



Fact Sheet

Teaching Practices for Out-of-School Time Online Learning

Steven M. Worker, PhD | smworker@ucanr.edu | Revised May 8, 2020

Online learning environments may provide opportunities for youth to learn, grow, and practice around a subject matter similar to physical learning environments. The 4-H youth development program is well-positioned to foster innovation for online learning.

Teaching in out-of-school time differs from formal schooling environments. In out-of-school time, youth participation is voluntary, based on youth interest, and anticipated outcomes emphasize socio-emotional and youth development indicators just as much as knowledge and skills. The out-of-school time context requires educators to become coaches, mentors, facilitators, and partners.

For online learning environments, educators must continue to plan program goals and a sequence of learning experiences, employ experiential education, and promote positive youth development.

Educators not familiar with online learning may experience apprehension or confusion over the choice of technology, and the process of planning a blended approach of synchronous (real-time) and asynchronous (in-between meetings) learning activities. Fortunately, there is more in common between traditional in-person learning and online learning than there is divergence.

- Every structured learning experience has four elements: the youth at the center, the educator, the core concepts/learning objectives/curriculum, and the context/learning environment.
- Learners bring their own knowledge, skills, and attitudes to the program.
- Youth do not need to learn all the content, just the core concepts.
- The program includes the environment where the learners are, whether at home, in a library or coffee shop. In online learning, the educator has less control over this, thus, must plan activities and learning experiences accordingly.
- The more time youth participate, the more they will learn and grow.

Three key points for online learning

Teaching methods first, technology second

The emphasis needs to be planning program goals with an engaging sequence of group and individual activities taking place together in real-time and in-between meetings. Selection of technology tools should come second.

Involve youth in choices of digital tools

Young people often have vast experience in digital tools, media, and websites. Tap into their expertise and invite them to offer options and together as a full group select digital tools to enhance the learning experience.

Focus on relationships

Youth-adult relationships are an essential part of out-of-school time programs. Youth need positive, sustained, and trusting relationships with caring, competent, and committed adults, in a traditional in-person program or in an online program.

Promising Practices for Out-of-School Time Online Learning

Be present and create a supportive online community

- Educators should be present in three ways: (a) socially by creating connections with youth and becoming aware of their interests and abilities; (b) facilitate the learning experience; and (c) cognitively to support each young person as they develop knowledge and skills.
- Set norms for your meetings. Plan for plenty of time for youth-to-youth interaction; and plan informal conversation time perhaps before or after each meeting

Create group commitments

- Near the beginning, help the group create group commitments (aka ground rules). Particularly important to discuss is how often and through which ways everyone will communicate online and in-between meetings.

Use large group, small group, and individual activities taking place both together in real-time (synchronously) and in-between meetings (asynchronously)

- Blend real-time (synchronous) and offline (asynchronous) activities to balance real-time full group meetings with activities youth can do in-between meetings.
- Build opportunities for youth to participate as a full group, in smaller groups, and individually for both synchronous and asynchronous learning.

Reflect after each meeting; ask youth to provide feedback, too

- After each meeting, briefly reflect on what worked well, what did not work well, and what to do differently next time.
- Ask youth to provide their feedback, too, on their excitement, motivation, and experience.

Combine core concept learning with customized and personalized learning

- Prepare learning objectives with associated core concepts in advance. Additionally, design options and choices within learning experiences that link the core concepts.
- As meetings progress, be flexible and allow youth to choose based on interest and ability. Or substitute new activities that better align with young people's prior knowledge and interest.

Example activities for online learning

Size	Synchronous (real-time)	Asynchronous (in-between meetings)
Individual	Invite youth to make a presentation Ask youth to rotate facilitation roles	Educator provides an activity for youth to complete at-home either by themselves or with help from parents
Small group	Group project: pose a real-life issue or problem for youth to discuss and pose solutions to; provide a scenario or simulation for youth to work together on Small group time may be allocated during real-time meetings, or youth can arrange to convene in-between meetings	
Large group	Meetings together using audio-video technology. Educator might talk about a concept or conduct a demonstration, facilitate a group discussion	Discussion board: educator and/or youth post and respond to questions Social media: youth post photos and videos related to the subject matter

Boettcher, J. V., & Conrad, R-M. (2016). *The online teaching survival guide (2nd ed.)*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.: San Francisco, CA.