SELECTED OHIO 4-H PARENTS'/ GUARDIANS' PERCEPTIONS OF
CRITICAL THINKING, PROBLEM SOLVING, COMMUNICATION, AND
DECISION MAKING LIFE SKILLS STRENGTHENED THROUGH THEIR
CHILD'S PARTICIPATION IN LIVESTOCK SKILLATHONS

A Thesis
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate parents' or guardians' perceptions of Ohio 4-H members regarding selected life skills strengthened by their children through participation in livestock skillathons. Specific life skills explored were critical thinking, problem solving, communication, and decision making.

Selected parents or guardians from five counties in Ohio were interviewed in focus groups using a 14-question interview schedule. Responses were tape recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using the constant comparative method. This method involved comparing incidents from the data, putting them into categories to describe reoccurring incidents, and identifying reoccurring themes from the categories.

Six resulting themes were identified: (a) children can develop and practice important life skills through their participation in the skillathon; (b) critical thinking, application, and problem-solving skills can be demonstrated or through participation at quality assurance stations; (c) many skillathons stations do not require any demonstration of decision-making skills; (d) skills developed and enhanced will depend largely on the skillathon's educational design; (e) children have widely diverse feelings about skillathons; (f) a skillathon is perceived by parents/guardians as encouraging their child to learn basic project knowledge through hands-on learning.
The researcher concluded that communication, becoming at ease in an interview with an adult, and learning basic project knowledge are skills developed and practiced by participating in a skillathon. Quality assurance stations that include opportunities for moving, sorting, loading, or unloading animals and for solving health-related problems allow youth to demonstrate critical thinking, application, and problem-solving skills. The researcher concluded that there was no agreement among the parents which stations in the skillathon demonstrated decision-making skills. The parents stated that there was a need for more scenarios or problematic situations are needed in skillathons to demonstrate decision-making skills. Parents indicated that learning needs to be challenging and age appropriate in order for skills to be developed and enhanced through a child's participation in the skillathon. The researcher also concluded that there were mixed feelings from children about skillathons. Some 4-H members enjoy it, some hate it, and some older members are feeling that skillathons are too easy and stagnant. According to 30 participant responses, skillathons are encouraging children to learn basic project knowledge through hands-on learning.

The researcher also concluded that Ohio 4-H Youth Development cannot claim that critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, and decision-making skills are developed by skillathons. Ohio 4-H Youth Development can state that skillathons develop communication skills and project knowledge through hands-on learning.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, who always pushed us to do more. Thanks!
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

As early as 1885, The Ohio State University sought to better peoples’ lives through educational outreach programs (Ohio Cooperative Extension Service [OCES], 1987). Among the first programs were meetings for farmers and an Agricultural Extension train that traveled the state carrying agriculture exhibits (Ohio State University Extension, 2000). In January 1904 any work that was being done was divided into two Extension districts: Agricultural Experiment Station and Agricultural Extension. With the establishment of land-grant institutions, universities and colleges were fulfilling the mission of educating people through programs focused on identified issues and needs. Program emphases were given to Agriculture, Home Economics (now called Family and Consumer Sciences), Community and Natural Resource Development, and 4-H Youth Development. To help fulfill the issues and needs of people, the first county Extension agent was hired in 1912.

The early development of 4-H began in the late 1800’s when progressive educators started to emphasize the needs of youth and introduce nature study as a basis for better agricultural education (National 4-H Council, 2000b). In January of 1902, A. B. Graham began a Boys and Girls Agricultural Club to study agriculture (McCormick & McCormick, 1996). Over a two-year period, 2,000 boys and girls in different areas of the
state were enrolled (OCES, 1987, p. 6.01). Graham never would have predicted that his club meeting of 30 boys and girls, almost 100 years ago, would become a very large youth organization with over 6.8 million 4-H participants in the U.S. (National 4-H Council, 2001) and nearly 300,000 youth in Ohio (Ohio 4-H Youth Development, 2001). In fact, one out of every six people in Ohio has been or is currently involved in 4-H.

"Ohio 4-H is a non-formal, educational, youth development program that is offered to kids age five (or in kindergarten) to 19, regardless of their race, color, creed, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, gender or handicap" (Ohio 4-H Youth Development, 2001, para. 1). Membership expectations for traditional 4-H youth include a balance between 4-H project work, involvement in a 4-H club, participation in 4-H activities and events, and working towards improving one's personal growth (Horton & Farrell, 1999).

Ohio's 4-H vision is to become the state's premier leader in developing youth to become positive, productive citizens and catalysts for effective change to improve our diverse society (Ohio State University Extension, 4-H Youth Development, 1994). Ohio 4-H Youth Development Extension agents further accept a mission to create positive environments for youth to reach their potential by implementing experiential learning, fostering leadership, developing skills and values for life-long benefits, enhancing career exploration, and strengthening families and communities. Career exploration, leadership and self-esteem development, learning a work ethic and responsibility, life skills, volunteer development, and youth at risk programs are the basis for programs developed across the State of Ohio (Ohio State University Extension Human Resources Personnel/Recruitment, n. d.). "Life skills are built into 4-H projects, and often activities
and events, that help participants become contributing, productive, self-directed members of a forward-moving society" (National 4-H Council, 2000a).

Society cannot take for granted that life skills are being taught in the home as part of the informal growing process and family life. As 4-H Youth Development Extension agents strive to fulfill a well-defined mission, today's fast pace and complex society requires youth to develop life skills more than ever. Learning life skills outside of the home may be needed. Jeffers (1989, p. 116) concluded that "life skills that will enable young people to become successful adults can be identified and emphasized through Cooperative Extension 4-H programs." The skillathon was one program developed by Ohio 4-H to provide an opportunity for youth to gain life skills (Black, 1996).

BACKGROUND OF PROBLEM

The first livestock programs for youth were judging contests (Ohio State University Extension, 4-H Youth Development, 1994). In 1912 the Logan and Seneca County Agricultural Societies requested help for junior livestock judging contests and by 1915, 42 county Agricultural Societies were conducting them. In 1918, 4-H clubs for pigs were among the first to exhibit at the Ohio State Fair and in 1925 the Cleveland Union Stockyards conducted the first show and livestock sale for Ohio 4-H livestock exhibitors.

In the late 1980's Jodi Black, State Extension Associate, 4-H/Animal Sciences, started researching ways to teach quality assurance to livestock project members (J. Black, personal communication, April 12, 2001). About that same time, 4-H Extension agents expressed that they needed help in starting livestock interview judging within the
counties. In Black’s research she discovered that Cindy Lattner, a 4-H Youth Development agent, in Tuscarawas County had developed kits that were hands on, fun, and were used with interview judging.

In 1989 the Ohio State Fair, Grand Champion steer named Hank had his hair dyed to disguise that he was also a steer from Illinois named Carl (Steel, 1995). 4-H and FFA programs were immediately blamed for not educating their youth. This 1989 incident of cheating opened a door for pursuing more educational opportunities and assessments of knowledge for Ohio 4-H livestock projects (J. Black, personal communication, April 12, 2001). By developing and providing more youth educational opportunities and assessments of knowledge, youth needed to study more and seek more livestock information to succeed in these opportunities and assessments. 4-H Youth Development agents had an opportunity to provide more livestock information, to test knowledge gained, and to educate youth about the consequences of cheating.

