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Facilitate the Awesome: Creating Capacity for Teen Programs in Youth Development

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Abstract

A critical need exists for adults who are properly prepared to meaningfully engage with adolescents. While utilizing teens in leadership and teaching roles has been gaining popularity and application, a developmental and skills-based approach for improving “trusted adult” capacity to engage with adolescents has not been comprehensively addressed in other programs or curricula. The “Facilitate the Awesome” short course focuses on advancing adult knowledge and skills related to supporting the physical, emotional, and social needs of adolescents. In an evaluation of 113 participants statistical significance was established for all the learning variables tested, using a sign test and estimated effect sizes using Cohen’s *D*, indicating that the selection of information and skills being provided to participants were potentially novel and useful.

Keywords: Adolescent, Leadership Development, Strength-based, Trauma-Informed, Curriculum

Introduction

A critical need exists for adults who are properly prepared to meaningfully engage with adolescents. Ongoing analysis of 4-H programs nationwide indicates the number of teen enrollments drops with each increasing year of age past 11 (Albright & Ferrari, 2010; DeCubellis & Barrick, 2020; Harder et al., 2005; Hamilton et al., 2014; Heinsohn, 1995; Newby & Sallee, 2011). The enrollment statistics for Washington State are no different. In 2017, teens in Washington's 4-H program were surveyed (Lile et al., 2021) to offer insight into program satisfaction, coded to the Essential Elements of positive youth development (Martz et al., 2016). Lile, and colleagues' findings that "youth expressed the desire for more developmentally appropriate challenges and opportunities to take on more responsibility" (p. 65–66), paralleled much of the published research exploring reasons teens drop out of 4-H. Acknowledging and embracing youth voice when considering program improvements is a necessity for organizations promoting asset-based models and youth empowerment. Speaking on adolescent retention, Hamilton and colleagues (2014) state, "More is known about the characteristics of youth who drop out than the features of youth organizations, which is unfortunate because only the latter can be altered as a means of improving retention" (p. 2). Creating an inventory of the developmental needs of adolescents, and skills for adults to be partners in that development, seems germane to Hamilton and colleagues' (2014) recommendation for program characteristics. Examining the systems in which teens currently participate could also be instructive.

Out of this need was born the grounded development of the short course "Facilitate the Awesome" (FTA), which is composed of four 2-hour modules addressing adolescent development, communication, and leadership. FTA was developed following the best traditions of the Extension mission, bringing together a group of like-minded and highly capable staff and faculty to collaboratively address a need in an intentional and context-appropriate form. The overarching objective of FTA is to provide adults with tools and knowledge to improve their ability to work with a diverse range of adolescents (ages 10–21), which should result in enriched social capital *with and for* adolescents. While utilizing teens in leadership and teaching roles has been gaining popularity and application (see Lee & Murdock, 2001), a developmental and skills-based approach for improving "trusted adult" capacity to engage with adolescents has not been comprehensively addressed in other programs or curricula. This article contextualizes the development of the "Facilitate the Awesome" program and presents analysis of evaluation data from its first five years of implementation.

Relevant Literature

Understanding what attracts teens to and keeps them in out-of-school youth activities, and what they gain from participation (Deschenes et al., 2010; Hansen et al., 2003; Lile et al., 2021) comprises half the task of securing meaningful engagement opportunities for adolescents. The other half of the challenge consists of determining what kinds of adult and peer interactions best scaffold adolescent development. It was primarily the definition and pursuit of this positive interactive engagement that guided the design of FTA. FTA encourages the development of strengths-based programming that helps adult facilitators communicate effectively while building social and leadership skills among adolescents.

