

Facilitator Tips: How to Get the Most from This Curriculum

Teaching and Learning Strategies

All activities in the Discovering Healthy Choices curriculum were designed using experiential learning and inquiry. Experiential learning is grounded in the idea that experience is essential to learning and understanding. Specifically, experiential learning involves a recurring sequence of three distinct steps: 1) an experience (“Procedure/ Experiencing”) that involves learner exploration; 2) a period of discussion and reflection (“Sharing, Processing and Generalizing”) where learners share their reactions and observations, process their experience, and make generalizations to real-life examples; and 3) an opportunity to apply (“Apply”) new knowledge and skills in an authentic manner, which helps learners deepen and broaden their understanding (it helps learning last!).

Inquiry is a teaching and learning strategy whereby learners are engaged in activities that require the observation and manipulation of objects and ideas in order to construct knowledge and develop skills. Inquiry is grounded in experience, focuses on the use and development of critical thinking skills, and targets the learning and application of specific content knowledge. Furthermore, inquiry starts with a question, and effective questioning strategies are critical when facilitating inquiry-based learning. Open-ended questions or prompts (e.g., Explain what you know about...; or Discuss your understanding of...) promote learner inquiry and are considered more effective than closed-ended questions or prompts (e.g., Name the parts of...; or What is the name of...?).

The inquiry-based activities in the Discovering Healthy Choices curriculum were designed using the 5-step Experiential Learning Cycle by Pfeiffer and Jones (1983): Experience, Sharing, Processing, Generalizing, and Application. It is recommended that adequate time be allotted for youth learners to proceed through each step in order for learning to be maximized.

As part of Discovering Healthy Choices, learners will discover nutrition concepts through hands-on and garden-based nutrition activities. Garden-based activities not only allow youth to enhance nutrition knowledge, preferences for vegetables, and consumption of fruits and vegetables, but it also gives them an opportunity to explore agriculture and the environment while improving life skills, self-esteem, and social skills and behavior.

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Organization of Learning Environment:

Creating the environments where learning happens

The activities in the Discovering Healthy Choices curriculum were designed to be facilitated in a small group-learning environment. Learners construct understanding through inquiry using observations, the manipulation of objects and ideas, and personal reflection. However, learning is a social endeavor where dialogue and reflection with others are critical elements. Therefore, creating physical and social environments where learners can carry out inquiry will help learners organize their thoughts and develop an understanding of the content and processes being emphasized in specific curriculum activities.

Organization of the Curriculum

The modules are sequenced so that foundational concepts are discovered first, and then built upon with more advanced concepts as they continue through the modules.

Each module consists of one hands-on activity, one application activity in the instructional garden, and multiple take-home application activities. When learners apply their new knowledge and skills in authentic situations, this is when they are able to develop deeper understanding of the subject matter. At this point, youth have already completed the hands-on activities that have introduced new concepts and skills. The application activities provide the youth with the opportunity to take what they have learned and apply it to independent, real-world situations in the instructional garden, at home, or in the classroom. This application of knowledge is a critical step of the learning process.

Curriculum Activity Layout

- **Activity Title**

The activity title introduces the facilitator to the topic that will be addressed during the activity.

- **Background Information**

This introductory section provides facilitators with a brief overview of the subject matter and provides examples that help to explain the importance of the topic.

Facilitator Tip: The background information is not meant to be shared with the youth prior to the activity. Rather, it is intended to support facilitators by providing factual information that may help ground and inform group discussions.

- **Life Skills**

Life skills are abilities that help youth become productive, contributing members of society. The activities are designed to provide youth with the opportunity to practice particular life skills that are utilized in everyday life. The life skills targeted are listed for each activity. Learn more about the Targeting Life Skills model at: http://www.csrees.usda.gov/nea/family/res/pdfs/Targeting_Life_Skills.pdf

- **Subject Links**

This describes other subject areas that are connected to the module.

- **Education Standards Supported**

This curriculum supports Common Core State Standards, Next Generation Science Standards, and California Nutrition Education Competencies. Specific details for standards addressed for each grade level is described in the “Education Standards Supported” section on page 9.

- **Time Required**

Each module includes an estimate of the time needed to complete the activities. The actual time required for the activities will vary based on level of learner interest, size of the group, age of the group members, and the setting in which the activities take place.