Black started with interview judging at the state fair. Participation was low and participants were not very excited about interview judging. With the ideas from Tuscarawas County and an FFA skills contest in Minnesota called “Skill-a-thon,” Black and others developed the kits for the Ohio State Fair skillathon. Kits for beef and sheep were developed first.

By the second year of the skillathon, youth stood in long lines to participate. It was also another way to award youth for knowledge and not just winning in the show ring (L. Murphy, personal communication, January 4, 2001).

With the development of the new 4-H livestock skillathon, 4-H Youth Development agents had a method of helping youth develop their project skills and life
skills through designed, hands-on learning stations (Black, 1996). “The objectives of the skillathons are to: (a) provide a learning laboratory which will enhance knowledge of the beef, poultry, sheep, and swine industries; (b) help youth feel more comfortable communicating with an adult; (c) gain self-confidence and skills in one-on-one communication; (d) develop responsibility for completing a project; (e) develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills; (f) provide additional opportunities to recognize youth for their accomplishments” (Black, 1996, p. 1).

**STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

According to the objectives of skillathons, they are helping youth to gain project knowledge and certain life skills (Black & Black, 1997). Ohio county 4-H livestock committees and 4-H Extension agents utilized skillathons with those written objectives and with the primary objective of 4-H, to help youth become responsible citizens through an emphasis on experiential learning. Are skillathons for youth to gain knowledge and gain identified life skills?

Since the development of the livestock skillathons, thousands of youth across Ohio have participated. In 1996 more than 1400 youth participated in the skillathons at the Ohio State Fair (Black, 1996) and in 1999 more than 400 Morrow County youth participated in a livestock skillathon (C. Holsinger, personal communication, December 12, 2000).

4-H Youth Development agents are claiming that large numbers of youth participating in skillathons can develop project knowledge and life skills. To recognize life skills gained or strengthened in children, parents and guardians perceptions should be
sought (B. Henderson, personal communication, November 12, 2000). What are parents’ or guardians’ perceptions of the life skills identified as gained or strengthened through the skillathon? Are the objectives of developing critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and decision-making skills realized through their child’s participation in livestock skillathons? Is the skillathon program designed to achieve these objectives?

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study was to investigate parents’ or guardians’ perceptions of Ohio 4-H members regarding selected life skills strengthened by their children through participation in livestock skillathons.

Specific objectives included to explore:

1. critical thinking skills,
2. problem-solving skills,
3. communication skills, and
4. decision-making skills.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following is a list of terms and their definitions. These will serve as the conceptual definitions utilized for this study.

1. **Life skills**: Are referred to as the basic educational skills that human beings need for their survival and to develop their intellectual potential to improve the quality of their lives (Chinapah, 1997). Life skills involve the use of
knowledge and experience to meet everyday needs in a variety of situations (Bradley et al., 1991).

2. **Critical thinking:** An alternative to making decisions by guessing, habit, or tradition (Jones, 1992). By critically thinking, an individual is focusing on deciding what to do or believe through reflecting and reasonable thinking.

3. **Problem solving:** “Clearly identifying a problem and a plan of action for resolution of the problem” (Hendricks, 1996, p. 21).

4. **Communication:** An effective exchange of information through verbal and nonverbal messages (Bradley et al., 1991).

5. **Decision making:** The ability to come to a conclusion or to make a choice (Cox, 1994).

6. **4-H:** “4-H is a non-formal educational youth development program offered to individuals 5-19. Youth are involved in hands-on, experiential learning that allows learning by doing. All 4-H programs focus on active involvement and quality experiences which stimulate life-long learning of values and skills” (Ohio 4-H Youth Development, 2001, para.1).

7. **Skillathon:** This is a program of helping youth develop both their life skills and project skills and is designed as a series of mini-learning stations with a facilitator at each one (Black, 1996). Participants rotate from station to station, attempting to perform specific tasks. The station facilitator allows participants to test their own knowledge and abilities before giving them any hints. This technique is referred to as “experiential learning or learning by doing before being told or shown” (Black & Black, 1997, p. 1).
4. **Station facilitator:** An expert in the particular skillathon being used (Black & Black, 1997). The facilitator’s duty is to be pleasant, positive, and friendly while evaluating the participant’s knowledge, skill in applying the knowledge, and attitude level associated with the project (Black & Black, 1997).

5. **Livestock quality assurance:** Livestock producers making sure their product is of the highest quality through feeding and nutrition, managing facilities, handling and care, using proper injection sites, reading and following medication directions, and keeping records (Black, Bowman, Flood, Horton, & Shulaw, 1999).

6. **Interview judging:** One-to-one communication that assesses, probes, or finds out what an individual has learned or what skills have been developed (OCES, 1987).

7. **Authentic assessment:** A contrast with traditional standardized tests (Wiggins, 1990). Students are allowed the ability to demonstrate not only what they have learned, but also how they acquired a particular skill or piece of knowledge (Barnett, 1992).

**LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

1. The study was restricted to the information from Ohio 4-H parents or guardians in five counties. The findings are applicable only to those who participated.
2. The study was restricted to information from a small number of 4-H parents or guardians.

3. The study focused on four primary life skills identified by the interviewer. Other life skills may be strengthened by 4-H members through livestock skillathons.

4. Life skills may be strengthened by another source other than 4-H livestock skillathons.

SUMMARY

Since the late 1800’s Ohio State University has continually offered programs to meet the identified needs and issues of people across Ohio. The Ohio State University has developed and utilized the Extension program to help fulfill this mission. The needs of youth have been emphasized through the 4-H program and incorporated as part of the Ohio State University Extension in the early 1900’s.

Through the 4-H program, Youth Development agents have created experiential programs with a mission to develop skills, foster leadership, enhance career exploration, and strengthen families and communities. Helping youth to become positive, productive citizens and catalysts for effective change to improve our diverse society has been their vision.

In this diverse and complex society youth need to develop life skills more than ever to prepare them for a life away from home. The 4-H Youth Development program has helped youth to develop basic skills to meet everyday needs and become successful adults.
To better educate Ohio 4-H youth who take livestock projects, the skillathon program has been created as an experiential program to help 4-H members develop project and life skills. Critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, decision-making skills, and communication skills have been identified by the 4-H Youth Development program as life skills gained or strengthened by 4-H members through participation in the skillathon.

This study will investigate life skills the 4-H Youth Development program identifies as gained or strengthened by 4-H members through their participation in skillathon. Through parents’ or guardians’ perceptions of their children, the researcher will have the opportunity to explore critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, and communication skills.

The question that remains to be answered: Is the 4-H Youth Development program achieving the skillathon’s objectives? From this study, the 4-H Youth Development program will gain valuable information by determining the extent to which parents perceive their children are developing life skills through livestock skillathons. This information will also help to assess whether livestock skillathons are achieving the objectives that educators hope they will accomplish.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature provided an overview of the following concepts: (a) life skills, (b) Targeting Life Skills Model, (c) authentic assessment, (d) livestock education, (d) investigating livestock skillathons, and (e) parents’ perceptions.

