

Active Teaching— Active Learning

Teaching Techniques and Tools

Youth like action! They like to go places, feel things, meet people, and have new experiences. Young people will be more active and interested learners if you use a variety of methods to teach project skills and knowledge. The amount of information a learner retains varies from method to method.

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Techniques

How children and youth learn

Research has shown that youth learn best by doing.¹ Active involvement of the learner is the key. Teaching knowledge and skills by using a variety of tools and techniques will provide good learning experiences for all youth. Remember that “learn by doing” is a basic concept in youth development programs and often it is the best way to retain knowledge.

Reading

Young people retain approximately 10 percent of what they read. Printed materials and other literature are important ways to share knowledge, but supplement them with other learning methods.

Hearing

Young people retain approximately 20 percent of what they hear. Most teachers talk too much. Give young people a chance to explain and discuss what is presented.

Seeing

Young people generally retain 30 percent of what they see. Exhibits, posters, and illustrations are a big plus in teaching, especially when youth prepare materials to share.

Hearing and seeing

When youth see and hear new material, they retain approximately 50 percent of it. Observing demonstrations, seeing movies or videos, and participating in tours are all ways members can see and hear. These generally are popular teaching methods.

Saying

Young people retain approximately 70 percent of what they explain personally. When young people become an active part of the learning process, the amount they learn increases dramatically. Discussion groups and judging experiences are two important ways members can express their ideas.

Saying and doing

When young people are involved actively in saying and doing, they retain approximately

¹ Research was conducted by the Socony-Vacuum Oil Company Studies and the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare (Klein, 1974).

Learners have the ability to retain:

- 10% of what they read
- 20% of what they hear
- 30% of what they see
- 50% of what they see and hear
- 70% of what they say as they talk
- 90% of what they say as they do a thing

Methods of instruction and ability to recall

	Recall 3 hours later	Recall 3 days later
Telling (when used alone)	70%	10%
Showing (when used alone)	72%	20%
Telling and showing together	85%	65%

Basically, we learn through one of the five senses. Here is how we learn.

Seeing	83%
Hearing	11%
Touching	3½%
Smelling	1½%
Tasting	1%

90 percent of the material. Most people learn best by actually “doing.” Provide opportunities for youth to practice and explore what they have learned.

Keys to learning

Every youth development staff members and volunteers should give as much responsibility as possible to group members. The more they do for themselves, the more they learn. How can a leader best involve group members in this learning process? The following ideas may help.

Find out what youth are ready for, and begin at that point.

Start with a question session.

- What do they know about the subject?
- What would they like to know?
- What would they like to do for a project?

Learning will occur if, and only if, youth are ready.

- What can you do to bring him or her to that point?
- How can you best handle the subject under study?

The more senses (seeing, touching, tasting, hearing, and smelling) involved, the better the learning.

- How many senses are being called into play when you present information?

The mind learns by association.

- Relate the unknown to the known. For example, discuss the function of automobile parts by relating them to their more familiar extensions—the steering wheel, clutch, or brake.

Move from fact to principle.

- Explain the “why” of a thing. For example, if you teach the foods in a good breakfast, also describe the nutrients they contain and their effect on health and energy.

Be flexible.

Be able to adapt plans to the teachable moment.

Be varied in your approach.

For example, at a project meeting on dog grooming, show the brush and comb and illustrate grooming techniques. Let each member groom a dog under close supervision. Then, discuss the process with them.

Recognize youths’ efforts as soon as you can.

- Younger youth especially require immediate recognition.

- Discuss the results of their work with them and suggest improvements.
- Have them demonstrate or in some way display their efforts as soon as they are ready.

Experiential learning model

Youth learn and retain more when action is involved in teaching. You can become a more effective teacher by posing simple questions to youth while they are doing an activity. Combining activities with questions to help youth learn is called **experiential learning**.

Experiential learning helps youth to:

- Explore (Do)
- Reflect
- Apply

These are the three steps to experiential learning.

Explore (Do)

Youth “explore” and learn when they are involved in a hands-on learning activity.

Reflect

Participants “reflect” on the activity when they can share and think about it. Questions relate to what happened during the activity and what was important about the activity.

