



Teaching Tips and Techniques: A Dialogue Learning Approach

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Introduction

Volunteer teachers are important to Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) and to the Master Food Volunteers (MFV). Volunteers may teach and assist with a variety of topics. Although there are many methods for delivering content, this publication will focus on a selection of teaching techniques as they pertain to the Master Food Volunteer Program. Also check the “Resources for Further Reading” section of this document for information on additional publications available for download from our VCE publications web site and other Extension Service web sites to assist you in preparing food demonstrations, farmers market demonstrations, developing lesson plans, acquiring materials and equipment, and working with youth.

Most educators are probably familiar with the more traditional telling approach to teaching because that is how most of us received our education. The telling approach is a traditional student and teacher relationship where the teacher stands in front of the class and lectures the students. However, a dialogue learning approach involves a continuous conversation between the educator and learners and makes the learning experience more meaningful (Norris 2003). This approach also encourages learners to learn, understand and internalize information by talking to one another in a non-threatening environment. The dialogue approach is the “ideal” educational method. It allows

learners to practice what they have learned. In dialogue, learners make meaning of the information and decide what they will do with it instead of being “told” what to do.

A part of learner-centered education is learning information that is meaningful to the participant and then taking time to practice and build confidence so that they may be able to apply the concept in a new environment without supervision.

Preparing to Learn

The principles of dialogue learning are quite simple. First, create a positive learning environment that begins when the learner enters through the door. Some suggestions to set the tone for a program and create a positive environment include the following:

- Make welcome signs and place them where everyone will see them. Welcome signs also help learners know what to do.
- Greet learners warmly as they arrive and help guide them to feel comfortable
- Provide name tags and ask learners to write their names in large print
- Use people’s names immediately
- Arrange tables or chairs to enhance dialogue
- Play background music (something upbeat and energizing)
- Have a decorative table with recipes, handouts, a basket of fake fruit, etc.
- The workspace is ready when learners arrive

- The educator uses the power of positive suggestion. (Norris 2003, 2008)

Welcoming Learners

Introduce yourself and the program you are representing. Provide learners with an overview of your agenda, including objectives of your lesson plan; what you hope to get out of the class; a recipe you will prepare, or length of your program.

Describe the program. Give learners an idea of what you will need from them. For example, “Today I will ask you to participate in a 20-minute lesson, then we will practice what we have learned, and you can help me prepare a recipe.” You are defining your expectations up front so they will not need to guess what is next.

Offer a voice by choice. Being called on and being made to speak in front of an audience is terrifying to some people. One of the best things you can offer your learners is letting them know up front that you will not call on anyone or go around the room for responses. If you break this rule, you will lose their trust (Norris 2003, 2008).

Facilitating Dialogue: Five for Thriving

The following are five learning principles that will help you facilitate dialogue learning with your audiences.

Respect. Respect who they are, where they have been, and what they know. Remember, adults have many life experiences that they bring with them to your program.

Safety. Learners should feel free to participate fully without fear. Praise them when a learner offers an idea.

Inclusion. Everyone is equal and made to feel part of the group.

Engagement. Learners should be given the opportunity to do something with the information they are learning, rather than just sitting and listening.

Relevancy. Find out why the information you are presenting is important to your learners and how it has personal meaning to them (Norris 2003, 2008).



Photo: <https://snaped.fns.usda.gov>

Facilitating Dialogue: The Power of Open Questions

Open questions focus on asking questions that encourage a more reflective response and not just “yes,” “no,” or “I don’t know.” Open questions encourage a conversation between the presenter and the audience. Developing these types of questions may require some planning, so you may find it helpful to write them down. Over time as you become more comfortable with asking open questions, you should be able to do so without as much planning beforehand.

Open questions have no correct answer and invite the participant to dig a little deeper into their own experiences. These questions also

give learners a chance to show you what they know and who they are (Norris 2003, 2008).

Some examples of open questions include the following:

- What are the benefits of letting your children help you cook?
- What are some of your favorite vegetables?
- How do you like to prepare vegetables?