LIFE SKILLS

The term “life skills” is used often as a general phrase. To understand the term life skills for this study it was important to look at definitions and uses in research in general and as specifically related to 4-H youth development.

Life skills are basic educational skills that human beings need for their survival (Chinapah, 1997). These life skills included health and nutrition, socialization and communication, critical thinking, and problem solving and analysis. Life skills are needed to develop their intellectual potential to improve the quality of their lives. Along with literacy and numeracy, life skills are basic learning competencies and the basis of education for all.

McKinney (1983) also defined life skills as doing, thinking, and feeling to succeed in everyday life. “The development of life skills allows youth to cope with their environment by making responsible decisions, having a better understanding of their values, and being better able to communicate and get along with others” (Boyd, Herring
& Briers, 1992, para. 2). Researchers have found that participation in the 4-H program is positively related to perceived leadership life skill development. As participation in 4-H activities increased, participants’ level of leadership life skills developed increased. The researchers also found that 4-H club members’ perceptions of their development of leadership life skills were higher than the perceptions of the non-4-H youth.

Heinsohn and Cantrell (1996) examined the impact of the 4-H program on teenager’s life skills development. Leadership development, social development, citizenship development, value development, interpersonal skills, communication skills, personal development, and career development were subscales of life skills clustered from 55 teen life skills studied (Heinsohn & Cantrell, 1996). The researchers concluded that “4-H had the greatest impact on leadership skills and a 4-H member’s perception of their ability to speak in public” (p. i). 4-H member experiences and participation at the club level were related to life skills development. Teens who held club leadership roles had the greatest increase in life skills development.

In 1989, Jeffers studied, “Factors Associated with Adult 4-H Volunteers’ Evaluation of Life Skills Development Among Participants in the Kentucky 4-H Program.” Jeffers reduced 45 life skills identified in the Kentucky Extension mission statement into eight general areas. These eight general areas of life skills developed were (a) leadership development, (b) social development, (c) personal development, (d) interpersonal skills, (e) citizenship development, (f) communication skills, and (g) career development. Jeffers concluded that “volunteers indicate that past and present 4-H programs have been and are effective in the development of life skills among program participants” (p. 116).
Knowlton Ward (1996) studied the influences 4-H animal science projects had on the development of certain life skills. She concluded that participation in 4-H animal science programs does have a positive influence on youth life skill development. Helping youth accept responsibility, ability to relate to others, spirit of inquiry, decision making, public speaking, maintaining records, and giving youth a positive self-esteem were life skills that had a positive influence through participation in 4-H animal science projects. A research study by Shurson and Lattner (1991) found that accepting responsibilities, making decisions, communicating with others, and sportsmanship were life skills learned from an Ohio 4-H swine livestock experience.

Researchers have pointed out that the Indiana 4-H livestock judging program was highly influential in the development of life skills, such as oral communication, decision-making, and self-confidence (Martin, 2000). Moderate influence was given to the development of problem solving ability, self-discipline, and the ability to defend a decision with accuracy. Martin (2000) also concluded that the Indiana 4-H livestock judging program had a positive impact on the development of several life skills that can be associated with workforce preparedness.

4-H youth development has incorporated cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development to enable youth to reach their fullest potential as capable, competent, caring, and contributing citizens (Dalzell, 1999). 4-H members have practiced skills appropriate to their stages of development through participation in the 4-H program. By practicing such skills, youth have developed into competent, caring, contributing, and capable citizens.
While research has examined the relationship of life skill development to 4-H participation other than livestock skillathons, researchers concluded that 4-H has a positive impact on life skills. Therefore, the researcher has intended to study life skills gained or strengthened through member participation in a 4-H livestock skillathon.

TARGETING LIFE SKILLS MODEL

For the current study the researcher utilized the Iowa State 4-H Youth Development Targeting Life Skills Model (Hendricks, 1996) (Appendix A). The researcher utilized the TLS Model to establish skills identified in the skillathon’s objectives as life skills and to establish how youth can learn life skills through developmentally appropriate learning opportunities.

“The Targeting Life Skills Model (TLS Model) is intended to be inclusive for all possible life skills” (Iowa State University Extension, 2000, para. 5). These life skills are identified as skills needed to prepare youth to live a productive and satisfying life in society. Although there is not complete agreement on which specific life skills are needed to ensure success in life, Patricia Hendricks (1996), Iowa State University Extension Youth Development Specialist, developed the TLS Model to include all life skill categories. No research exists to validate the model, but it was developed by reviewing several other models. Certain consistent life skill categories emerged from the other models that make up the TLS Model. “The categories of life skills are identified and divided on the basis of the familiar four H’s from the 4-H clover that represent Head, Heart, Hands, and Health. Two general categories of life skills are included under each
of the four headings” (p. 4) (see Appendix A). The categories include: (a) caring, (b) relating, (c) managing, (d) thinking, (e) living, (f) being, (g) working, and (h) giving.

Communication, critical thinking, problem solving, and decision making have been established as skills that can be developed by 4-H members through participation in skillathons (Black & Black, 1997). Hendricks (1996) identifies these skills as life skills in the TLS Model. The life skill category of relating includes communication. Critical thinking, problem solving, and decision making are included in the thinking category.

The Iowa State 4-H Youth Development program utilizes the TLS Model to create developmentally appropriate learning opportunities through which youth can learn life skills. This also enables educators to assess the impact of the learning experiences on life skill development. The model provides a way to simplify coordination of life skill development with appropriate tasks based on children’s ages and stages of development. “Life skill development is mapped sequentially over four age groupings of youth to indicate a continuum of growth. The continuum will guide planners in identifying an appropriate developmental level for content delivery” (Iowa State University Extension, 2000, para 6). For the purpose of the TLS Model, Hendricks grouped the four age categories as: (1) grades K-3/ages 5-8, (2) grades 4-6/ages 9-11, (3) grades 7-8/ages 12-14, and (4) grades 9-12/ages 15-19.

Hendricks (1996) reviewed age-related tasks as outlined by several authors and developed the TLS Model to reflect the pattern of maturation and experiences that can be applied to life skill development. She stated, “developmentally appropriate tasks are not only related to previous experience but to maturation that occurs within an individual” (p.
9). Hendricks stated that some researchers conclude it may be more difficult to learn a task if it is not learned at the appropriate age.

Ohio 4-H projects are intended to be designed for members’ ages 9 to 19 (Ohio State University Extension, 4-H Youth Development, 1994). Five- to eight-year-olds can participate in Ohio’s age appropriate Cloverbud Program, which does not allow them to participate in livestock showing and handling activities and therefore a skeleton involving livestock. Therefore, 4-H members 9 to 19 can participate in livestock skillathons. According to the TLS Model youth ages 9 to 11 can be challenged in learning communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills. Older members are at a higher level of these skills and will need different activities to experience life skills, practice them until learned, and be able to use them for a lifetime.

Achieving observable and measurable program success can greatly improve by assigning developmentally appropriate tasks to specific life skills. The best youth development experiences are “carefully planned to (a) encourage life skill development while delivering subject matter and (b) to achieve specific results” (Hendricks, 1996, p. 1).

AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT

One measure of performance using real-life experiences rather than standardized tests is called authentic assessment (Cole, 1994). The process of authentic assessment can include observation, conferencing, portfolios, self-evaluation, collaborative evaluation, and traditional paper and pencil tests. Students perform tasks that illustrate knowledge gained instead of using short-term memory to recall information. By
performing in real-life settings, students are better able to connect their education to life experiences.

Effectively performing the acquired knowledge for someone other than a teacher or peer is very important in this performance-based assessment (Wiggins, 1990). In fact, youth who are actively involved with constructing and synthesizing knowledge with the intent to communicate their knowledge to someone other than a teacher value learning more. Authentic assessment can allow students to take control of their learning by determining how they will acquire and demonstrate their knowledge (Barnett, 1992). In most educational experiences the learner is at the mercy of the teacher. The teacher teaches information and the learner takes a test to evaluate knowledge gained.

Traditional and conventional tests tend to only ask the student to plug-in, recall or select the correct answer. These tests also tend to focus on low-level skills and on an isolated evidence of achievement (Meisels, 1995). Authentic tasks involve the student in challenges similar to those encountered in adult and professional life. Even students with learning disabilities can begin to clarify their strengths and weaknesses in order to set goals through authentic assessment (Boerum, 2000).

Skillathons represent an opportunity for authentic assessment by having 4-H members move from station to station attempting to perform project knowledge tasks (Black & Black, 1997). Skillathon stations are designed to be fun and hands-on, as well as challenging. Authentic assessment includes developing and examining actions in situations that are experience based and problem oriented and includes or simulates actual acts from learning (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000). The acts from learning include reflections of knowledge change. Station facilitators for skillathons allow the 4-H
members to test their knowledge and abilities and evaluate and review knowledge demonstrated.

4-H LIVESTOCK EDUCATION

With the start of boys and girls clubs by A. B. Graham and Extension agriculture trains in the early 1900's, livestock education has a long history in Ohio (OCES, 1987). One of the first livestock education programs was livestock judging contests, which were utilized by fairs. Bryan (1994, p. 3) stated that the “evaluation of breeding and market animals in each of the various livestock species is the foundation of any 4-H project.” Without the ability to evaluate an animal a 4-H member may have a difficult time choosing the best animal to meet his or her project goals.

4-H project books became an important part of livestock education as a resource utilized by the project leaders to direct member project instruction as well as group-centered experiential learning (Ohio State University Extension, 4-H Youth Development, 1994). The project books have lesson plans to teach a group, but as the number of talented adults decreased, the project manual became a self-study teaching tool. In the development of new project books, it is implied that it is very important for parents to have a role in the project, a standard by which learning outcomes can be identified and evaluated, an opportunity for recognition for those who carry out their project, and a project leader to enhance the learning rather than direct the learning.

Today’s changing livestock project manuals incorporate animal project knowledge with animal well-being, quality assurance, livestock industry knowledge, show ring ethics, and Pillars of Character (Black et al., 1999). It is also an important part

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of the livestock project that individuals learn to keep records. Project books are designed
to employ the skills of communicating with others, evaluating, experimenting, and
questioning. In many skillathons across the state, project manuals were evaluated in an
interview (A. Barsch, personal communication, January 3, 2001). By reviewing these
manuals, interviewers were able to assess a member's project knowledge and record
keeping skills through a question and answer session. An interview evaluation gives the
judge the chance to probe and find out what the member really knows or has learned
about the project (OCES, 1987).

In recent years educators have developed other livestock education contests and
programs. Carcass contests, quiz bowls, skillathons, and quality assurance programs
have been added to 4-H livestock education.

Carcass shows are becoming very popular and a very useful teaching tool for
youth involved in livestock projects (S. Ruhl, personal communication, December 7,
2000). Ruhl (2000) stated that "in 1998 a Senior Fair Board member discontinued the
market hog carcass contest. Soon after many supporters pushed them to reinstate the
contest, claiming education potential." Once animals have been slaughtered, an
evaluation of the carcass takes place; they are graded and ranked for meat quality and
loin size. Comparisons have been made to the champion project winners.

4-H dairy project members and youth beef breed associations have utilized
knowledge or quiz bowls for many years (Spike, 1995). They were developed to increase
the knowledge of a project (OCES, 1987). Through a series of questions a team of four
competes to answer the most correct questions in a specified time period.
In 1995, at the Ohio State Fair, more than 1,140 youth were introduced to and participated in a new livestock education and evaluation program called skillathon (Black, 1996). "A skillathon or livestock learning laboratory is an excellent method of involving FFA and 4-H'ers in challenging, learn-by-doing activities" (Black, 1996, p. 1). The program was designed to develop both a member's life skills and project skills (Black & Black, 1997). One objective of a skillathon is to provide a learning laboratory to enhance youths' knowledge of the livestock industries. Other objectives include developing life skills, helping youth to be more comfortable communicating with an adult, gaining self-confidence and skills in one-on-one communication, developing responsibility for completing the project, developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and providing additional opportunities to recognize youth for their accomplishments.

In 2000, livestock educators accepted a new challenge by developing quality assurance programs to meet the Ohio Department of Agriculture's mandates (D. Glauer, personal communication, December 11, 1999). Quality assurance addresses topics that 4-H project members need to be responsible food producers (Black et al., 1999). The pork industry and some slaughtering plants are requiring pork quality assurance education programs for their producers. All market and milking livestock project exhibitors in the State of Ohio are now required to attend a general, quality assurance education program. Quality assurance education has also been incorporated into livestock skillathons as a delivery topic.

Ohio 4-H Youth Development has a long history of educational events and programs designed for livestock. The researcher's review of livestock education has
provided information that skillathons were designed as a way to educate livestock project members and allowed project members to develop life skills. Other programs educated 4-H members and assessed their project knowledge. Therefore, the researcher has intended to study the life skills gained or strengthened through member participation in a 4-H livestock skillathon.

INVESTIGATING LIVESTOCK SKILLATHONS

Prior research investigating livestock skillathons has been very minimal. Knowlton Ward (1996) has studied how effective skillathons, quiz bowl events, judging events, and shows or exhibitions were in developing youth life skills. On a scale of 1 = “not effective” to 5 = “a great deal of effect,” skillathons scored a 3.0 among 52 respondents. Shows or exhibitions ranked the highest with 4.5, judging events were next at 4.0, and quiz bowl scored a 3.7. From that data, she concluded that most animal science events appeared to have a positive influence on the development of important life skills, while skillathons had an average effect on development of important life skills.

Lattner and Shurson (1991) studied the extent to which Ohio swine project members learned about 13 topics related to fundamental swine production knowledge. Additional questions were asked related to career knowledge and life skills development. They concluded that life skills development is an important part of the total 4-H swine project experience. From their survey, Lattner and Shurson (1991, p. 1) indicated that “4-H swine project members learned the most about sportsmanship and working with others, followed by accepting responsibility, communicating with others, and making decisions. Leading a group and public speaking were the least learned.”
PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS

Prior research of parent perceptions shows that all human perception and all observations are inherently biased. For example, in studies of memory for interactions, there is a "self bias" (Sillars, Weisberg, Burggraf, & Zietlow, 1990). The researchers have seen a strong tendency for people to recall the things they said more readily and more accurately than they recall utterances made by others. A number of circumstances have been empirically established in which greater or fewer biases influence the conclusions that people draw and inferences they make.