Possible learning questions:

- What did you like about this activity?
- Did everyone in the group agree on how to do the activity?
- What was the most fun about doing the activity?
- Why is it important for us to know about _____?
- What was the most challenging part of the activity?

Apply

To complete the process, youth need to “apply” what they have learned to everyday life. Questions relate to why the activity was important and to applications of the activities outside the world of 4-H.

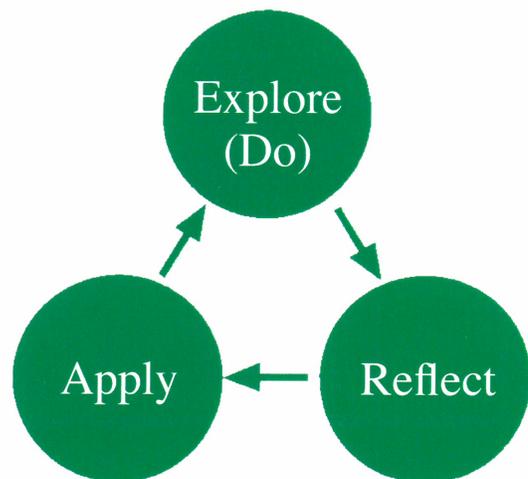
Possible learning questions:

- When else have you had fun and learned new things at the same time?
- What did you learn about working with others from this activity?
- If you were to do this activity again, what would you do differently next time?
- What did you learn about _____ that will help you in the future?
- What will you remember to do next time when you ____ ?

Learning concepts

One of the most important responsibilities of a staff member or volunteer is to help youth acquire the skills and knowledge to reach their goals. Some basic concepts apply to all learning situations.

- Young people learn best in an atmosphere of warmth and acceptance.
- Youth need to have clear, self-determined goals.
- Each person has different abilities. The same learning method will not be equally successful with all members.
- Youth must be actively involved in selecting and carrying out the learning activities.



Experiential Learning Model

Example—youth participate in a Judging Contest.

Explore (Do)—When participating in a judging contest, youth are asked to step into the role of judge and to compare, select, and tell why. Typically, participants are presented with a situation and asked to compare four items and decide which is the best choice, next best choice, and so on.

Reflect—The activity leader may ask questions such as:

- “What did you like about participating in the judging contest?”
- “What did you learn about growing tomatoes by judging that class?”
- “How did you place the class of tomatoes, and why?”

Apply—For this application, the staff member or volunteer may ask the following questions:

- “What did you learn in the foods judging contest about decision making that you could apply in everyday life?”
- “Tell me about another time that you would organize your thoughts and explain a choice you made.”
- “How might you use the skills you learned in judging if you were to purchase a car?”

As you teach different activities, use experiential learning to help the young people think about what they learned and how to apply it to their lives.

Teaching styles

A good teacher has many characteristics. In positive youth development, leadership styles are explained as being placed on a line or scale. On one end is a directive or autocratic leader. At the other end is a nondirective style, and in the middle is the democratic style. Your teaching approach is probably related to your leadership style. You may use a directive teaching approach or a facilitative teaching approach. You may even use a combination of both approaches.

A directive teaching approach is similar to the classic model of a classroom teacher. The teacher informs or trains students on how to complete an activity or task. A facilitative teacher serves as a coach and believes that students have something to bring to their learning experience.

Characteristics of a directive teacher:

- Uses mostly a lecture style of teaching—one-way communication from teacher to participants
- Gives solutions to problems rather than encouraging participants to discover their own solutions
- The teacher is the “expert”
- Discourages discussion
- The teacher’s method is the best way to do things

Characteristics of a facilitative teacher:

- Plans fun, interactive learning activities
- Shares information and then lets participants practice what they have learned
- Encourages questions and discussion
- Serves as a “coach” rather than the expert
- Motivates participants by helping them understand how they can use what they have learned
- Uses questions to help participants explore, reflect on, and apply what they are learning

You may use a different teaching approach depending on the situation at hand. Instances where a directive teaching approach is preferred include:

- Activities in which the risk of injury is high and close supervision is needed

- Activities that are time sensitive
- Activities with younger elementary-aged children who might need more guidance

As youth grow older and become more experienced, a more facilitative teaching approach is preferred.

