

Teamwork and Cultural Literacy for Teens
Program Background, Overview and Summary

By Nate Arnett and Graham Cochran

Ohio State University Extension

narnett@metroparks.org

gcochran@metroparks.org

(937) 278-2601

Today's youth are growing up in an exciting time - an age of diversity. The world is changing faster than we have ever seen it before and there is a need in Extension to help clientele look at issues from a global perspective (Ludwig, 2002). According to Ludwig, "Extension professionals will find themselves challenged and pushed by those on the cutting edge to become more skilled at integrating global concepts into local programming." According to Hansell (2000), "We live in an increasingly complex and multicultural society and our success as proactive adults and contributing citizens depends on our ability to successfully negotiate cultural differences and to appreciate diverse perspectives."

While living in another country is a powerful way to develop intercultural competence, there are numerous opportunities for Americans to develop these skills without leaving the country, due to the multicultural makeup of our society (Hansell, 2000). Banks et al. (2001) explains that for youth, academic knowledge and skills are essential but not sufficient; youth must be competent in intergroup and civic skills to function effectively in today's complex and ethnically polarized nation and world. Cross-cultural skills and understanding are necessary for relating to others in our nation's increasingly diverse workforce. As a Youth Development program, 4-H can empower young people who need the knowledge, skills and attitudes to communicate and be successful in a diverse society.

In 2004 our team developed the TCLT (Teamwork and Cultural Literacy for Teens) program with targeted outcomes focused around: (1) teens demonstrating intercultural knowledge and skills gained through planning and leading activities for the Cultural Learning Camp, (2) participants increasing knowledge and aspirations regarding international experiences offered through Ohio 4-H, (3) participants improving workplace competencies and skills by improving interpersonal skills and abilities to work with others, and (4) participants increasing awareness of global issues.

For the past three years, the TCLT program has brought together different groups of 4-H members from Ohio through a teambuilding and international learning experience. The units working together on this project have very different youth participants (Warren County has more of a white, middle/upper class population, Adventure Central serves primarily a lower income, African American audience, and Greene County 4-H has a lot of involvement with the working class and rural community.) TCLT has successfully involved at-risk youth from an urban 4-H program with more traditional 4-H participants. The target age for this program (ages 12-15) is ideal for retaining early teens in the 4-H program and exposing them to international experiences that develop intercultural skills.

A team of adults and teens are involved in planning. They select participants and hold a two-day Cultural Learning Camp. The Cultural Learning Camp includes teambuilding, discussions about global food resources and rustic camping. The group then participates in an extended learning experience where they travel to Howell, Michigan for the Global Village program. Designed by Heifer International, the Global Village program helps participants get a taste of the real world with an overnight, "immersion" program designed to give the participant an idea of what it is like to live as a subsistence level farmer from different areas of the world. Youth live in family groups and quickly learn to rely on each other and their neighbors.

In addition to program sessions and camping events, debriefing meetings were used to further explore the experience and discuss how lessons learned could be applied to their life, future 4-H experiences and the world of work. The group processes the experience as well as discusses future activities and how they might stay involved by planning other programs for their peers.

Program Evaluation

TCLT was evaluated with survey instruments using a post-then-pre method, which can be successfully used to identify self-reported changes (Rockwell & Kohn, 1989). Data was collected from program participants regarding presence of the Key Elements of 4-H Youth Development as well as KASA change related to program objectives. Qualitative data was also collected using open ended questions as part of the survey and through questions used for discussion at a debriefing meeting with youth participants and parents.

Participants reported pre-to-post program gains in indicators that they experienced the following key elements: positive relationship with a caring adult, opportunity to value and practice service, an inclusive environment, opportunity to see oneself as an active participant in the future, and engagement in learning. Through participation in this program, youth reported an increased appreciation and knowledge of other cultures. Youth also reported that the skills gained will help them in the future. When asked about what they gained, a significant number wrote something about gaining respect for those who are not like themselves. Finally, participants reported gains in interpersonal skills that will help prepare them for success in the 21st Century workplace.

Participant comments as part of open ended questions and debriefing further illustrated the program's impact. When asked about changes made because of this experience, youth made comments like "I don't leave a whole plate of food anymore"; and "If there is something that I want, I can wait now." After TCLT, one youth lived out on the deck at his home for two weeks, gathering rainwater and living in simpler conditions. Responding to a prompt about how TCLT prepared them for the world of work one youth said "I have to not judge people by first appearances."