Facilitating Dialogue: Elements of Waiting

As you ask open questions, give learners time to think about the question, choose their response and feel comfortable in sharing. You might try counting to 5 or 10. Even if this feels uncomfortable to you, the benefits will not be lost on the participant. You will demonstrate your genuine curiosity in what they have to say. If you do not wait for them, you send the signal that what they had to say was not that important, and it will be harder to get them to participate in the program. Wait for at least five seconds for learners to respond as they think about their answers. The waiting may seem like an eternity, but it will be worth it as you begin to acquire more meaningful conversations with the group.

Imagine that you are asking a group of learners in your class this question: “What is one change you recently made to improve your family’s diet?”

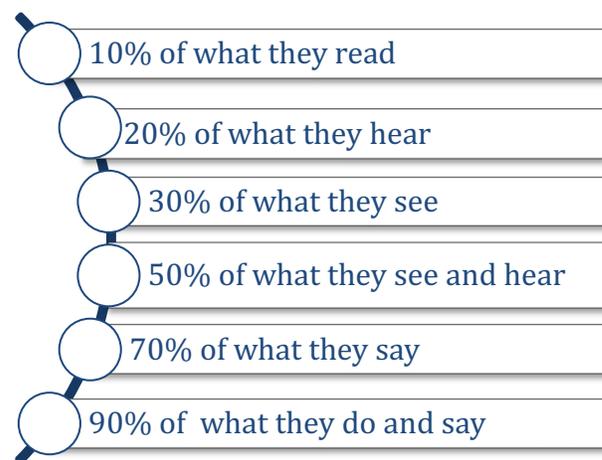
It is highly likely that someone will speak by the time five seconds are up. If not, **do not** break the trust factor and call on someone to speak. Feel free to offer some suggestions or move on. Have a back-up activity ready to generate discussion on the topic if you are not getting a response from the group.

Waiting can be one of the toughest things to do when facilitating a group. Practicing this

technique will make it easier and more comfortable (Norris 2003, 2008).

Participant Involvement

People remember new information when they do something and talk about it. Talking about it also reinforces learning. According to Magnesen (1983), adults will generally remember:



An active, learner-centered approach, with a variety of activities that energize multiple senses can play a role in how much of the new information is retained (Magnesen 1983).

Participant Involvement: Simple Ways to Increase Participation

How do we get our learners to remember that 90% of what they should do and say? Following are some examples of how to increase participation and learning (Norris 2003, 2008):

Partner interactions. This is the most common approach to increasing participation. Pairs are given a topic and a time limit for discussion. You can use this method in a number of ways including partner walk-and talk (partners walk while they are discussing the topic) which can be effective because it gets

people up out of chairs and moving around. Make sure to limit the time for discussion so that learners don't become bored and get off-topic.

Trio talks. These talks are the same as partner interactions but with groups of 3 people instead. These talks can be helpful when you are teaching a specific skill. The third person can serve as an observer of their partners as they practice the skill.

Table chats. These chats include up to four people and are useful if your tables are round and small enough for everyone to participate. Table chats still include a short discussion of the specific topic and work well if the group is developing a chart, a checklist, or completing another task as part of the discussion.

Make sure your partnering activities use open questions related to your topic.



Photo: University Relations, Virginia Tech

Participant Involvement: Benefits of Using Partnering Interactions

One way to utilize open questions is to facilitate partnering interactions at the beginning of your workshop or lesson. Partnering interactions allow learners to answer an open question as part of a smaller group. This smaller group helps learners to feel safe in responding without having to do so in front of the entire group. The

small group reports answers back to the entire group as they choose. Again, this is an example of “voice by choice.”

You may also want to initiate more partnering interactions with open questions at other times during your program or workshop. Small groups of two – four people work well for learner participation. Partner interactions also help to begin a conversation and help learners make meaning of their experience. This also encourages learning to take place (Norris 2003, 2008).

Participant involvement and the Key to Learning: The 4 A's

Now that we have discussed how to increase participation and facilitate dialogue, let's look at four specific activities, **Anchor, Add, Apply,** and **Away**, to help make your program interactive and informative. These activities are especially effective if you are seeing learners more than one time (Norris 2008).

