



April 2011
Volume 49 Number 2
Article Number 2IAW2

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Implementing and Assessing 4-H Educational Activity Kits for Children

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Abstract: Educational activity kits were developed and implemented through a statewide effort for 4-H Youth Development Extension programs serving 5-8 year-old children. The purpose of the kits was to promote life skills in children and assess the learning environment. Data was collected based on the observations of 577 children across 22 counties. Findings indicated life skills of subject matter knowledge, getting along with others, and decision-making were enhanced through activity kits. While contextual elements for positive youth development were present for: positive relationships with caring adults, opportunities for mastery/competence, emotionally and physically safe environment, and opportunities for engagement of learning.

Introduction and Program Description

Through a statewide assessment of a Midwestern state's 4-H professionals, a majority (79%) identified, "developing educational activity kits" as a priority for programs serving 5-8 year-old children, often referred to as 4-H Cloverbuds. As a result, three 4-H activity kits were developed in 2006. The kits focused on three lessons (Food Fun, Science of Sound, and Our Country) selected from the state's 4-H Cloverbud Curriculum—Series II. Each kit contained educational materials and was available for volunteers to access from their county Extension office. Materials associated with each kit were:

- Food Fun—American Dairy Assoc. food models, educational game, My Pyramid poster, My Pyramid lesson plans, songs, food intake log, and children's book

- The Science of Sound—CD with sound clips, sound matching activity, homemade pipe chimes, sheet music, and sound experiments
- Our Country—Floor puzzle, patriotic songs, book, game, U.S. & 4-H flag set, 3' X 5' U.S. flag, flag folding lesson, and 4-H pledge activity

The purpose of the study reported here was to determine if the activity kits attributed to the program goals of enhancing life skills (Scheer, 1997) in an environment (contextual elements) that promotes positive youth development (Astroth, 2000).

These activity kits and others that are part of Ohio's 4-H Cloverbud program can be viewed in greater detail through at <http://www.ohio4h.org/youth/cloverbud/cloverbudresources.html#7>. Information through this link includes list of kit contents, kit evaluation, curriculum piece, activity tools, and additional resources.

Program Evaluation

All of the state's counties (88) and other sites throughout the state received the three 4-H Cloverbud kits: Fun with Food, Science of Sound, and My Country at a statewide volunteer conference. An observational data collection instrument was completed by adult volunteers who worked directly with participating children. It consisted of seven quantitative (see results for specific items) and two qualitative questions.

The seven quantitative items were structured using an observational scale of 0 (none of the children) to 4 (all of the children). The two open ended questions were: "Was it beneficial for you to have the 4-H Cloverbud Kits for conducting 4-H Cloverbud activities—why or why not?" and "How can the 4-H Cloverbud Kits be improved?" The evaluation form was developed by the lead author in consultation with the state's 4-H Cloverbud specialization team. The evaluation form was pilot- and field-tested. Evaluation forms were included with each kit, so they were readily available for use in every county. The study and evaluation form were approved through the authors' institutional review board.

An evaluation and feedback form was included with the kits. This form was completed by the volunteers using the kits. The following results represent 577 children as represented by 82 observational evaluations from 22 counties. This evaluation only represents the counties that made the effort to provide evaluation feedback, although it would not be accurate to assume that those counties reporting were the only ones using the kits.

Our Country was the most frequently used kit by volunteer leaders. Almost all of the survey respondents (98%) believed the 4-H Cloverbud Kits were beneficial for conducting activities with participating children.

For the quantitative results using an observational scale of 0 (none of the children) to 4 (all of the children), percentages are given with values 3 and 4 combined (first three items—life skills, remaining four items—contextual elements):

- Gained subject matter knowledge—96.3%;
- Improved in getting along with others—95.1%;

- Increased decision-making skills—93.8%;
- Experienced positive relationships with caring adults—98.8%;
- Experienced opportunities for mastery/competence—97.6%;
- Experienced emotionally and physically safe environment—98.7%;
- Experienced opportunities for engagement of learning—100%.

Qualitative results indicated what worked with the kits and what can be improved. Volunteers were asked if it was beneficial to have the 4-H Cloverbud Kits for conducting 4-H Cloverbud activities, why or why not. Comments most common were related to themes "ease of use" and "engagement with children." Some of these comments were the following.

- The kit provides a variety of ideas to use at our meetings; kit was interesting to them, always enough activities.
- Yes, had many activities on hand, children enjoyed the activities, the children gave a demonstration at the 4-H meeting on folding and carrying the US Flag.
- The kit included many easy to understand activities for the Cloverbuds to do. It was nice not having to come up with all the activities on my own.
- It was easy to prepare and teach a lesson. The activities were fun for the kids.

For the qualitative findings about how to improve the kits, the common themes were "no improvement needed" and "increase activity materials." Some example comments were the following.

- It can be improved by adding more food fun activities
- More materials for hands-on activities, less paperwork
- It is great like it is.
- I really liked this kit!

Conclusions and Implications

The results indicated the activity kits were effective for enhancing life skills and providing contextual elements for positive youth development. The mixed method approach of quantitative and qualitative techniques strengthened the findings because the data analysis revealed similar outcomes. Based on these findings, two other 4-H Cloverbud activity kits have been developed: Fitness is Fun and Sports Fun.

The findings have implications for Extension programs throughout the U.S. for program implementation and evaluation. The availability of the kits enabled volunteer leaders to deliver educational activities they otherwise may not have been able to implement due to material costs and coordination time. In conclusion, a shared resource approach with program delivery can reap rewards for both volunteers and children, resulting in positive youth development.

References

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