

Experiential Learning

Oklahoma 4-H Volunteer Development Series



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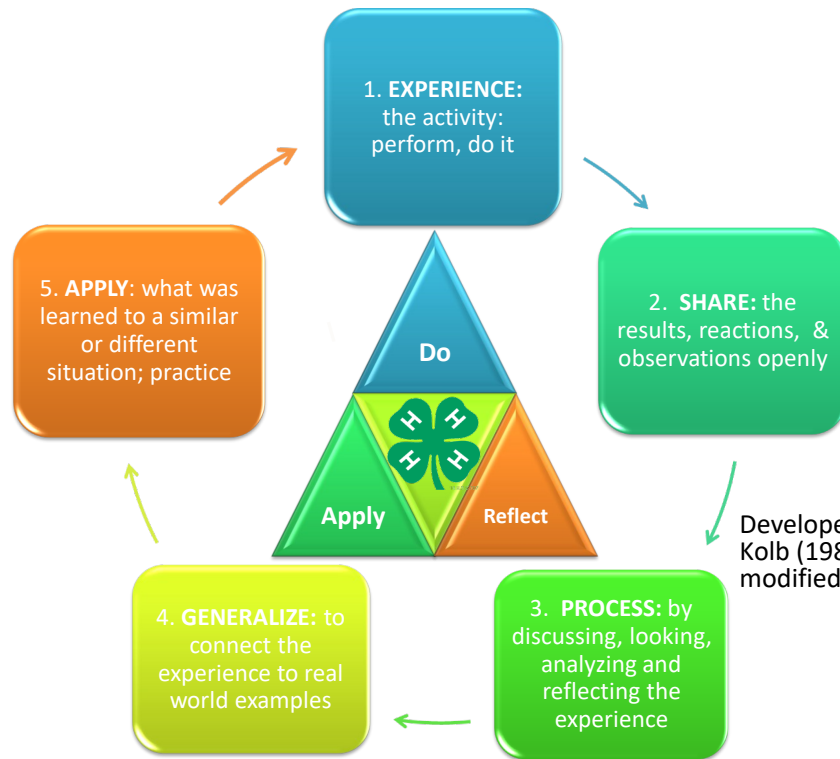
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Learning by Doing

The 4-H youth development program is founded on the principle of “learn by doing.” Learn by Doing is not random process. It is a well planned experience grounded in a research model called Experiential Learning Model developed by David Kolb (1984) and adapted by 4-H for programming and curriculum development.



Developed by Kolb (1984) and modified by 4-H

“We now accept the fact that learning is a lifelong process of keeping abreast of change. And the most pressing task is to teach people how to learn.”
 ~Peter Drucker

4-H relies heavily upon the five steps of the experiential learning model to teach skills, knowledge and life skills. Each sequential steps help youth identify what they have learned from an experience or activity and how to apply that knowledge and skill, as well as life skill to other experiences or situations. The model focuses on a “process” not a product.

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1. Participants **experience** the activity - perform or *do it*.
2. Participants **share** the experience and their actions by describing *what happened* to them. In this step the individual is learning there are different interpretations of reality.
3. Participants **process** the experience to determine *what was most important* and identify common themes and experiences.
4. Participants **generalize** from the experience and connect the discussion and experience to the larger world. Asking the question, *So what?*
5. Participants **apply** what is learned to a new situation and other parts of life. Asking the question, *Now what?*

The five steps are often simplified and often referred to as Do, Reflect and Apply.

There are three key 4-H models all interconnected to Experiential Learning. No one stands alone in the process of “Learning by Doing.”

Eight Essential Elements: The 8 essential elements means: Caring, knowledgeable and skilled adults, contribute to the success of young people, as they grow and develop in a safe and nurturing environment where there is an opportunity to learn

and interact with others. Positive youth development is an intentional process that promotes positive outcomes by providing opportunities, choices, relationships and support. 4-H accomplishes this through “reaching and teaching.” One approach won’t interest all people or cultures, thus we must strive for flexibility in designing and delivering our program.

Recognition Model:

There are five forms of recognition in the 4-H program, all equally important in the development of a child. Youth need to feel good about **participating** in an educational experience. The child is taught how to make **progress toward self-set goals**. Youth learn how to personally assess their skills and knowledge by achieving a predetermined **standard of excellence**. There are opportunities for **peer competition** where we assist the individual in developing resiliency in the spirit of competition. A primary goal of 4-H is to help young people become self-directing, productive and contributing citizens. We are helping them to learn to work **cooperatively** in an increasingly

interdependent global world. When young people work together, they examine their own skills and abilities and explore solutions beyond their own ideas.

