

Unit 3: Learning Life and Project Skills through Experiential Learning

This unit explains why 4-H believes young people learn by doing. This unit also outlines the importance of children and youth learning two related but separate skill sets in 4-H: project skills and life skills. By doing fun 4-H projects under the guidance of a volunteer, youth are also learning important skills that are transferrable to other areas of life.

Learning objectives:

1. You will learn the components of the experiential learning process.
2. You will learn the difference between project and life skills.

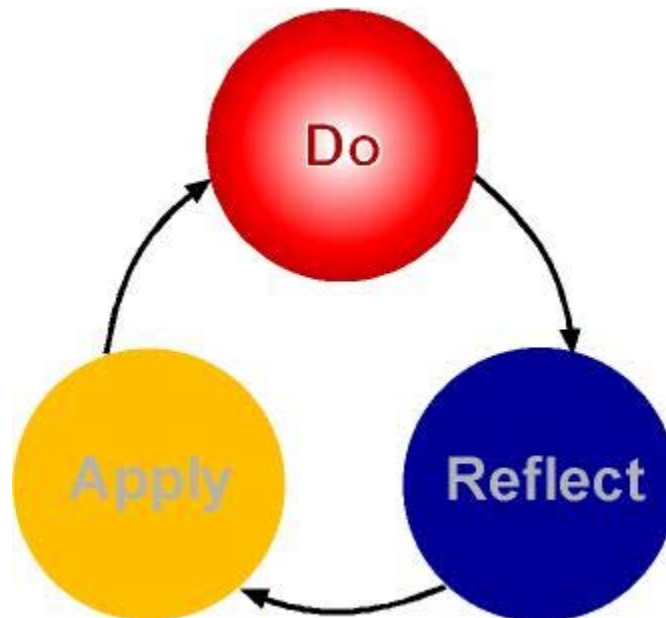
Preview questions:

1. What project skills do you teach 4-H members in project meetings?
2. What are some examples of life skills?
3. Can you name a life skill that can be learned and practiced regardless of the 4-H project?
4. How can we help youth process and apply real life learning when a 4-H project doesn't turn out perfect?

Experiential Learning

In 4-H, young people learn by doing something such as learning how to use a saw and cut a straight line or making a boot jack or birdhouse. Youth develop skills through 4-H projects, demonstrations or activities. Learning continues beyond the actual project skills because 4-H uses a deliberate process that allows youth to learn through a "doing" experience that is then followed by leader led discussion. This method of Do, Reflect and Apply is referred to as the Experiential Learning Model (Kolb, 1984).

Source: Missouri 4-H website (2007)



4-H Youth Development expanded this model to include five steps (listed as a - e below) to teach life skills. The sequential steps of the model help youth identify what they have learned from a 4-H experience and to apply that learning to other experiences or situations. The model requires that the volunteer leader be very clear about the targeted skill or concept. The follow up processing questions are not closed ended questions that can be answered with a pat yes or no response. Instead, the questions are open ended and shared to support the learning goals. (Remember the 4-H curricula authors have already created processing questions for you!)

DO

A. Experience or do the activity; perform

- Youth do their projects
- Leaders watch as youth discover

REFLECT

B. Share reactions, observations

- What did you do?
- What happened?
- What did it feel like to do (whatever)?
- How did you share your project with others?

C. Process and analyze the experience:

- Identify the most important thing learned.
- What did you learn about yourself by doing this project?

APPLY

D. Generalize to connect the experience to real-world examples

- Now what?
- This step emphasizes the life skill practiced rather than the subject matter skill.
- This is a prime teachable moment when projects don't turn out exactly as planned ("What would you do differently the next time you work on this type project?")

E. Apply what was learned to a similar or different situation; practice

- How can you use what you learned in other situation?
- What did the experience mean to you personally?
- To your everyday life?
- Where have you faced similar challenges?

Volunteers and youth benefit from the experiential learning process

Both volunteer leaders and youth benefit by using the experiential learning process. Leaders are able to assess the youth's knowledge and experience of a subject and build upon it. Leaders can also serve as a coach and perhaps learn cooperatively with the youth. Youth, regardless of their learning style, learn from each other by sharing knowledge and skills, working together, sharing information and evaluating themselves and others. Youth take responsibility for their own learning and relate the experiences to their own lives.

Note the experiential learning model begins with an experience. Action! This immediately focuses the attention on the youth learner rather than the adult project leader. The goal is for the youth to experience the activity in order to develop the targeted skills. Effective leaders always provide a safe setting and guidance throughout the experience but are not overly directive. In summary, they choose to be a "guide on the side, not the sage on a stage."

Building Experiential Learning into 4-H Project Work

Many types of activities can be used to provide a learning experience, including 4-H project work. Project work appeals to youth because they have many projects from which to choose: beef, clothing, foods, arts and crafts, shooting sports, woodworking, electricity and many more. Discovering and exploring 4-H project work is the "hook" to get youth involved in 4-H. While they are having fun, they learn. As youth learn, they are acquiring two sets of skills: project skills and life skills.

Project Skills

To complete a project item or exhibit, 4-H members learn a multitude of skills related to the subject matter of the project. For example, skills learned through a woodworking project would be measuring, sawing a straight line, sanding and applying a finish. In a clothing project, skills acquired would be learning to lay out then cut out a pattern, thread the sewing machine and make a buttonhole.

4-H Curricula: An Existing Tool to Help Volunteers Build Project and Life Skills

It is important that project leaders teach and transfer the most current information and methods to the youth during project meetings. This can be accomplished by using research based, jury-approved 4-H curricula that includes youth manuals and adult leader guides. All curricula have step-by-step instructions on how to use the materials, general information on the project, procedures for conducting each activity, questions to process each experience, and suggestions for related activities. Developmental outcomes and learning indicators are included in addition to the life skill being targeted. The 4-H curricula are like an intricate woven tapestry that has been created by a team of national university faculty and youth development specialists. Together, these experts have created a vast amount of curricula that includes all the necessary threads for a high quality 4-H project experience:

- the latest research-based knowledge on the subject
- hands on activities that are developmentally appropriate (Unit 4)
- do-reflect-apply questions
- ideas for related community service activities (generosity, Unit 2)
- extended learning suggestions (mastery, Unit 2)

Life Skills

When youth participate in a project, activity, or club meeting, they develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are needed for life long success—no matter what job, career, or interest. For example, leadership in a 4-H club and giving presentations can lead toward mastery in communication, a life skill. Over the years, there have been thousands of 4-H members who have acknowledged that their skill of communication was acquired as a result of their participation in 4-H projects and exhibits. Communication is one of the most important life

skills youth learn in 4-H. Did you know that some resources state that as many as 40 percent of American adults fear public speaking more than death?

Life skills are divided into five major categories: subject matter knowledge, self-awareness, decision-making, social interaction and physical skills. View Iowa State University's 4-H: Targeting Life Skills Model (Hendricks, 1996) below or log on at <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/4H/lifeskills/previewwheel.html>.