Findings from several areas suggest that parents' perceptions of children's skills and behaviors should be more accurate than children's perceptions of their own behaviors and skills (Roloff & Berger, 1982). Parents observe their children everyday by evaluating problems and celebrating accomplishments in their children's lives. It can begin with parents of a newborn observing and celebrating new skill development of the infant and can continue into the child's adulthood.

There are several reasons why children's self-observed skill levels could be less accurate than parents' observations of their skill level (Papalia & Olds, 1998). Children's cognitive abilities are less developmentally advanced, making it more difficult for them to differentiate between gradations in skill levels and abilities. Children ages 6 to 8 are more interested in the process of doing things rather than the end product. Even as their cognitive levels increase, teenagers are not always accurate in their assessments of danger and risk. An outside observer may be much more objective compared to a teenager's assessment of danger and risk. Teens may tend to see things from their own point of view.
Observations of children's skills and behaviors are accepted as the foundation for thousands of psychological diagnoses each year (C. Torppa, personal communication, April 30, 2001). For example, the Connor's Behavior Check List is one such measure in which parents and other adults in a child's life are asked to report their observations of children's behaviors. From these observations they are able to draw conclusions about an individual's condition or state of development.

Ohio 4-H District Specialist Bill Henderson (personal communication, November 12, 2000) views that children cannot recognize skills gained through 4-H until later in life when someone else identifies skills or the young adult is asked to identify the process of developing these skills. The assessment of the past skill development will most likely will occur in a work situation. As youth develop skills, parents or guardians see the day-to-day changes in their children.

SUMMARY

To succeed in everyday life, youth need life skills. Researchers have concluded that 4-H has a positive impact on life skills and some life skills can be developed through participation in 4-H activities. The researcher was able to find only one study that addressed the relationship of developing life skills and 4-H skillathons. In this study by Knowlton Ward (1996) skillathons had an average effect on developing life skills. Other 4-H events appeared to be more effective.

Communication, critical thinking, problem solving, and decision making are all identified as life skills by TLS Model (Hendricks, 1996). 4-H Youth Development agents can develop programs by utilizing the TLS Model that incorporates
developmentally appropriate learning opportunities through which youth can learn life skills.

The 4-H program has developed skillathons for 4-H members 9 to 19. According to the TLS Model (Hendricks, 1996) a teen learning life skills needs to be engaged in more challenging tasks compared to a nine year old. None of the studies described indicated a relationship of age to the development of life skills in 4-H activities.

Based on the literature review the researcher has developed a conceptual model representing the content within which 4-H learning experiences occur and how the potential for positive outcomes might be realized (Figure 2.1). According to Ohio 4-H, a 4-H member participates in 4-H activities or learning activities with parent or guardian involvement. A parent or guardian within a 4-H member’s social environment has the opportunity to observe the extent to which and the conditions under which learning experiences occur. Learning experiences or 4-H activities can be club meetings, camps, school enrichment, and contests. For the purpose of this study the 4-H activity could be a livestock skillathon. The member participating in 4-H activities could possibly develop and demonstrate subject matter knowledge and develop and demonstrate life skills. The skills and subject matter developed, as well as demonstrated could possibly lead to positive outcomes. Outcomes to possibly meet Ohio 4-H Youth Development’s vision of becoming the state’s premier leader in developing youth to become positive, productive citizens, and catalysts for effective change to improve our diverse society.
Figure 2.1: A conceptual model representing possible relationships of a 4-H member to positive outcomes.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The researcher decided that a qualitative methodology was the best choice for this study. In the literature review, no prior research was found that investigated life skills strengthened through the use of skillathons or parents' perceptions of life skills developed utilizing livestock skillathons. Creswell (1994) described that one should consider the nature of the problem when selecting a research paradigm.

Qualitative research is the best research method for discovering underlying motivations, feelings, values, attitudes, and perceptions (Qualitative Research Consultant's Association, 1998). "The goal is a holistic picture and depth of understanding, rather than a numerical analysis of data" (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavi, 1972, p. 22). The holistic picture is then formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting.

Bloland (1992) described three principal methods or procedures that are used to define qualitative research. Researchers currently use the methods of observation, both participant and direct, qualitative interviewing, from unstructured to structured, and unobtrusive research, including the study of documents.

One form of interviewing is the focus group. In a focus group, researcher can create a permissive, non-threatening environment that encourages participants to share
perceptions (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Focus group interviews provide a researcher with qualitative data to determine the perceptions, feelings, and thinking of people about issues. The researcher can carefully plan a series of discussions with multiple groups designed to obtain perceptions.

Compared to qualitative research, quantitative research uses objective measurement and numerical analysis of data to try to explain the causes of changes in social phenomena (Ary et al., 1972). Quantitative inquiry begins with a theory of the phenomena to be investigated. The ultimate goal is to revise and support theories or lawlike statements of social and behavioral phenomena based on the results of hypothesis testing. This comparison revealed that qualitative research is the best method for discovering the perceptions of parents or guardians.

**Participant Selection**

The researcher used a nonprobabilistic strategy called purposive or purposeful sampling to select research participants. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to select participants based on the purpose of the study (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Purposeful sampling assumes that the investigator wants to discover, understand, gain insight, and select a sample from which the most can be learned (Merriam, 1998).

Merriam (1998) suggested that a researcher must first determine what selection criteria are essential in choosing the people or sites to be studied. For this research, the main criteria for subject selection was that the participants were parents or guardians of 4-H members who participated in an Ohio livestock skillathon event in 2000. These 4-H parents/guardians were selected from a total of five counties, one from each of the five districts that constitute OSU Extension. Jodi Black, State Extension Associate, 4-H
Animal Science, suggested counties with strong skillathon programs and ones with which she had a strong working relationship. Counties were also selected because of the county 4-H Youth Development agent's willingness to work with the researcher.

The counties selected were Butler (Southwest District), Coshocton (East District), Fayette (South District), Wayne (Northeast District), and Wood (Northwest District). The researcher contacted the 4-H Youth Development Extension agent in each of these counties for approval of the research project. Also contacted by the researcher were The Ohio State University Extension Administrative Cabinet, Human Subjects Review Board, each District Director, each District 4-H Specialist, and Dr. Jeff King (Assistant Director, 4-H Youth Development) to explain the research project, to explain criteria for selecting counties, and to gain their approval.

Using the study's criteria, the 4-H Youth Development agent in each county developed a list of potential parent/guardian participants. Once identified, each potential participant was mailed a letter of invitation to participate in a focus group (Appendix B).

**Instrumentation**

The researcher developed the interview schedule as a means of instrumentation (Miles & Huberman, 1994) (Appendix C). Some of the questions were developed with probes. A probe is a request for additional information (Archer & Layman, 1991). The questions focused upon critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and decision-making skills, which were the life skills contained within the objectives for skillathons, and corresponded to the life skills as presented in the TLS Model (Hendricks, 1996).

