Children*.)
- Be enthusiastic and have a sense of humor! It's contagious.

Good luck and best wishes for success!

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