



FLORIDA 4-H VOLUNTEER TRAINING SERIES¹

Making Learning Fun

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4-H Is Where There Is Fun in Learning

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 are not a teacher by profession, you can successfully guide youth to learn communication, leadership, citizenship, and other life skills, as well as subject matter, through their 4-H projects and club participation.

Sometimes, youth learn better in 4-H than in a formal education setting, and success in 4-H may motivate them to perform better in school. 4-H learning methods and curriculum materials are well-suited to small groups of youth in various settings, including clubs, camps, and schools. Using a blend of creative teaching methods is essential for getting the attention of youth. Simply using multiple senses—sight, sound, touch, and so forth—has been shown to increase learning (Esplendori, 2022).

Greater involvement of and participation by learners also help in retention. This is indicated by the following quote from Seaman A. Knapp (considered the founder of the Extension concept): “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” (Pigg, 1983).

“Learn by doing” has been the core 4-H teaching philosophy since its beginning in the early 1900s. Youth are more willing to learn and be attentive when there is something to do, rather than just to listen. However, teaching youth involves more than simply using the “learn by doing” approach. “Experiential learning” is a more comprehensive approach because it encourages youth to think and to discuss with others what they have learned after taking part in a concrete experience. The experiential learning approach allows youth to experience a concept or skill with minimal guidance from an adult. Instead of being told “the answers,” they are presented with a question, problem, or activity that they must make sense of for themselves. As a group leader, the adult helps guide youth in a process of doing, sharing, processing, and applying their knowledge in new situations.

(Refer to Ask IFAS publication 4HSFS101.1, “Florida 4-H Volunteer Training Series: Learn by Doing + a Little Bit More.”)

Principles of Teaching and Learning

The overall goal of the 4-H Youth Development Program is to provide high-quality educational experiences that intentionally cultivate sparks, belonging, developmental relationships, and youth engagement, creating the strong Positive Youth Development content shown to support the social, emotional, cognitive, and practical skill development that prepares them for success in life, work, and community.

The following are some principles to keep in mind that will help you be successful with youth wherever and whenever learning takes place:

- Learning in 4-H can occur in a variety of settings.
- Youth learn best in an atmosphere of warmth, acceptance, and belonging.
- Youth want to be actively involved in setting their own goals and in planning their activities.
- Youth have different abilities, they learn at their own rate, and yet they want to be challenged.
- Youth have knowledge and wisdom to share as well.
- Youth respond to both self-motivation and external motivation.
- Self-evaluation and reflection deepen learning and growth.

Preparation

Preparation is important for 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 setup. Is the atmosphere conducive to learning?
- Know what equipment and materials you need.

- Know the project area you will be teaching. You do not need to be an expert, but you should utilize age-appropriate activities and curriculum.

Engaging Teaching Methods

Table 1 describes various methods you can use to help 4-H'ers learn. Try to vary the teaching methods you use and engage older youth in helping teach. Not only does this help accommodate different learning styles, but it also promotes independence for older youth.

Choosing a Teaching Method

Consider these factors before choosing a teaching method:

- Purpose of the program
- Number of participants/space available
- Age(s) and interests of participants
- Equipment, materials, assistance, and funds available
- Time available

Additional Tips for Success

To help ensure the success of your teaching efforts, do not forget the following:

- Be prepared by planning ahead. Lack of content or organization cannot be overcome by creative teaching methods.
- Each method has advantages and disadvantages. Choose what is appropriate for the audience and program content.
- Practice! Get comfortable with different methods, especially ones you are not as familiar or comfortable with.
- Involve group members, especially older youth or officers, in both planning and delivery when possible.
- Get as many participants as possible involved in the learning activity.
- Use an action-oriented, learn-by-doing approach.

References

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Additional Reading

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Publication History

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Diem, K. G. (2005). *Making learning fun*. Clemson Extension/South Carolina 4-H. 4-H Leader Training Series.

Tables

Table 1. Ways to engage youth in learning.

| Teaching method | Definition | Examples |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| Games and simulations | Fun and interactive activities that can introduce new concepts or reinforce existing ones. | Thinking games, action games, board games, or matching games. |
| Experiments | A method of discovery learning where participants study the effects of changing one variable while keeping other factors constant. | Breaking up participants into several groups to alter different variables simultaneously. |
| Field trip or tour | A method of learning that involves taking participants to a location where they can experience the topic firsthand. | Visiting a museum, factory, or historical site. |
| Skill-a-thons | A method of learning that involves youth rotating through different learning stations, where a specific skill is taught. | Youth working on a task, such as tying a knot, without directions, followed by a final evaluation of the skills learned. |
| Role-playing/skits | A method of learning that involves a small group of participants acting out a brief, rehearsed, dramatic presentation of a real-life situation in front of the entire group. | Practice running a meeting using parliamentary procedure. |
| Collage/bulletin board/graffiti mural | An artistic composition of fragments of printed matter or other materials pasted/fastened to a surface to convey an idea or theme to others. | Magazine and newspaper clippings, tissue paper, or construction paper. |
| Group discussions | A method of learning that helps members express their own thoughts. | Debating topics, brainstorming, or using open-ended questions to prompt discussion. |
| Presentations | A method of learning that involves showing the process by which something is created and sharing information using visual aids, models, or multimedia tools. | Demonstration, speech, illustrated talk. Florida 4-H Public Speaking Contest Florida. |
| Guest speaker/panels | A method of learning that involves bringing in outside experts to add credibility and objectivity to an educational program. | A talk by a single person or a panel discussion involving a dialogue among a group of four to eight experts on an assigned topic in front of your group. |

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