Life Skills Model: In the 4-H Ritual we are asked, “*What do the four H’s on the club emblem represent?*” The reply is “*They represent the equal training of the head, heart, hands and health of every member.*” Purposefully select on life skill from each quadrant when planning and implementing an activity/program. Life skills are taught hand in hand with “subject matter.” Through a subject/project youth gain knowledge and skills, but more important is us helping them see a much larger and more long term application of the information and/or skill to real life situations.

The mastery of any skill requires opportunities to try, make mistakes and try again.

To learn more about each of these models see:

- **Youth Development: Eight Essential Elements**—4H.VOL. 114
- **4-H Recognition Model**—4H.VOL.105
- **Life Skills Model**—4H.VOL.135

“I never teach my pupils; I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn.” ~ Albert Einstein

A well-designed activity may provide opportunities to practice several of the life skills shown on the clover. However, in order to help youth process what they have practiced, one life skill should be targeted and emphasized.

4-H programs concentrate on helping young people acquire life skills. Life skills are developed as a member learns a “skill”. There is a difference in a skill and a life skill. A “skill” is a learned ability to do something.

“Life skills” are the ways we apply the information learned to real life situations.

The Targeting Life Skills Model developed by Iowa State University Extension (1996) targets life skills in a bull’s-eye – aiming 4-H youth toward life skills development using the four H’s of the Clover. A well-balanced 4-H experience for the individual, club, activity or event will focus equally on all four quadrants of the model.

In designing an educational experience, it is suggested that the parent, volunteer or educator select and focus on one skill from each quadrant and integrate it into the subject matter content. The key to “life skills” development is the individual having an opportunity to talk about (reflect) and apply an experience to other aspects of their life. Example – How is following directions for a recipe and measuring ingredients applicable to other experiences in life?



“Life skills” are the ways we apply the information learned to real life situations.

Choosing a Method

Many teaching methods can be adapted to almost any subject matter. The methods depend upon the learners, the life skills targeted and the way the learners can become involved with the content. The method selected should be one that allows the youth to learn-by-doing, discover,

practice the life skills and project skills targeted for the activity and have fun. The subject matter or topic usually doesn't limit the choice of a method, the life skill to be practiced will. If the intent is to have the youth practice decision-making, then the method needs to provide

opportunities to practice decision making as they explore the subject matter. Here are some popular methods used in 4-H to promote life skill development. Following each method is one or more life skills that could be targeted with the method.

METHOD	LIFE SKILL
Playing a game	Team work, risk taking
Giving a presentation	Communicating
Judging activities	Communicating, decision making
Planning activities	Teamwork, planning, leadership
Role Playing	Communications, relating to others
Experiments	Decision making, problem solving
Interviewing others	Communications, relating to others
Solving a problem	Decision making, problem solving
Making models and products	Problem solving, leadership, utilizing resources
Learning a skill	Many life skills

“You can teach a student a lesson for a day; but if you can teach him to learn by creating curiosity, he/she will continue the learning process as long as she/he lives.”
~Clay P. Bedford

The 4-H program has a long history of helping youth "learn by doing." Methods like lectures and demonstrations that are often used in formal school settings do not support experiential learning. Rather than being an up-front teacher, teaching the youth

what you want them to know or do, you help them learn by guiding the learning experience. You become a facilitator or coach. You involve the youth in ways they can discover for themselves instead of being put into a position of attempting to repeat what

they have been told or shown. When the experiences are carefully designed, safely executed and thoughtfully processed, you provide tremendous potential for youth development and growth.

Processing the Experience

Debriefing the experience is what moves an experience beyond “learning-by-doing.” The primary purpose of debriefing is to allow participants the opportunity to integrate their learning. They have a sense of closure or completeness to their experience. In order for youth to take what they have just experienced and use it effectively in their everyday lives, they must think about it and interpret

it’s meaning for themselves (Hammell 1986).