Recognizing a need for more autonomy and resultant accountability is critical for adolescent identity development & programs (Grolnick et al., 2002). The adolescent need for autonomy can be a challenge in clubs where the teen's parents and/or adult leaders play a dominant role in suggesting, directing, and controlling youth decisions and activities (Dworkin & Larson, 2007; Wallace et al., 2015). For example, Lile and colleagues (2021) noted that community club programs in Washington State emphasize family and volunteer engagement, the volunteer core being comprised primarily of parents. During adolescence it is developmentally beneficial for adolescents to begin exploring relationships independent of the family unit, in environs where they can assume more personal initiative and accountability (Hansen et al., 2003; Lapsley & Rice, 1988). The development of leadership skills, which is often seeded in younger 4-H members, can be directed toward more self-determined and outward-facing community leadership

opportunities, specifically opportunities that assist adolescents in greater self and peer-group definition (Akiva et al., 2014; Yeager et al., 2017). Determining what adolescents seek and value in organized activities is a critical component of designing approaches that promote self-determination. FTA was designed to encourage adults to use questioning techniques that promote adolescent decision-making and goal setting. The evaluation of the program was utilized to investigate whether these approaches were considered novel and useful to adult participants.

Hansen and colleagues (2003) surveyed teens to identify personal and interpersonal developmental aspects in organized adolescent activities. The *personal* gains adolescents identified in organized activities included: 1) identity work; 2) the development of initiative including goal setting and problem solving; and 3) the building of basic physical, emotional, and cognitive skills. Conspicuously, within the realm of *interpersonal* development, the youth in Hansen and colleagues' study (2003) identified: 1) the development of social competencies including leadership and teamwork, 2) the extension of peer networks and relationships, and 3) access to the social capital provided by adults. The authors of the FTA curriculum believe that by focusing on the Essential Elements of Positive Youth Development (Martz et al., 2016), we align with many of these adolescent priorities. Hansen et al. (2003) also discussed the challenges of extending peer relationships to diverse and more inclusive audiences, which adolescents did not necessarily identify as an outcome in the assessment of their peer networking. Hansen and colleagues (2003) stress that it is “the *conditions* under which youth interact that influences changes in young people’s behavior and attitudes” (p. 49) [*emphasis added*]. The adult advisers of a youth group greatly influence their group’s climate and openness as well (Eccles & Gootman, 2002). The authors of FTA designed activities for the encouragement of greater communication, inclusivity, and hope (Lile et al., 2021; Pringle et al., 2019; Rand & Touza, 2018) as these are beneficial in adolescent development (NASEM, 2020). Interestingly, adult disposition is frequently cited in studies of adolescent programming as a reason for teen attrition (Hansen et al., 2003; Lile et al., 2021). The authors of FTA iteratively built a series of experiences intended to increase communication skills, raise *adult* awareness of trauma-informed programming, and guide short course participants toward “trusted adult” status (Pringle et al., 2019).

Facilitate the Awesome: A Short Course Empowering Adults with Adolescents

The FTA short course includes four 2-hour modules focused on advancing adult knowledge and skills related to supporting the physical, emotional, and social needs of adolescents. Opportunities to apply learning in FTA are constructivist and lean heavily into cooperative group experiences (Johnson et al., 2010). FTA teaches a motivational pedagogy (referenced to the Essential Elements of Positive Youth Development) emphasizing developmentally appropriate interactions and inclusive, trauma-informed strategies through which adult advisers can assist in creating growth and peer leadership opportunities for adolescents.

The current objectives and a short description of the main activities in each module are listed below.

Introduction

This short course begins with group introductions: an empathy-building exercise, modeling the establishment of a group agreement and an introduction to asset-based youth development (NASEM, 2020; NIFA, 2016; YLI, 2005).

Module 1: Adolescent Development

Learning Objectives

- Identity development is as a critical aspect of adolescent development
- Adolescence is a life stage of great physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development
- Adolescence may be viewed as having three stages with distinct differences

Participants learn about current and seminal theories of adolescent identity development (Elkind, 1967; Selman, 1980; Yeager et al., 2017); and participate in a categorical sorting exercise of early, middle, and late adolescent traits. This module also lays foundational information for understanding adolescent brain development and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) (CDC 2023; Jensen & Ellis Nutt, 2015).

Module 2: Empowering Adolescents

Learning Objectives

- Identifying and engaging individual strengths
- Using the essential elements of positive youth development to motivate and redirect adolescents
- Teaching and modeling mindset & goal attainment strategies

This module builds on the three-stage model of adolescence, providing instruction in growth-focused questioning techniques (Alexander et al., 2022; Rowe, 1986; Wiggins & McTighe, 2000) followed by strengths-based team-building exercises (Galloway et al., 2020; Vanderwey et al., 2014). Participants are encouraged to brainstorm and reflect on diverse ways they can support the Essential Elements of PYD in each stage of adolescence and to consider how to address misdirected fundamental needs (Brendtro et al., 2002). There is an activity introducing growth vs. fixed mindset (Dweck & Molden, 2017). The module ends with a developmental map for making SMART goals (Doran et al., 1981) with adolescents.

