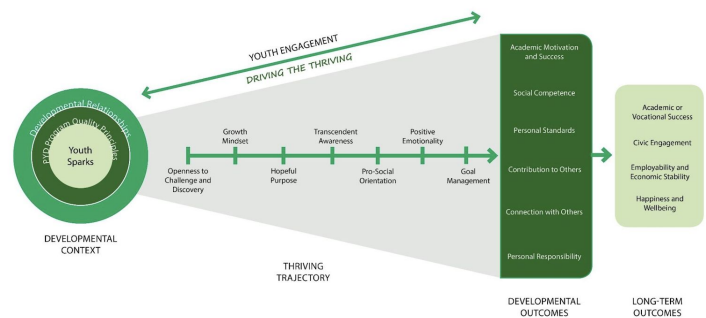


Quality Interaction: Creating “Movie Magic” in your 4-H Program

Introduction

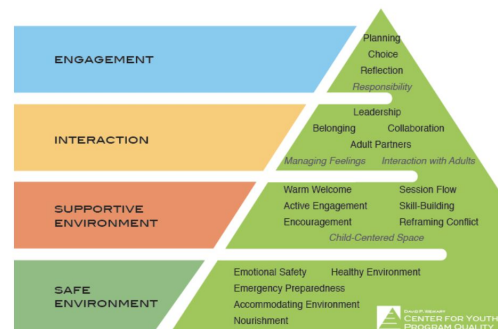
4-H is a Positive Youth Development (PYD) organization that provides research-backed learning experiences to Arizonans far and wide! No matter the program mode, whether you volunteer with a 4-H Community Club or lead an afterschool 4-H Robotics Program, our role as adults in this organization is to provide youth with a world-class educational experience. Thinking back to your first orientation or training as a volunteer, you can probably recollect many of the PYD research pieces that Arizona 4-H Staff utilize to prepare 4-H Volunteers. Dr. Mary Arnold of Oregon State University is revolutionizing how we think about 4-H PYD with the 4-H Thriving Model. Arnold’s research highlights the valuable developmental context that must take place before we can reap the benefits highlighted in prospective longterm youth-centered outcomes such as academic/vocational success or employability and economic stability (2018).

The 4-H Thriving Model



A major component of Arnold’s Developmental Context is PYD Program Quality Principles. Weikart’s Pyramid of Youth Program Quality identifies the third level of quality as being Quality Peer Interaction through group and community building (2013). As adults working with 4-H members, how do we create Quality Peer Interaction? Hollywood provides us with many pop culture references of outstanding groups of teens who overcome obstacles, such as defeating Lord Voldemort in the *Harry Potter* series, quality bonding as a group of misfits in *The Breakfast Club*, to something as epic as retrieving a treasured Babe Ruth autographed baseball in *The Sandlot*. Movie producers set the standard pretty high when creating these imaginary teen peer groups, however, 4-H members are creating movie-worthy sagas of their own in 4-H programs across the state! As adults who support 4-H youth, it is our responsibility to empower them to have high-quality peer interactions.

Pyramid of Youth Program Quality



Creating “Movie Magic” with Quality Interaction in 4-H

Weikart guides us in our quest to create Quality Interaction by emphasizing the importance of including the following principles in our programs: Belonging; Collaboration; and Leadership (2013). The rest of this blog will provide you with tricks, tips, and case studies as to why each of the Quality Interaction pieces is necessary for creating a high-quality 4-H program.

Belonging

A study of Florida 4-H members found that when members experience a sense of belonging and inclusivity there is a greater likelihood of developing positive attributes that are conducive to personal growth which makes them more likely to participate in 4-H for a longer period (Hensley, 2007). Creating belonging can be done quickly and easily with a small amount of effort. The simple step of promoting the use of each child's name increases belonging by a significant amount.

