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Spicing up 4-H Teen Public Speaking with Multiple Intelligence Approaches

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Spicing up 4-H Teen Public Speaking with Multiple Intelligence Approaches

Abstract

Spicing up 4-H teen public speaking can be accomplished through multiple intelligences (MI) approaches. Innovative introductions, visual imagery, and metaphor used with an MI lens strengthened Speak-Up programs for 4-H Ambassadors. The metaphor of chili peppers enabled youth to focus on five major speech components: the aroma (title), hot spice (opening), hot sauce (central idea), meat and potatoes (body), and then adding more hot sauce (conclusion). The pepper theme was built into the entire program (growing, cooking, cleaning, decorating, cultural aspects, history, etc.). MI enabled teens to make new friends, gain confidence, learn leadership, and overcome fears in public presentations.

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4-H Ambassadors and Teen Leaders Speak-Up

Chili peppers, their aroma, and the culture surrounding their use, formed a template for spicing up, "SPEAK-UP," public speeches and presentations by teens who attended an Idaho 4-H Ambassadors Training. This youth development opportunity was distinctive in its incorporation of Howard Gardner's (1999, 1993) multiple intelligence (MI) theory with a fun chili pepper, hot spice theme. One of the most remarkable features of MI theory is how it provides eight different pathways to learning. Latin music, dance, and song were features of this program. Multiple intelligence teaching approaches strengthened this "SPEAK-UP" program in Idaho.

Sparking interest in and strengthening public speaking skills is a goal of the Idaho 4-H Ambassador program. SPEAK-UP programs motivate teens to express themselves in dynamic ways and increase their confidence so that they overcome fears and are more willing to speak before groups.

For 18 years, Idaho 4-H has conducted statewide 4-H Ambassador training for youth near Donnelly, Idaho. In November 2001 the public speaking component of the Ambassador program was spiced up through the integration of multiple intelligence concepts with beginning and advanced Ambassadors ages 13 - 19. Teens exhibited such a high level of satisfaction with the "Chili Pepper" workshops that presenters were requested to repeat the program at the Western Regional 4-H Teen Leadership Retreat in January of 2002. Extension professionals and adult chaperones also enhanced their public speaking skills as a result of the program.

Chili Peppers as Metaphor for Five Speech Components

Chili peppers were the metaphor used to enhance public speaking. Youth focused on five major speech components: the aroma (title), hot spice (opening), hot sauce (central idea), meat and potatoes (body), and then adding more hot sauce (conclusion). The pepper theme was built into the entire program (growing, cooking, cleaning, decorating, cultural aspects, history, etc.). Multiple intelligences were used in planning the program, and 4-H Ambassadors were introduced to the concept through this workshop.

To better understand MI and its integration into public speaking, teens divided into multiple groups of 10 (standing, sitting, and laying on the ground) and read together "Bugs" by Margaret Wise Brown. They loved this activity, requesting several times to "do it again," using a variation of SPEAK-UP delivery techniques and methods.

In keeping with the pepper theme, teens verbalized the hows and whys of the tongue twister "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers" musically, linguistically, and bodily-kinesthetically. Naturalistic, kinesthetic, and linguistic activities were then used to reinforce the concepts of pitch, expression, volume, and cadence. These incorporations of Gardener's (1999, 1993) MI theory into public speaking had a tremendous impact on the Idaho 4-H Ambassadors.

Multiple Intelligences Use Enhances Learning

Gardener suggests that intelligence has more to do with the capacity for (1) solving problems and (2) fashioning products in a context-rich and naturalistic setting. He describes the eight intelligences (spatial, logical-mathematical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, linguistic, and naturalist) that relate to learning and educational practice. Individuals who incorporate multiple intelligences in their teaching and learning practice are more effective in knowledge transfer (Silver, Strong, & Perini, 2000).

Educators can learn to apply MI theory to today's learners (Bruetsch, 1998). Application of this theory enhances team building, assessment, productivity, and knowledge gain among all ages of learners (Lazear, 1998; Armstrong, 2000). Research suggests that the actualization of MI by teachers, Extension educators, 4-H professionals, and trainers will enhance learning and behavior change among all learners (Laughlin, 2001). MI links, bridges, and connects the dots from awareness to actualization of learning in Extension practice. Idaho Extension educators found using MI applications with teens "spiced up" learning, engagement, understanding, and fun!

Gardner suggests that we should place equal attention on individuals who show gifts of all eight intelligences. During SPEAK-UP, spatial learners were exposed to several varieties of dried Chili peppers in baskets that could be incorporated into the pepper framework. Costumes, table decorations (napkins, tablecloths, etc.), and posters of peppers were used to emphasize the pepper theme.

Bodily-kinesthetic learners were stimulated using projection activities, tasting "pepper" jellybeans, and practicing speeches in pairs and small groups. The support materials were presented in a logical-mathematical framework as a set of flip cards and in a "speech delivery tip outline" handout.

Interpersonal dialogue was cultivated during closed-armed and open-armed posture activities, in pairs, group work, and in presenting speeches. Participants reflected intrapersonally through writing their speeches. Naturalistic environments were used to reinforce speech concepts as group-reading events took place inside and outside of program facilities.

Lessons were planned using the *Multiple Intelligences Lesson Plan Book* by Anne Breutsche. SPEAK-UP approaches were sequenced as individual and small group tasks in a safe environment. Four (Fun! Ethics! Self-responsibility! Self-discipline!) entertaining activities based in multiple intelligences targeted specific SPEAK-UP goals and objectives. Using the Chili theme as a springboard, 4-H Ambassadors embraced different speaking methods and incorporated multiple intelligence approaches into group and individual speeches to end the Ambassador program.

Key youth development concepts included: Planning/preparation of speeches (use of "Build-on" speech outline cards, emphasis on practice, research on topics, and knowing your audience) delivery techniques of speeches (eye contact, body posture, humor, voice), personal presence (dress, non-verbal cues), and a discussion about social skills.

Achievements: Integration of MI into Public Speaking Programs

Forty-five first-year 4-H Ambassadors gave speeches. They exhibited creative use of the information gained in the SPEAK-UP development program. Through documented observation, teens gave innovative introductions using visual imagery and metaphors. Over half of participants used speech outline cards to present speeches. Over 40% of the teens used humor and fun in their presentation. Several participants exhibited efficiency in microphone use. Over 90% of speakers used the five major speech components highlighted in SPEAK-UP program. Teens formed new friendships, gained confidence, and had fun when working in pairs and small groups on components of their speech.

Teen participants reported that they learned leadership and responsibility through this public speaking experience. Several linked 4-H demonstrations to public speaking for the first time. Senior 4-H Ambassadors shared that public speaking helped them in their family business, overcoming their fears, community involvement, and work experience.

John Paul Murphy, Utah 4-H Specialist, noted; "When participants had an opportunity to say what they learned the most from the Western Region Teen Leadership Retreat and what they would take home to use in their 4-H programs, almost every kid mentioned the SPEAK-UP workshop and its great learning impact."

Spicing up 4-H teen public speaking with multiple intelligences approaches and the chili theme brought forth new understanding in the learners. One teen exclaimed, "4-H is amazing . . . it is experiential learning." Several indicated that the use of music in speeches was "good." Adult chaperones indicated they would use multiple intelligences and the SPEAK-UP development process in their communities, 4-H clubs, and in the promotion of Conservation District programs and events. Achievements of the Integration of MI into the Speak-Up program reinforced the ancient Chinese proverb "Tell me, I forget. Show me, I remember. Involve me, I understand."

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