Module 3: Key Elements of Adolescent Leadership

Learning Objectives

- Building inclusive social relationships matters
- Utilizing adolescent strengths leads to ownership and accountability
- Transformative leadership focuses on empowering others
- Advisers demonstrate empathy

Respecting that peer-focused interactions become more salient in adolescence (Brown, 1990; Johnson et al., 2010; Yeager et al., 2017), this module begins with a group discussion pertaining to the benefits and challenges of being inclusive. Participants engage in a role-play in which they “inhabit their teen-self” in a newly formed service club. Facilitators of the training act as adult advisers, applying the individual and group building techniques shared in Modules 1 & 2. The role-play is followed by a debrief and key theories pertaining to group development (Vanderwey et al., 2014).

The use of perspective-taking exercises is an effective tool for teaching adults and adolescents how to take the perspective of others, which is one of the essential developmental tasks of adolescence (Selman, 1980). Role-play can serve as a way of approximating and preparing for unknown risk situations. Advisers that offer empathetic perspective-taking can model a valuable leadership skill for adolescents in their personal growth and development processes. Centering adult FTA participants in perspective-taking activities also gives adults the opportunity to empathize with adolescent challenges.

Module 4: Encouraging Safe and Inclusive Behaviors in Teens

Learning Objectives

- Risk can be beneficial and is manageable for adolescents
- Authentic communication impacts decision-making
- Trauma-informed adults can create safe, inclusive settings and help adolescents mitigate the challenges of childhood trauma

Navigating relational accountability requires mutual respect. Securing “trusted adult” status requires adults who respectfully navigate pivotal decision-making conversations with adolescents (Pringle et al., 2019). Adolescent risk-taking can be framed as a positive learning experience if the community in which

the risks are taken is protective rather than prohibitive and punitive (Duell & Steinberg 2020; Gardner & Steinberg, 2005; Romer, 2010). Through additional role-play, this unit encourages adults to consider the developmental imperative of risk taking and the difference between growth-affirming and growth-debilitating risks during adolescence. It provides a framework for guiding adolescents in their own decision-making processes, which is what their developing brains require. Trauma-informed practice is a cornerstone of Module 4, emphasizing that effective positive youth development has many similarities to trauma-informed care (ITTIC, 2015).

These four modules create a cohesive and comprehensive educational short course for adults desirous to support adolescent developmental needs, leadership skills, and personal accountability capacities.

Participants

One hundred thirteen ($n = 49.13\%$) of the total number of adult participants ($N = 230$) in the FTA series completed the entire training and completed the evaluation surveys (2019–23). The units were initially delivered in person (2019), then moved to a live-virtual format beginning in 2020. Participants have been divided into four iterations or “rounds” coinciding with annual revisions to the curriculum (Table 1). Many participants of the in-person 2019 pilot were from non-Extension youth-serving and prevention organizations in Kitsap and Whatcom counties, Washington. In spring 2020, we formally started online training for 4-H staff, statewide. By 2021, 85 participants from 21 of Washington’s 39 counties had completed the full short course of four modules. From 2022 to 2023 we began sharing the curriculum nationally and have had representatives from 14 Land Grant universities participate. By the end of 2023, a total of 21 state program faculty and staff, 16 volunteers/parents, 27 representatives from community organizations, and 49 of unidentified affiliations completed the follow-up survey and provided feedback ($n = 113$). Table 1 summarizes each subgroup of individuals completing surveys by affiliation and training year.