Too much superfluous information maybe collected if interview schedules or observation schedules are not focused (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The researcher's
examination committee and the researcher reviewed the questions based on the focused life skills. It is important to have competent colleagues who are familiar with the purpose of the survey to examine the items and to judge whether they are appropriate for measuring what they are supposed to measure (Ary et al., 1972). The researcher made changes based upon the committee’s suggestions and used the questions for focus group interviews with the selected 4-H parents or guardians.

**Data Collection**

Five focus group interviews were conducted with the prepared interview schedule in March and April of 2000 (see Table 3.1). Each focus group had four to ten participants that met centrally within the county. Researchers have concluded that focus group interviews are to be discussed informally with 5-10 respondents (Kruger & Casey, 2000). Focused interviews are more flexible and open and the respondents are free to answer in their own words, for any amount of time (Ary et al., 1972).

All focus groups met in the evening at varied times. The researcher and the 4-H Youth Development agent of each county tried to schedule the most convenient date and time for the participants. The researcher made introductions, discussed the purpose and procedure of the research, and made participants aware that their participation was voluntary and thanked the participants before beginning. All questions and probe questions were asked in a conversational style.

Gender of respondents and duration of interview was observed and recorded (see Table 3.1). All five group interviews were tape recorded, the researchers made notes of her own thoughts, and an assistant moderator maintained the tape recorder, took notes,
and handled unexpected interruptions (Archer & Layman, 1991). All recordings of interviews were with the participants’ knowledge and consent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Number Males</th>
<th>Number Females</th>
<th>Total Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 19, 2001</td>
<td>Wayne</td>
<td>1 hr.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 22, 2001</td>
<td>Butler</td>
<td>1 hr. 30 mins.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 2, 2001</td>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>1 hr.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 4, 2001</td>
<td>Fayette</td>
<td>1 hr. 10 mins.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 5, 2001</td>
<td>Coshocton</td>
<td>1 hr.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: Focus Group Interviews Participant Totals and Durations

Data Analysis

In qualitative research “data analysis is a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description, and interpretation” (Merriam, 1998, p. 178). Merriam also stated that findings of a qualitative study can be in the form of organized themes that explain the data.

The method use to analyze this research data is described by Merriam (1998) and Glaser and Strauss (1967) as the constant comparative method. The constant comparative method first involves a comparison among incidents from data. The incidents are coded and then put into categories when there are reoccurring incidents. This is to be done by comparing notes of data to those of another set. Once categories
were identified, theoretical properties or themes of a category may emerge. Finally the researcher describes the themes or theory.

In the constant comparative method, it is a good idea to work with one or more teammates (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Teammates or multiple raters can help bring out points missed and add themes in their own coding. The convergence of results from different investigators can also be called triangulation (Creswell, 1994). By using multiple raters or teammates, any bias among data and raters can be neutralized.

Once all the data for this study were recorded and collected, the data were transcribed for reading. Three raters or teammates were used to identify reoccurring themes from data collected. The researcher and two Ohio State Extension 4-H Youth Development professionals read through the data individually. Each rater identified reoccurring data for each question. The researcher asked that each rater list reoccurring data and origin of the data from the five counties that participated. Raters then listed the reoccurring data as themes. Each theme was listed with counties and respondents that identified the theme.

Once completed, the researcher reviewed the individual reoccurring themes from each rater and collapsed them into a smaller number of overall themes. The researcher and her academic adviser reviewed the collapsed overall themes and returned them to the raters for suggestions and/or final approval. Suggestions were made and final themes were edited. Once again the researcher returned the edited final themes to each rater for final approval. The resulting themes are in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The specific objectives of this research were to explore critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, communication skills, and decision-making skills strengthened through Ohio 4-H member participation in livestock skillathons as perceived by parents or guardians. Six overall reoccurring themes emerged for the data (listed in no particular order). They include: (a) Children can develop and practice important life skills through their participation in the skillathon; (b) critical thinking, application, and problem solving skills can be demonstrated in quality assurance stations; (c) many skillathon stations do not require any demonstration of decision-making skills; (d) skills developed and enhanced will depend largely on the skillathon's educational design; (e) children have strong widely diverse feelings about skillathons; and (f) a skillathon is perceived by parents or guardians as encouraging their child to learn, basic project knowledge through hands-on learning.

All focus group interview data can be found in Appendix D. Participant responses made within the focus group interviews are identified in the findings. The county focus group upper-case letter, question number, and lower-case letter identify the individual responses stated by focus group participants.
Theme 1: Children can develop and practice important skills through their participation in the skillathon.

Specific skills identified by the focus group participants formed this theme. They included communication with adults, learning basic project knowledge, and applying what they have learned.

A. Communication and becoming at ease in an interview with adults.

It was expressed 12 times by respondents and in four focus groups that communication was a skill used by their child in a skillathon. One person responded that “communication skills for sure are utilized in skillathons” (group B, 4d). One respondent expressed, “You have to communicate. You are going to be asked some questions about intra-muscular injections and what it is. You have to be pretty articulate to explain it, where it occurs, and things like that” (group B, 4a). A third respondent expressed that “communication skills have to be one of the strongest points of skillathons. Even if a child simply has to ask for help from a facilitator because they just don’t understand” (group E, 4i). One person made a point that “it is not the memorization of items, it’s being able to communicate. Whether it be the communication at each station or the communication at the interview” (group E, 4b). One person also responded, “There are not too many opportunities for kids to have one-on-one oral interrogation and I have seen as my kids get older, they get more comfortable with standing before an adult and being quizzed orally” (group A, 4a). This respondent also added, “It builds confidence even if they knew the answers, it’s still good for them to stand before an adult, ask questions, think on their feet, and talk” (group A, 4a). When asked about skills their children were utilizing, one respondent identified “talking with an adult is a skill they use in
skillathons" (group D, 4b) and another respondent identified “sitting in front of adults and having to go through an interview process is a very good” (group E, 4a). A respondent indicated, “It is going to help them, as they get older for college or job interviews or anything” (group E, 4a).

B. Learning basic project knowledge and applying of what they have learned

Respondents indicated 18 times that children learn knowledge and apply what they have learned through their participation in skillathons. One respondent added, “Skillathon is a learning thing” (group A, 4h). Another person responded, “My boys learned to castrate and ear notch. They can take that back home” (group E, 4e). In focus group B respondent 4d not only indicated that communication skills were utilized, but learning project knowledge and applying what was learned is utilized. The child talks at their meetings to other members about the skillathon event and helps younger kids understand it.

One respondent stated that “the kids who have grasped the purpose of the skillathon, have learned the material are a lot better able to think on their feet and look at a situation, apply their knowledge, and come up with an answer” (group E, 4k). This person also stated, “The kids that are doing showmanship classes at a higher competitive level are often times now asked questions that they actually have to speak on a microphone and pull together some sort of answer in a few minutes. They may not realize it but the knowledge that they are definitely grasping, that they have to bring out; I think some of that has to come from items they have worked through the skillathon” (group E, 4l).
According to one respondent, whose family has been involved with the sheep skillathon for several years, “We’ll be driving down the road and see a flock of sheep and my children can name the breeds” (group E, 4f). This person also responded that “they are grasping what it is and I’ve seen them walk down the counter at Buhler’s and they name the parts of the meat” (group E, 4f). A second person stated that by participating in the skillathon “my son will give injections by himself new” (group D, 4c). A third person stated, “With rabbits one of our stations is that they have to tell what is wrong with a picture. And that helps them to learn what is the best environment for their rabbit” (group D, 4d). One respondent indicated that “record keeping is something that is not going to end when you’re out of 4-H and it is utilized in skillathons” (group A, 4f). A person in focus group C (4c) felt “it’s an application type of thing; it’s not only memorizing to use it in that type of setting.”