A widely popular emeritus faculty member at the University of Arizona utilized the power of belonging through remembering names to great success during his tenure at the Department of Agricultural Education. Dr. James Knight taught multiple 300+ student courses that focused on developing a greater connection with the University as a method for student retention. At the beginning of each semester, Dr. Knight would require each student to set up a one-on-one meeting where he would get to know each student and take a picture of them with their name. From that point on, Dr. Knight would stand at the door of each of his classes and shake each student's hand and call them by their name every class period. As a student of Dr. Knight, I found it harder to miss his class compared to other professors because I always thought Dr. Knight was counting on me to be there. Not only was he counting on me, but he also cared enough about individual students to know our goals, our struggles, and most importantly, our names.

Luckily, few 4-H clubs have over 300 members in them, so we have it a bit easier than Dr. Knight. However, as a volunteer, we should take the time to learn our members' names and promote the use of using first names by playing simple name games, using name tags, and referring to our pupil's names as often as possible.

Collaboration

A popular cliché with student groups is that group assignments often lead to one person doing all of the work, while a team gets the credit. As a 4-H volunteer, we must be sure to never allow this cliché to happen with small amounts of social engineering. By structuring educational experiences to be interactive and dependent on collaboration, we can kill the group work cliché in order to power up our programs.

4-H programs have a natural tendency to lean heavily on competition as a means of developing Mastery among our students. As 4-H professionals, we can capitalize on this aspect when possible. In the 4-H Livestock Program in Pima County, the Beef Cattle Project hosts a cattle team fitting contest at the annual Pima County Fair. In recent years, junior members have

dominated the beef barn meaning that more experienced cattle showmen are smaller in numbers. 4-H Volunteer Micaela McGibbon tackled this dilemma head-on in the Team Cattle Fitting Contest by requiring that each team consist of one Senior Member and three Junior Members. At no point was the Senior 4-Her able to perform any grooming, but was only allowed to instruct and coach Junior 4-Hers for the duration of the contest. Not only did this stop one person from doing all the work but allowed for the event to focus on collaboration. As a bonus older members gained valuable experience in leadership and developed mentor relationships with younger members!

It is a common trick of facilitators to take a common activity and up the ante by inserting directions that challenge and guide the direction a group will take in their efforts to solve a problem. Consider taking common activities in your 4-H program and refocusing them by adding some explicit directions and forcing growth from the team.

Leadership

A recent marketing strategy of our organization is “4-H Grows True Leaders.” Leadership is truly at the center of 4-H programming as we have a strong tradition of having youth club offices, teen camp counselors, and youth members on our volunteer committees. At all times, we should be working to strengthen the 4-Hers ability to take leadership by promoting ownership of the 4-H in your community.

Leadership goes beyond titles and positions in an organization. One powerful reflection of leadership is a 4-Hers ability for advocacy and self-determination. The Desert Sky Community School in Tucson, Arizona hosts an afterschool 4-H SPIN Club where students are learning about underwater robotics. During their first meeting, 4-H parent turned volunteer, Amanda Arnett-Romero planned for new members to create a name for their new club. With true ingenuity, 4-H members decided that they wanted to be called the Hammer Heads 4-H Club. Because the focus of the club was on underwater robotics, students planned on using hammers and their heads in order to develop ideas for removing pollution from Earth’s oceans! By advocating for themselves and rejecting the boring ideas of this 4-H agent, the Hammer Heads came up with a catchy and meaningful name that reflects the true leadership at work in 4-H programs.

When we have the option, 4-H volunteers should empower youth to take ownership and leadership of THEIR organization. Leadership can start out small such as Suzy Cloverbud taking attendance at the 4-H Club Meeting and eventually morph into Sammy Senior-Member leading other 4-Hers into an exploration of the Peppersauce Cave system like the Pima County 4-H Healthy Living Ambassadors! No matter how small, we should promote youth leadership at all levels!

Conclusion

Quality Interaction is extremely important for creating high-quality 4-H programs! With a little bit of work, we can positively change the lives of 4-Hers statewide. All we must do is create ***belonging***, foster ***collaboration***, and allow for ***leadership*** and then 4-H members will be living through some “movie magic!” I’ve always thought my own life would be a hilarious sitcom, however, I know that with *quality interaction*, Arizona 4-H members can be experiencing epic sagas that are worthy of more than a few Oscars!