Table 1. *Individuals completing surveys by affiliation and training year*

Round	4-H Staff	4-H Volunteer/Parent	Community Org	Unidentified	Total
1 – 2019*	3	3	20	24	50
2 – 2020–2021**	6	10	4	15	35
3 – 2022**/**	5	3	1	2	11
4 – 2023***	7	0	2	8	17
Total	21	16	27	49	113

* In person

** State Cohorts (virtual)

*** National Cohorts (virtual)

Fifty-one percent of the respondents (58) responded to the question regarding gender. Of those individuals, 79% (46) self-identified as female compared to 19% (11) self-identifying as male. One of the respondents selected “prefer not to say” and 49% (55) chose not to answer the question. Sixty-two percent of the of the respondents ($n = 70$) self-identified their race/ethnicity. Of those, 66% (46) selected White/Non-Hispanic, 7% (5) selected American Indian/Alaskan Native, 7% (5) selected Hispanic, 4% (4) selected Asian, and 1% (1) selected Black or African American.

Methodology

The “Facilitate the Awesome” Adolescent Adviser short course is an eight-hour interactive program, most recently offered as four modules in video-conference format, with each module being approximately two hours in duration. The four modules of FTA have consistently been delivered by at least two facilitators twice a year; currently eight faculty have extensive experience as facilitators in Washington State. The four

modules can be delivered in person, by video conference, or a hybrid arrangement. The training program includes a facilitation manual, a presentation slide deck, and a fillable PDF workbook for participants. To ensure inclusive and rich discussion and provide manageable numbers for breakout groups, virtual groups were kept to a maximum of 16 persons. Experience has shown that *in-person* groups of up to 30 participants are workable. The FTA short course has been offered twice a year for five years.

A retrospective pre-/post evaluation was created and was collected from participants following the end of the fourth unit of each four-unit short course. The evaluation opened with these two statements: 1) I will use the information I have learned in FTA to improve teen programming opportunities, and 2) As a result of this training I have built knowledge or skills that will help me be more effective in my work with teens. The evaluation then also included questions related to three or four of the targeted learning objectives of each unit. (Evaluation questions are included in Table 2 and Appendix A.) Questions in the pre-/post were phrased to reflect developing efficacy with the objective, for example: “Before this training I *could* help teens practice a decision-making process” and “After this training I *can* help teens practice a decision-making process.” The before/after Likert scale for the retrospective pre-/post included a scale of 1 to 4: 1. Not at All Confident, 2. Somewhat Confident, 3. Confident, 4. Very Confident. The retrospective pre-/post design was selected for its general efficiency in the context of the FTA short course program (Davis, 2003) and as noted in the University of Wisconsin–Madison (2021) evaluation quick tips, “at the beginning of a program it can be hard to ‘know what we don’t know’” (p. 1).

The primary documented evaluation data source was moved to Qualtrics beginning in 2020, and all evaluations since have been collected using Qualtrics. These self-reported data were used to document participant perceptions of learning and value at the conclusion of the FTA module as well as to inform the authors when objectives were not instigating learning change. Adaptations were based on feedback and intended to improve the learning value of FTA for participants. As the successive iterations of FTA gained broader appeal, the designers also brought together focus groups of participants from various populations to provide culturally relevant feedback and suggestions. The curriculum evaluation was not designed to address a research question, but rather to provide authentic and independent feedback on the FTA experience by participants to continuously improve the material. The project “Facilitate the Awesome: Adolescent Adviser Short Course Evaluation” has been certified by the WSU Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) as Not Human Subject Research (NHSR). IRB #20496-001.

Iterations and Adaptations

The adaptive process of creating the curriculum has been augmented by an open revision process between each delivery. Debriefing sessions among facilitators and with various diverse participant populations have been pivotal to improvements made during the revision process. Both the curriculum and objectives were reviewed twice a year after delivery and modified where data and qualitative feedback (such as participant comments) indicated opportunities to better align with the FTA priorities and participants’ needs. When an activity was not effective in meeting an objective, the activity would be revised. Objectives were only revised when the process or new research indicated there was a more beneficial learning target for advisers. Listed below is a summary of the revisions made to FTA between iterations.

Round 1 to Round 2: 2019–2020

The original short course presentation was not divided into units; however, the units were identified in the evaluation. Activities and lessons focusing on development and motivation (soon to be Units 1 & 2) seemed to be effective and required very little adjustment. The information in what would be Module 3 was focused on regional and state programmatic opportunities and initial participant activities focused on “planning group projects.” Module 4 of the original pilot curriculum consisted of an overview of the sponsoring university’s risk management policies. To give the curriculum a more global appeal, organization specific policy and program references were removed, and a greater focus was given to the needs of the developing

adolescent and trauma-informed programming, including an introduction to the ACES study (Felitti et al., 1998; RWJF, 2013). Additional effort was also applied to making scientific jargon more accessible.