**Theme 2: Critical thinking, application, and problem-solving skills can be demonstrated through quality assurance stations.**

Issues were identified that relate to quality assurance stations, such as those asking participants to devise plans for moving, sorting, loading, or unloading animals and solving health related problems. The participants made statements that demonstrated where critical thinking, application, and problem-solving skills have been found in skillathons. One person stated, “A quality assurance station is the only place children solve problems in a skillathon” (group A, 6a).

**A. Participants devising plans for moving, sorting, loading, or unloading animals.**

Respondents in three of the focus groups identified that moving, sorting, loading, or unloading of animals as a skillathon station involves critical thinking, application, or
problem solving skills. One person described what the 4-H member was to do: “OK this is your situation to get these cattle loaded. How would you set your fencing up” (group A, 6b)? Another person identified it as “the part of the skillathon where you have a map and the barn lot and you have to figure out how to set up the fence, the loading shoot, bring the truck in, and load so that everything works” (group D, 6d). One person stated that “critical thinking is used in the barnyard set up and how you move animals. I think that is one where you really have to think about” (group B, 5c). The person also concluded that the station is set up differently every time.

B. Solving health-related problems.

Respondents in four focus groups stated that solving health-related problems demonstrated critical thinking, application, and problem solving. One respondent stated, “I think that one area of the skillathon that you see the critical thinking is on medications” (group A, 5c). Another person responded that “critical thinking is utilized in the withholding of treated animals” (group A, 5d). “Withdrawal times with medications use critical thinking skills” (group B, 5d). A fourth person stated, “Problem-solving skills are utilized in the medication station too” (group A, 6c). Other respondents stated “medical treatments utilized problem solving” (group E, 6c) and “withdrawal times on medications utilize problem solving” (group E, 6d). Finally, one person pointed out, “The residual with antibiotics, that’s critical thinking and problem solving” (group B, 6a).

Respondents identified other health-related skillathon stations. One person (group C, 5a) identified the station “diseases” as a station where critical thinking is used. “You had to identify what the disease was and to say how it is caused and how you would treat it and how it is preventable” (group C, 5a). Another person (group D, 5b) identified
“rabbit sanitation” as a station that can demonstrate critical thinking and application skills. “They have to look at the picture and be able to see what is wrong” (group D, 5b).

Theme 3: Many skillathon stations do not require any demonstration of decision-making skills.

Two main issues were presented with this theme. First, no consistent examples of decision-making skills were found throughout all the groups. Secondly, skillathons need more scenarios or problematic situations that require pulling together diverse bits of knowledge to enhance decision-making skills.

A. No consistent examples of decision-making skills were evident in skillathons.

Although there were examples of decision making discussed in each of the five groups, there was no agreement on stations or activities in a skillathon that demonstrated decision-making skills. One person stated, “I think that applies to all the stations. Whether it’s where to put this Velcro piece or to answer a question to make a decision about what to say” (group B, 7a). Another person added, “Selection of an animal is a decision-making skill the children utilize” (group E, 7c). Two respondents had the opinion that children have to decide whether they will do the skillathon or not. “They have a choice of whether they do it or not” (group C, 7b).

B. Skillathons need more scenarios or problematic situations that require pulling together diverse bits of knowledge to enhance decision-making skills.

Respondents pointed out the need for more scenarios or problematic situations to enhance decision-making skills. One person expressed that “when it comes down to actually having to sit down and think, the majority of the kids would say that they have done this and this and there’s no thinking to it” (group D, 7b). Another respondent
indicated, “I’m not sure in the sheep skillathon that they have been presented the situations where they have to make a decision” (group A, 7a). Another also expressed, “I think with skillathon they really aren’t making decisions anymore, because they know it all. Except for the first year” (group D, 7d).

Other respondents added ideas or situations that could be a station in a skillathon. One person pointed out that “the pedigrees and sire selection could address decision making skills” (group A, 7e). Two respondents gave situations in which the child would make decisions. One person gave the example that “if you see this symptom or the animal is acting like this, what do you do” (group A, 7g)? A second person stated, “Give them a piece of paper with a scenario” (group D, 7b).

Theme 4: Skills developed and enhanced will depend largely on the skillathon’s educational design.

One main issue is presented with this theme. The educational design needs to incorporate learning that is challenging and age appropriate.

A. Learning needs to be challenging and age appropriate.

Respondents in each of the five focus groups gave examples of the need for learning in a skillathon to be challenging and age appropriate. One person expressed, “Every year they are going to learn, if the skills are challenging each year. That’s the clue to keep it challenging for the kids” (group A, 10b). One respondent pointed out, “They are not going to build a lot of skills if they are on the same level” (group D, 8e). Another person expressed, “It does need to be progressive. That is something we all need to look at” (group D, 8f). A fourth respondent added that “it sounds like the longer kids do it the more they have to change it to keep the kids interested, especially those that
have done it the longer period of time" (group C, 10a). To make it challenging, one person stated, “You could give the critical thinking questions to the older members” (group A, 7k).

Two respondents from two focus groups responded that their county skillathons are challenging because they change with the age of the child. One person stated that “the skillathon changes so much with their age, the challenge is there” (group C, 10c). Another respondent stated, “By making it progressive now over the course of eight or ten years, our success rate is very high. Kids that come through and go away feeling like, they really know a lot” (group E, 10e).

Theme 5: Children have widely diverse feelings about skillathons.

This theme addresses the differences in how children feel about skillathons. First, many members enjoy skillathons. Secondly, some older members feel that skillathons are becoming stagnant and too easy. Thirdly, some members don’t get excited at all about skillathons and some hate them.

A. Many members enjoy skillathons.

Respondents in each of the five focus groups gave examples indicating that many children enjoyed skillathons. One person exclaimed, “They can’t wait for next one” (group C, 3a)! A second person responded, “The reaction of our kids is it’s another challenge” (group C, 3e). One person simply stated, “My kids enjoy skillathon” (group B, 3c). “They think it’s fun” (group E, 3c). Another person commented that “you can tell the younger kids really are interested and want to learn” (group A, 3j). Another respondent added, “I think the third graders take it very seriously. We try to make it fun” (group D, 2l).
B. Some older members feel that skillathons are becoming stagnant and too easy.

Focus group respondents indicated that some older members feel that skillathons are becoming stagnant. Participants in four of the five focus groups expressed concern. One respondent commented, “It seems the older they get it’s like it’s the same thing over and over. They’ve already had it and it’s the same thing” (group A, 3f). A second person added, “The level of challenge is not there” (group A, 3h). “To be honest our county fair is not very challenging,” added a third respondent (group A, 3g).