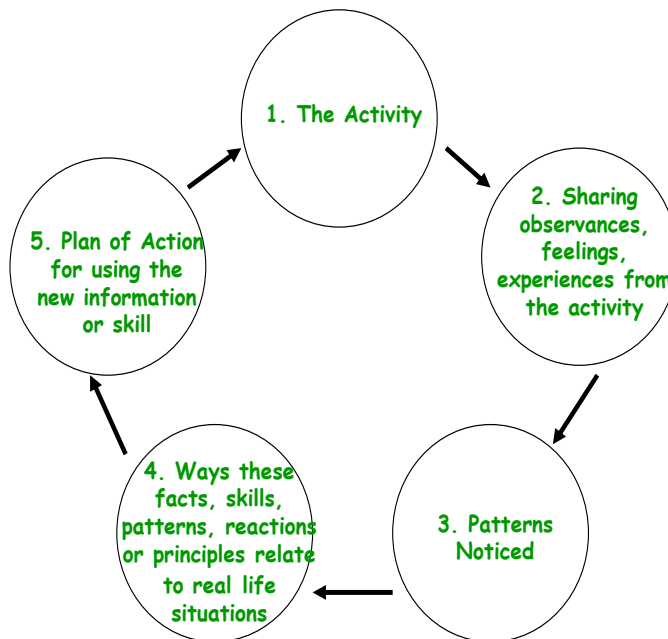
As the volunteer of the group you can assist in this process by:

1. Setting aside enough time to reflect on the experience(s).
2. Asking the right questions.
3. Planning appropriate activities that will help youth reflect on their experiences.

4. Listening to the youth carefully.
5. Supporting each youth’s unique learning.

The reflection and application steps of the experiential learning model help expand the learning potential. Each of the four reflections and application steps of the model comes to life when the helper asks appropriate questions to generate discussion and

A learning/teaching process is composed of 5 separate but interrelated steps. The process begins with an individual or group learning exercise and ends with discussion of how what was learned can be applied to other settings in the “real world.”



youth self-discovery. Each step should be explored before moving to the next step in relation

to both the project skill and the life skill.

The questions asked following the experience are critical. If the questions help youth explore the

“That is what learning is. You suddenly understand something you’ve understood all your life, but in a new way.”

~Doris Lessing

activity from their own perspectives, generalize to their own lives and see how to apply what they learned, then the goal has been reached. However, if the questions are perceived by the participants to be an oral test of their knowledge, then much of the benefits of using the experiential model are lost.

The following are examples of generic questions for each step of the experiential cycle.

Share

What did you do?

What did your group do when...?

What did you see? Feel? Hear? Taste?
What was most difficult? Easiest?

Process

What problems or issues seemed to occur over and over?

What did you learn about (life skill or activity subject matter) through this activity?

Why is the life skill you practiced important?

Generalize

What similar experiences have you had (with this life skill or subject matter)?

What similar challenge/problem/feeling have you faced? What did you do then?

Apply

How does what you learned relate to other parts of your life?

How can you use what you learned?

How can you apply (the life skill you practiced) in the future?

As you facilitate processing the experience you will want to be very aware of the stage or step of the experiential model currently being discussed and how ready the group is to move to the next step. This will depend on the needs and abilities of the group.

Asking the right questions is itself a skill to be learned. Sometimes a short activity in which everyone answers

Evaluating the Project Activity

“Learning is not a spectator sport.”

~D. Blocher

The most important question is whether the group members can show they have gained new knowledge and practiced the life skill and the project skill. The success indicator in the activity outline should describe an observable behavior or attitude change for both the project skill and life skill. For example a success indicator like "Youth will use one or more steps of the decision making model to solve the situation (project related)."

The questions discussed in the processing and application steps of the experiential model will often provide excellent feedback. Even better evaluation information can be gathered by having the group apply what they have learned to another situation. If you use experiential learning successfully some of the most important results will only happen as youth apply new skills in their everyday lives.

The example illustrates specific skills a young person working in the Health and Foods and Nutrition project might develop through service or project work. In the middle column you can see that a specific skill will develop complementary life skills which in turn have application to real life situations outside of the 4-H project or activity.

Skill	Life Skill	Application to Real Life
Identifying and meeting a need. Proper exercise and healthy food choices.	Service Learning HEAD Decision Making	Developing and carrying out a systematic plan for a community or social need. Choosing to exercise and eat right.
Awareness of surroundings and individuals. Recognizing the need for using will power.	Concern for Others HEART Social Skills	Social awareness and responsibility to community, work and family. Ability to make healthy choices from vending machine to buffet line.
Organizing, communicating, reporting, teaching, evaluating. Cleanliness - personal hygiene and food handling.	Marketable Skills HANDS Responsible Citizenship	Productive work skills for business and family. Living in community makes good hygiene essential to public health.
Learning to make healthy food, exercise, and social decisions. Washing hands, brushing teeth, stretching before exercise.	Healthy Lifestyle Choices HEALTH Disease Prevention	Living as a role model. Taking preventive measures to decrease the likelihood of obesity and disease.
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for better living in their clubs, communities, country and world.		

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Exploring Experiential Learning Model, 12/2000

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