Round 2 to Round 3: 2020–2022

The COVID pandemic required educators to perform a quick pivot to online delivery (Reimers, 2022). The FTA design team addressed this need rapidly by moving to a video-conference platform. In-person activities were swapped for video-conference activities. Round two of FTA began with the restructuring and distribution of information more contextually between each module: 1) development, 2) motivation, 3) group building and, 4) trauma and risk management. The modules were separated clearly and thematically, although some of the processes/activities were still moving between modules depending on how effectively they illustrated specific objectives. For example, strength-based program development moved from an activity of Module 3 group building to a primary learning objective of Module 2. Unit 3 introduced a role-play activity where participants were assigned characters via distributed cards to simulate adolescent group dynamics. Module 4 introduced more research on risk taking and adolescent brain development and about 30% more information about inclusion and trauma. A series of guiding questions were developed for helping adolescents consider their choices. By the end of 2020, FTA had reached about half of Washington State's 4-H staff and a small handful of volunteers. The authors continued to favor revisions for global adolescent development information rather than information specific to our state 4-H program.

Round 3 to Round 4: 2022–2023

Participants from a few neighboring states, including adolescent specialists, began attending our online short courses and providing feedback. Input from other professionals encouraged the development of a participant workbook, which helped focus the facilitated aspects of the training more concisely and allowed for “homework” and journaling activities. The character-assigned role-play activity was reframed as an exercise in perspective-taking, however the distribution of character cards seemed to be causing a lot of participant attrition in Module 3. The authors shifted to “self as teenager” role-play, guiding participants through self-reflective journaling before group encounters. The decision-making practice of Module 4 was reinforced with examples of growth-affirming vs. growth-debilitating risks, guided conversation cues, and demonstration and practice time. At the end of 2020 and early 2021, trainers of FTA repeatedly expressed concern that the focus on trauma at the end of Module 4 made for a difficult ending to the short course. This led to more widely distributed information on trauma throughout all four modules.

Our national pilots were frequently followed with focus group feedback from participating land grant faculty from around the country. We capitalized on inviting geographically and racially diverse groups and more participants were invited through exposure at national conferences.

There have been many small modifications over the years, which were primarily choosing the more concise information or most effective way of teaching particular topics.

Appendix A shows the evolution of survey questions over time. On occasion, learning objectives have existed in the short course curriculum for several years before elevating to a preferred and measured objective. Facilitating growth mindset, for example, was a part of the course from 2021 but did not become an evaluation measure until 2023.

Evaluation

Evaluations were collected following the end of the fourth module. Since our sample size was small (particularly when analyzed by rounds) and because the data were not normally distributed, an exact sign test was used to compare the pre- and post-scores for the 113 respondents to the evaluation. The sign test was deemed a better fit than the t-test, which assumes normally distributed data (Pagano, 2013). In addition, Cohen's d_{av} was used to estimate effect size as it is an appropriate calculation for within-subjects designs

(Lakens, 2013). The exact sign test measured learning changes in several different youth development professional audiences including non-4-H audiences, volunteers, staff, and faculty. The retrospective pre-/post evaluation showed a statistically significant increase in participant understanding of key concepts for all categories in all modules, and the effect size for all questions reached a high level of power (Cohen, 1988). Table 2 shows sign test results for all variables, which are stated as efficacy statements and tied to each of the FTA learning objectives above.