- **ANCHOR** activities connect the topic to the learners' lives and serve as the lead into your lesson plan or program topic. They also set the tone of your program and get learners ready for learning.
- **ADD** activities provide new information (this is the information that is the objective of your presentation). Share your lesson or program objectives here. Select three of your most important messages. Norris (2008) suggests the SPICE acronym to help you design this part of your program:

S	=	Short (15-20 minutes)
P	=	Pictures or charts, video
I	=	Interesting (use different ways to present information)
C	=	Compelling (how does this make a difference in my life?)
E	=	Easy, simple-to-understand language

- **APPLY** activities give learners an opportunity to practice using the information that you presented in the session. This is where your learners will do something with the content or skill they just learned. It can be as simple as a partner interaction or more complex such as producing something, like a recipe.
- **AWAY** activities encourage learners to take the new information with them when they leave your session and apply it to their own lives. This provides a conclusion to your program. Review the content that was previously covered and ask them to summarize what they have learned. Ask learners to share one thing they will do as a result of today's class. Always end with the open-ended question, "What are your questions?" rather than "Does anyone have any questions?" (Norris 2003, 2008).
 - For goal setting in this AWAY section: When you meet again, discuss how learners did on their goals.
 - If they did not reach them, consider another approach that is more doable. They should not feel bad about not reaching goals but consider what barriers they need to deal with in overcoming their challenges.

Incorporating the 4 A's into your program ensures your learnings have done the following:

- Anchored the topic in their own lives (**ANCHOR**)
- Received some great new information (**ADD**)
- Applied the information through an interesting activity (**APPLY**)
- Made a plan to use the new information in the future (**AWAY**)

Ideally, learners should experience all four A's, and depending on the type of learning experience, you may only incorporate a few of

them. Regardless of how many of these activities you use, the learners need to be able to apply what they have learned (Norris 2003, 2008).

A Few Additional Things to Remember About Adult Learners

Dialogue learning always relies on understanding specific characteristics about adult learners. According to Daugherty (2010b), the following are some specific characteristics to keep in mind as you implement the teaching techniques outlined in this document.

Adult learners are autonomous and self-directed. This means that you need to actively involve them as learners. You are the facilitator, rather than the teacher. Try to find out what learners want to learn before designing your session or program.

Adult learners have a foundation of knowledge and life experiences. Acknowledge the expertise of learners. Encourage learners to share experiences and knowledge.

Adults are goal-oriented. Adults have clear objectives. Have a clearly defined plan for your program and one or two simple objectives. If you appear to be disorganized, people will feel like they are wasting their time.

Adult learners are relevancy-oriented. Activities and topics should be relevant to the defined objectives.

Adult learners are practical. Explicitly state how the content applies to learners' lives.

Adult learners need to be respected. Treat learners as equals. Acknowledge the wealth of knowledge learners bring to your program.

Working with Youth

Youth, like adults, learn best when they have an opportunity to do what it is they are learning. Four-H prides itself on teaching youth through hands-on activities. Remember, just like adults, youth want to be active; they don't want to sit and listen to someone lecture. This is especially true in after-school settings where children have been sitting all day; they do not want to come to a nutrition lesson and sit and listen to someone talk. Make sure you plan lots of activities to get youth up and moving around.

Your local Extension Agent for 4-H Youth Development can also train you on how to work with youth in your programs. Contact your supervising Extension agent for more information. Also, refer to the "Resources for Further Reading" section for additional publications about working with youth.



Photo: University Relations, Virginia Tech

Additional Steps to Plan a Learner-Centered Program

As you consider a more learner-centered approach to your programs, there are multiple methods for preparation. However, the following seven steps are helpful in developing an entire program (Vella 2002).

For this publication, these seven planning steps will be briefly described to help you get started.