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- **Learning Objectives: Concepts and Vocabulary**

Facilitators are provided with a list of defined concepts and vocabulary that is meant to be discovered by the youth during their exploration and completion of the activities. The list should not be provided to the youth at the beginning of the activity. At the end of each activity, the facilitators should ensure that the appropriate terms and concepts have been discovered by or introduced to the youth.
- **Suggested Groupings**

Suggestions are provided for the group size designed for each activity. The suggested groupings are meant to help facilitate quality learning among the youth. Some activities are designed for youth to work in either small groups, large groups, or individually.
- **Materials Needed**

A list of the materials needed to complete the activities is provided for the facilitator. The list describes the materials to be used. Most materials are provided (these are marked with an *); however, other materials will need to be obtained prior to activity implementation.
- **Getting Ready**

This list describes what needs to be done by the facilitator to prepare for the activity, how many of each of the materials to prepare, and what tasks need to be completed prior to the beginning of the activity.
- **Opening Questions/Prompts**

Questions or prompts presented at the beginning of each activity are meant draw the youth into the topic being addressed in the activity. Responses to the questions will provide the facilitator with an understanding of what the youth already know about the topic. Facilitators should encourage the youth to record their answers to these introductory questions on the provided flip chart paper, as this is an important part of the learning process.

Facilitator Tip: This is the point when the activity begins with the youth. Opening Questions/Prompts should be asked as they are written. Open-ended questioning is a key element of inquiry-based learning.
- **Procedure (Experiencing)**

This is the part of the curriculum when the youth experience and complete the activity itself. It is highly recommended that facilitators read the procedure in its entirety before implementing with the youth so that the activity flows smoothly. It is important for youth to record their observations, ideas, and other thoughts during the procedure on the flip chart paper provided, as this is an important part of the learning process.
- **Sharing, Processing, and Generalizing**

Following the procedure, there is a period of reflection, during which time the youth come back together as one group and share their observations with each other. This phase provides youth an opportunity to communicate their findings, listen to what others discovered, consider the various thought processes, and learn from each other. It helps to solidify what the youth have learned throughout the course of the activity. This phase also contains prompts that allow the youth to engage in thinking about how they went about solving a problem. This is called meta-cognition, which is considered a key element in developing a deeper understanding.
- **Concept and Term Discovery/Introduction**

At this point of the activity, most of the concepts will have most likely already been discovered by the youth. Many concepts will have already been defined by now as well. However, some concepts may have been missed or poorly understood and need to be clarified; additionally, technical terms may need to be introduced to the youth.

Facilitator Tip: Ensure that all terms/concepts have been discovered or introduced to the youth. Additionally, make certain that any misconceptions have been addressed.

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Starting an Instructional Garden

- **Books and Downloadable Resources**

California School Garden Network. Gardens for Learning, a guide for creating and sustaining your school garden. Available for free download <http://www.csgn.org/store/gardens-learning>

Center for Eco Literacy. Getting Started, A Guide for Creating School Gardens as Outdoor Classrooms. Available for free download <http://www.ecoliteracy.org/downloads/getting-started>

Sunset Western Garden Book. (2007). 8th Edition.

- **School Garden Grant Opportunities**

California Fertilizer Foundation. CFF awards grants of \$1,200 to California K-12 school garden programs. Awards include educational materials. Applications reviewed in January and June. <http://www.calfertilizer.org/grant.htm>

National Gardening Association. Offers a variety of grant programs with awards of up to \$500 <http://www.kidsgardening.com/grants.asp>

Orchard Supply Hardware School Garden Project. Grants of up to \$1,000 in materials, plus support from an OSH Garden Coordinator. Preference for schools that have never had a garden before. Watch site for grant cycles. <http://www.osh.com>

Western Growers Foundation. From WGA Homepage, click on School Garden Programs. WGA offers grants of \$1,000 and \$1,500 plus garden start-up supplies. Applications due November 15 and June 1 of each year. <http://www.wga.com>

Extension Opportunities Beyond the Learning Setting

Discovering Healthy Choices was developed as part of the Shaping Healthy Choices Program. The Shaping Healthy Choices Program is a multi-component approach to improve children's food choices. Other components of this program include a curriculum for cooking demonstrations, Cooking Up Healthy Choices, and family newsletters called Team Up for Families.

Cooking Up Healthy Choices contains is directly linked to Discovering Healthy Choices. It was developed to offer more opportunities for youth to apply the concepts they have learned through the participation in five cooking demonstrations.

The Team Up for Families newsletters include messages about what the youth are learning in the Discovering Healthy Choices curriculum, in addition to positive nutrition-related parenting practices. Each of the eight newsletters are designed to link to each of the eight modules in Discovering Healthy Choices.

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