Table 2. Sign test results for all variables

Mod.	Question	Neg Dif	Pos Dif	Ties	Total	P	Cohen's d_{av}
1	I can use strategies that can aid teens in healthy identity development.	1	64	25	90	.000	1.04
	I can identify ways in which adolescence involves physical, emotional, and cognitive changes.	0	62	26	89	.000	1.06
	I can identify distinct characteristics of early, middle, and late adolescence.	2	71	18	91	.000	1.34
2	I will utilize strength-based approaches for engaging teens.	0	33	15	48	.000	1.25
	I understand how the essential elements of positive youth development can be applied to teens in different developmental stages.	0	58	30	88	.000	1.08
	I can define growth mindsets for teens.	0	11	1	12	.001	1.69
	I can support and enhance youth development by using SMART goals.	0	50	37	87	.000	0.91
3	I value the use of role-play for modeling and perspective taking.	0	14	5	19	.000	1.03
	I know strategies to encourage teens groups towards self-direction.	1	55	29	85	.000	1.06
	I could utilize peer mentoring as a skill and team building strategy.	0	55	29	84	.000	0.98
4	I can speak to the value of positive risk in adolescent development.	0	62	27	89	.000	1.14
	I can guide teens in self-reflective decision-making.	0	61	25	86	.000	1.14
	I can adapt programming to be more inclusive and trauma-responsive.	0	32	20	52	.000	0.95

Statistical significance was established for all the variables tested, indicating that the selection of information and skills being provided to participants were potentially novel and useful.

Confidence that learners would use the information presented steadily increased as the “Facilitate the Awesome” curriculum was adapted using learner feedback. In addition, learner confidence that the knowledge and skills they gained would make them more effective teen advisers increased from Rounds 1 to 4. While some learning objectives were reworded between Rounds (see Appendix A), two questions were consistently asked of all survey respondents of FTA. Those questions included 1) if they felt that they learned skills and knowledge that would help them be more effective with adolescents, and 2) if they would use what they learned to improve their adolescent programming (Table 3). For Round 1 of FTA, 79% (33) of respondents were “confident” or “very confident” that they would apply the information and skills they learned to improve their teen programming, compared to 91% (32) in Round 2, and 82% (9) and 93% (10) in Rounds 3 and 4 respectively. (With this question, the high number of Round 2 respondents is promising since Round 2 was predominately direct delivery to staff and volunteers of 4-H.) For the second question, 79% of respondents in Round 1 were confident or very confident that they developed a deeper

understanding and augmented their skill sets, empowering them to more effectively work with teens. This improved steadily to 91% in Rounds 2 and 3 and to 100% in Round 4, though the total number of learners decreased in Rounds 3 and 4 compared to the previous rounds because of the online delivery method.

Table 3. *Global measures for FTA efficacy*

I will use the information I learned in Facilitate the Awesome to improve teen programming opportunities						As a result of this training, I have built knowledge or skills that will help me be more effective in my work with teens					
Round	Not confident/somewhat confident		Confident/very confident		Missing	Round	Not confident/somewhat confident		Confident/very confident		Missing
	%	N	%	N			N	%	N	%	
1	21.4%	9	78.6%	33	8	1	21.4%	9	78.6%	33	8
2	8.6%	3	91.4%	32	0	2	8.6%	3	91.4%	32	0
3	18.2%	2	81.8%	9	0	3	9.1%	1	90.9%	10	0
4	7.1%	1	92.9%	13	3	4	0.0%	0	100%	14	3

For adults completing the training, there were significant gains in knowledge and skill efficacy reported.

Discussion

“Facilitate the Awesome” was created and continuously improved by a team of Extension educators using a research-informed approach to respond to the needs of their volunteers, communities, and peers. FTA presents itself as both a research-based source of information about adolescent development and as a training tool to help adults communicate more authentically with adolescents. Many of the objectives of FTA are enhancements for communication strategies: developmentally appropriate communication, communicating for motivation and goal attainment strategies, peer mentoring and cooperative strategies, and communication intended to mitigate risk. To successfully engage with adolescents, adults need to speak with encouragement and listen with understanding. Nonauthoritarian communication, like several of the communication strategies promoted in FTA, has also been identified as intrinsic to trauma-informed programs (ITTIC, 2015). The evaluations suggest that FTA provides novel information and new skills that youth development volunteers and professionals view as valuable in their work. Clarifying how to meet the distinct needs of adolescents is also particularly crucial in youth development programs that utilize parent volunteers; preparing adults to understand the complexity of adolescence may be one way to increase the capacity of services available within adolescent programs. “Facilitate the Awesome” has helped reinvigorate adult interest in teen programming opportunities in Washington State, several of the short course’s participants stepping in to help restart the 4-H Summer Teen Conference after a seven-year hiatus. This event has actively enlisted over 30 staff and volunteers and has been a platform for introducing facilitation skills from FTA.