However, it is important that you work with your supervising Extension agent to complete these steps. If you work with other Extension programs, you may contact other Extension professionals who are experienced in working with this style of program planning:

1. **Who:** Describe your learners. How many learners are you planning to attend? What is their previous experience? Where are they coming from? List who is leading or co-leading the program. This information will help you make your program more relevant to your learners.
2. **Why:** What do the learners need and want? Why is this program needed for the learners?
3. **When:** Specify the date and time of your program. What is the duration of the program?
4. **Where:** List the location where you will hold your program. What materials and equipment are already available at the location? What will you need to provide?
5. **What:** Develop the content for the program. What do learners need to know related to this lesson or program? How will they best learn it? (Norris 2003). This step can take some extra time to develop, especially as you consider how (and in which order) you will deliver the content. Also, consider how much time you will have to cover the content. Do you need to pare down or increase the content to fit within the time frame of your program? Your supervising Extension agent or professional can assist you with this step.
6. **What for:** Describe what your learners need to be able to do or to accomplish as a result of learning the content. According to Vella (2002), this step will include developing some achievement objectives. Work with your supervising agent or Extension professional to develop these objectives.
7. **How:** Create learning tasks to ensure the achievement objectives are met. This step

gives learners the opportunity to think about the content and consider how they will use it in the future. These learning tasks should be based in the Four A's Model: Anchor, Add, Apply, and Away (Norris 2003) mentioned previously.

Like the previous two steps in this plan, work with your supervising Extension agent or other Extension professional to develop these learning tasks. As you plan your program using these seven steps, consider putting them into a blank chart with two columns. The left column should list the seven steps, and the second column describes each step. Use blank poster paper to write out this seven-step plan (Norris 2003, 2008).

In summary, planning programs and incorporating learner-centered dialogue can take some time as you work in partnership with your supervising Extension agent or other Extension professional. However, it is well worth the effort to make sure your learners can actively practice what they have learned and make it more applicable to their lives.

Resources for Further Reading

The following are additional publications that are helpful for you as you prepare to teach nutrition and food safety programs, food demonstrations, farmers market demonstrations, and acquire facilities, materials, and equipment. Also listed are resources for working with children and youth.

Based on your interests and skills, you may use one or more of these publications. Your supervising Extension agent may also give you more guidance on which publications will best suit your specific skills, talents, and interests:

DePorter, B., M. Reardon., and S. Singer-Nouri. (1999). *Quantum Teaching: Orchestrating*

Student Success. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

- Identifies strategies for building a supportive learning environment
- Describes methods for introducing active learning experiences in a group setting

The Effective Volunteer Teacher, Master Food Volunteer Program (adapted with permission from Oklahoma State University).

<http://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/FST/FST-102/FST-102-PDF.pdf>

- Suggests tips for successful teaching
- Provides additional ideas for designing lesson plans
- Describes the steps in planning a lesson plan
- Describes ways to develop visuals and handouts to help learners learn and remember content
- Identifies steps to review the facility, acquire materials, and equipment needed to facilitate the program

Master Food Volunteer Foods Demonstration Guide. <http://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/FST/FST-100/FST-100-PDF.pdf>

- Describes steps to plan a food demonstration
- Identifies guidelines to keep foods safe during a food demonstration
- Defines tips for giving effective food demonstrations

Leave 'em Star Struck: A Fruits and Vegetables Demonstration Activity for Farmers Markets.

<http://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/FST/FST-101/FST-101-PDF.pdf>

- Identifies steps to prepare a successful food demonstration specific to a farmers' market
- Describes policies that need to be followed via the local health department and farmers market for conducting a food demonstration
- Describes food safety recommendations for keeping food safe during a food demonstration at the farmers market

The Thrill of Skill, Home Baking Association.
http://homebaking.org/PDF/2013_thrilloftheskill.pdf

- Lists age-appropriate skills for children in the kitchen
- Includes core outcomes for art, current affairs, history/social studies, cultural ties, literacy, math, sciences, service learning, and technology.

Using an Experiential Model in 4-H, University of Florida Extension.

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/files/4H/4H24300.pdf>

- Experiential learning model
- Focuses more on the learner than the teacher

Ages and Stages of 4-H Youth Development, University of Missouri-Columbia Outreach and Extension.

<http://extension.missouri.edu/FNEP/LG782.pdf>

- Describes the stages of development for children and youth from early childhood to teen
- Includes implications for each stage for volunteers working with specific age groups

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<http://pods.dasnr.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-2369/T-8201web.pdf>.

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