

## Transfer of Learning: What We Can Do to Aid Knowledge and Skill Transfer

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One of the purposes of 4-H programming is to help youth become engaged in learning, master skills, and continue to use the skills they have developed. If such application does not occur, the goals of education and training are not achieved (Taylor, 1997). This idea of gaining knowledge in one context and applying it to another is called *transfer of learning*. The 4-H program uses a model called the experiential learning model to describe how learning is transferred, which can be summarized into three steps: do, reflect, and apply. Transfer of learning has also been referred to as the “so what” or “now what” phase of the learning process (Cafarella, 2002; Taylor, 1997).

Learning transfer does not always take place. The Ohio 4-H program appears to do an exceptional job of engaging youth in their roles and activities. However, simply doing is not enough. We may not always be as intentional about following through on the reflection and application part of the experiential learning model to facilitate transfer of learning. In a recent study of Ohio 4-H camp counselor alumni (Digby, 2005), it was evident that counselors had gained many personal and interpersonal skills, yet at the time they were counselors, they did not always realize the extent to which they were developing skills that applied beyond being a counselor (McNeely, 2004).

Authors have written about cognitive processes that aid in the transfer of knowledge. Asking learners to understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create when learning subject matter are methods used to aid in the transfer of learning (Mayer, 2002). For transfer to occur, we need to provide experiences that are real and meaningful to learners. Learning also depends on having a base of content knowledge and procedural skills, that is, the skills necessary to solve problems (Basile, 2000). A description and an example of how these methods can be used when working with 4-H members is given in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Cognitive Processes That Aid Transfer of Learning**

<b>Process</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Example</b>
Understand	Learners demonstrate understanding when they make connections between new knowledge and their prior knowledge.	4-H members find a job description that interests them. Allow the 4-H member to compare the skills needed in that job to the skills they are gaining through their 4-H club experience.
Apply	involves using procedures to execute familiar tasks or to solve a problem that is unfamiliar.	4-H members to select the right amount and type of wood to buy for a woodworking project.

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Process	Description	Example
Analyze	Analyze involves breaking material into parts and determining how the parts are related to each other and to an overall framework.	In a consumer skills project, youth may analyze newspaper and TV ads to understand how advertising messages are used to market products.
Evaluate	Evaluate is making judgments based on criteria and standards such as quality, effectiveness, efficiency, and consistency.	4-H food and nutrition members to create a daily food plan for themselves and compare it to the standards established by the New Food Guide System for a person of their same age, gender, and activity level.
Create	Create involves reorganizing elements into a new pattern or structure.	4-H members generate ideas and plan a fundraiser for their club.

Adapted from Mayer, 2002

The ideas given above are likely to aid in the process of transfer of learning. Learning transfers best when the learning takes place in the context of real situations (Taylor, 1997). Among the strategies that can be employed are having opportunities for practice during training, developing an action plan, actually being engaged in an activity, and allowing time for reflection (Gardner & Korth, 1997). By implementing these methods within 4-H programs, 4-H members are more likely to learn skills and subject matter and apply those skills and subject matter to other contexts of their lives.

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