The authors consistently integrated current and seminal research with engaging group learning, leaning heavily into their experience with volunteers, adolescents, and adventure-education team-building practices. The result is an engaging curriculum that asks participants to not only learn but *experience* adolescence in a new way: as a facilitator of adolescent leadership and as a partner in learning. While the curriculum’s experiential methodology may have been challenging to people nested in traditional learning styles, the assumption has been that “learning by doing” is an appropriate pedagogy to model for partners within the institution of 4-H.

One of the more meaningful impacts of this short course is that it assists adults in reconnecting with their personal experiences of adolescence to consider how those experiences influenced their own development. Role-play requiring being someone *other* than oneself apparently made participants reluctant to participate, however when participants were encouraged to identify with their own adolescent experiences, they seemed far more capable of participation and willing to “de-center” to be empathetic to others. Since the inclusion of the “self-as-teen” activities, participants of FTA regularly communicate developing a deeper empathy for the struggles of adolescent identity development. These expressions of empathy also serve as demonstrations of what it means to be a “trusted adult.”

The group discussions facilitated in this curriculum are a significant part of the shared learning of each group. The nature of group accountability, as it is a clear experiential theme of Module 3 and an expectation for participants, seemed to be a determinant in the positive outcomes of participants. The activities realigning adults with the salience of peer-group identification helped remind the adults of its powerful significance to teens. It is important to say that the implementation of this “group-centered” short course took place during a very traumatic and global pandemic event. Many of the group activities that are based on physical engagement initially presented challenges to our efforts, particularly the latter two modules, which are highly interactive. The trainers frequently made note of the evolving “customs” of the video-pandemic culture: randomly opting out, being an observer rather than a participant, leaving the camera off, multitasking or calling in while in motion. Some of these behaviors perhaps speak to the trauma being experienced because of the pandemic, a grounded example of what trauma is for our participants. The feedback garnered from prevention and wellness partners in Round 1 (2019) informed the trauma education objectives for our future iterations of FTA, which appears to have been beneficial for all involved. In Rounds 2 and 3, which had many more 4-H staff and volunteers, the trauma-based information was frequently described as “new” despite being two decades old in the literature. Having a language to make meaning of life-changing experiences is really a part of what adults should be sharing with adolescents.

As our audiences have expanded and become more culturally inclusive, the authors and trainers of FTA grapple regularly with the challenges of presenting about trauma in cooperative group settings. It unquestionably adds a layer of self-reflection for participants and FTA instructors to consider. Even simple games and activities can be culturally derived and contain assumptions about prior experiences for participants that may not be true for all. The authors strive to remain mindful, promoting individual identity work and strength-based pedagogy; however, *social identity development is a primary focus of adolescence*, and it is our hope that the most effective adolescent advisers will be able to help their young, nascent leaders navigate their growing awareness of social inequities with empathy and action.

Conclusion

The results of ongoing evaluations have helped improve “Facilitate the Awesome.” The authors are confident that the sign test results indicate that this curriculum has grown increasingly effective through its iterations.

The results we have been able to gather and analyze indicate that the FTA short course presents adults with new and novel ways of engaging and communicating with adolescents. Participating adults have generally communicated enthusiasm toward the content of the short course, and indicated they intended to utilize their new knowledge to improve teen programming.

Limitations and Future Inquiry

Research informing FTA development is recent, and as such, the studies referenced frequently considered assurances for diverse sampling. As the national outreach of FTA continues, there will be increased effort to train facilitators from more diverse populations, garner culturally informed feedback,

and apply it accordingly. Participant perceptions and interpretation of the activities used to illustrate learning objectives was regularly questioned for cross-cultural relevancy; however, the authors recognize more data in this area would be desirable. While the demographic of participants was reflective of our state's program enrollments, the training team recognizes that more nationally representative sampling is necessary and crucial. Additional evaluation data from specific regional audiences will be needed to establish the curriculum's effectiveness for 4-H professionals and for those working in other youth development programs.

One of the curriculum's founding intentions was to increase volunteer capacity to serve as teen advisers. The Washington State implementation team has witnessed an increase in adults engaging in adolescent programming. With desirable sample sizes now in view, the design team is considering turning their attention to measuring adolescent perceptions of the efficacy of their FTA facilitators. One suggested study is utilization of a tool similar to the Youth Experiences Survey (Hansen et al., 2003) in tandem with "Facilitate the Awesome" to help demonstrate that improved adviser skills are also improving the experience of the adolescents in the programs. Further studies are anticipated.

Once a train-the-trainer supplement is shared more globally, additional opportunities for internal activity validation will emerge. Additional data will provide confidence in the lesson-specific outcomes and the possibilities for study of intermediate outcomes and impacts will grow. With wider dissemination of the FTA short course and evaluation of specific populations, program outcomes and impact-related considerations of culture, LGBTQ+, socioeconomic status among youth experiencing programs in Extension and other nonformal settings may be conducted.

Author Note

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Appendix A

Unit	Theme	Question Round 1	Question Round 2	Question Round 3	Question Round 4
1	Adolescence is a life stage of great physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development	Before/after this training: I could/can use knowledge about adolescent development to support teens.	Before/after this training: I could/can identify ways in which adolescence involves physical, emotional, and cognitive changes.	Before/after this training: I could/can identify ways in which adolescence involves physical, emotional, and cognitive changes.	Before/after this training: I could/can identify ways in which adolescence involves physical, emotional, and cognitive changes.
		Before/after this training: I understood/understand ways that adolescent brain development impacts behavior.	Before/after this training: I could/can identify characteristics of early, middle, and late adolescence	Before/after this training: I could/can identify characteristics of early, middle, and late adolescence	Before/after this training: I could/can identify characteristics of early, middle, and late adolescence
2	Empowering teens through teaching and modeling growth mindset	Before/after this training: I understood/understand how the essential elements of positive youth development apply to teens.	Before/after this training: I could/can create programs that value teen input and capitalize on the strengths in the group.	Before/after this training: I could/can create programs that value teen input and capitalize on the strengths in the group.	Before/after this training: I utilized/will utilize strength-based approaches for engaging teens.
		Before/after this training: I understood/understand how the essential elements of positive youth development can be applied to teens in different developmental stages.	Present but not evaluated	Present but not evaluated	Before/after this training: I could/can define growth mindsets for teens
3	Empowering teens through teaching goal attainment strategies	Before/after this training: I could/can guide others in making smart goals.	Before/after this training: I could/can support and enhance youth development by using SMART goals.	Before/after this training: I could/can support and enhance youth development by using SMART goals.	Before/after this training: I could/can support and enhance teen leadership by facilitating SMART goals.
		Before/after this training: I had/have tools to engage teens to be leaders in their community.	Before/after this training: I knew/know strategies to encourage teen groups toward self-direction.	Before/after this training: I knew/know strategies to encourage teen groups toward self-direction.	Before/after this training: I could/can support teens in developing their own leadership capacities.
4	Perspective Taking builds empathy and trust	Before/after this training: I could/can work with teens to develop progressively challenging opportunities.	Before/after this training: I could/can work with teens to develop progressively challenging opportunities.	Before/after this training: I could/can encourage teens to support themselves and each other through challenges.	Before/after this training: I could utilize peer mentoring as a skill and team building strategy.
		Before/after this training: I understood/understand the ways positive risks impact teen development.	Before/after this training: I understood/understand the ways positive risks can support teen development.	Before/after this training: I understood/understand the ways positive risks can support teen development.	Before/after this training: I could/can speak to the value of positive risk in adolescent development.
4	Authentic communication impacts decision making	Before/after this training: I could/can help teens practice a decision making process.	Before/after this training: I could/can guide teens in self-reflective decision-making.	Before/after this training: I could/can guide teens in self-reflective decision making.	Before/after this training: I could/can guide teens in self-reflective decision making.
		Communities of prevention help mitigate the challenges of childhood trauma by being inclusive and trauma informed	Before/after this training: I knew/know ways I could adapt programming to be more inclusive and trauma-responsive.	Before/after this training: I knew/know ways I could adapt programming to be more inclusive and trauma-responsive.	Before/after this training: I could/can understand/understand how to support inclusive and trauma-informed programming.