One person responded, “I think that’s a challenge for the beef, sheep, and swine kits. They need a revitalization so that we keep the kids that have learned something new to look at and learn” (group E, 3h). Another person commented, “It seems like kids are getting stagnant and sometimes my kids come out of there and say well the questions are too easy or it’s the same as last year or not challenging enough” (group B, 3b). One person stated, “We also find that in swine that the skillathon is stagnant” (group B, 3g).

C. Some members don’t get excited about participating in skillathons and some hate them.

Respondents often quoted children’s’ negative responses to skillathons. When parents were asked what their children say about skillathons, one respondent said their child “didn’t want to do it” (group D, 3a)! Other respondents shared that their child has said “ah, do we have to do that again” (group E, 3a) and “it’s summer time we don’t have to go to school” (group E, 3b). Another person stated, “They don’t think it’s cool to participate” (group B, 8b). One person replied, “My middle daughter hates them” (group A, 3b).
Theme 6: A skillathon is perceived by parents/guardians as encouraging their child to learn basic project knowledge through hands-on learning.

This theme was developed from over 30 participant comments stated throughout all five focus groups. Learning project knowledge and hands-on learning were evident themes.

One person stated, "Skillathon to me means knowledge of your animal" (group C, 2b). Another person stated that "it definitely helps kids to gain knowledge" (group D, 11b). Another defined it as "basic knowledge about a particular species" (group E, 2b). One respondent commented that "it's the ability to learn the different species and about the different species" (group B, 2c). One person simply identified skillathon as "knowledge" (group A, 2b). Another person defined them as "learning stations" (group A, 2a). And a respondent expressed, "I really think that the purpose of the skillathons is not to frustrate the kids, we want the kids to be able to learn and expand on that knowledge" (group A, 5h).

It was also evident that respondents perceived skillathons to be hands-on. One person immediately responded that skillathons are "hands-on" (group D, 2a). Another added, "It's hands-on. It's good that we offer kids an alternative. Not all kids are readers or book learners" (group E, 2f). Another respondent also stated, "It does allow for a mix of learning skills for the youth in terms of different ways that they present it and different types of things that are in there" (group C, 2f). One respondent stated that "skillathon is the ability to do a whole bunch of skills" (group B, 2a). Another person expressed that "some of the hands-on information that they learn, they take back home" (group E, 4e).
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

DISCUSSION

The development of Ohio skillathons in the early 1990's was a reaction to
livestock project members cheating at the Ohio State Fair and an underlying need for
further assessment of knowledge gained by livestock project members. The objectives of
skillathons were then developed to provide a laboratory to enhance project
knowledge and to develop the life skills of critical thinking, problem solving, and
communication. The objectives are in accordance with part of the Ohio 4-H mission,
which is to create positive environments for youth to reach their potential by
implementing experiential learning, fostering leadership, and developing skills and values
for life long benefits.

The researcher found that project knowledge is developed through a member's
participation in a skillathon and is learned through hands-on stations. The learning was
then applied through project responsibilities and everyday life.

According to the data, the researcher concluded that critical thinking and
problem-solving skills were demonstrated in quality assurance stations that allowed the
participant to devise plans for moving, sorting, loading, or unloading livestock and for
solving health-related problems. No evidence was given that critical thinking skills,
problem-solving skills, and decision-making skills were developed consistently by a member participating in other parts of the skillathon.

The researcher found it was evident that communication with an adult was a life skill that skillathons could develop, which many other educational settings do not. By participating in a skillathon youth have also developed skills enabling them to communicate knowledge to peers.

According to the TLS Model (Hendricks, 1996) the life skills such as communication, critical thinking, problem solving, and decision making are appropriate for all skillathon participants. The level of development of these skills can happen at all ages. Tasks need to be different for teens to develop life skills compared to nine year olds. With older members, parents’ comments indicated that the skillathon has failed to challenge them at their cognitive level. New stations are needed or the educational design needs to be changed to challenge older youth.

Finally, children have widely diverse feelings about skillathons. Many youth enjoyed skillathons, especially when they are challenging and success is perceived as possible. Some parents commented that some youth do not enjoy participating in skillathons.

The challenge for 4-H Youth Development educators is to re-evaluate the objectives of the skillathon with the results of this study. According to 4-H parents’ and guardians’ perceptions, all objectives are not being met. Is the skillathon the most appropriate way to demonstrate life skills? Ohio 4-H Youth Development is currently evaluating how Ohio 4-H can include the eight critical elements of youth development programs as described by the National 4-H Impact Assessment Steering Committee.
(Peterson et al., 2001) into their programming. In order for positive growth and development, 4-H programs should include: (a) a relationship with a caring adult; (b) safe physical and emotional environment; (c) opportunities to master skills and content; (d) opportunities to practice service for others; (e) opportunities for self-determination, decision making, and goal setting; (f) opportunities to be an active, engaged learner; (g) a positive connection with the future; and (h) an inclusive atmosphere. According to the present research study, Ohio 4-H Youth Development cannot state that skillathons meet all eight of these critical elements of youth development.

CONCLUSIONS

The researcher has drawn the following conclusions based upon the findings presented in Chapter 4. Conclusions were made on each theme identified by the study.

Theme 1: Children can develop and practice skills through their participation in skillathons.

The parents and guardians identified that skills can be developed and practiced by 4-H members through participation in skillathons. Specific skills included communication, becoming at ease in an interview with adults, learning basic project knowledge, and applying what they have learned.

Participants in four focus groups identified that communication is a life skill that was used by their children in skillathons. The participants indicated that communication is a skill that is used throughout the skillathon. They stated that communication was utilized when children answer questions asked of them and asked questions to the
skillathon facilitator. Youth also communicated with other 4-H members and adults before and after the skillathon.

Many participants also indicated that communication was a very important life skill. Communication is an important skill that youth need to develop leadership life skills (Bradley et al., 1991). In a research study by Martin (2000), employers identified communication as an important life skill needed for workforce preparedness. The parents and guardians expressed that there are very few times a child has the opportunity to communicate in an interview with an adult. Having to communicate with an adult will help them to gain confidence in an interview situation and better prepare them for future scholarship and job interviews.

Many participants expressed that children learn subject matter knowledge and apply what they have learned through their participation in skillathons. The participants indicated that children were learning livestock subject matter skills and applying the skills in everyday life. When working with a veterinarian or solving their own health-related problems, members applied skills learned. Cole (1994) stated that by performing knowledge in real-life situations, youth are better able to connect the education to life experiences.

Project knowledge skills developed may also be applied through other 4-H experiences. The parents felt members were successful in showmanship events and were able to help other members learn the subject matter. Application of subject matter was evident through verbal communication and hands-on skills with their projects.
Theme 2: Critical thinking, application, and problem-solving skills can be demonstrated through quality assurance stations.

The researcher concluded that participation in activities at quality assurance stations could demonstrate critical thinking, application, and problem-solving skills. Devising plans for moving, sorting, loading, or unloading animals and solving health-related problems were stations that participants identified as helping to promote their skills. Black et al. (1999) identified these as quality assurance stations. Quality assurance stations or programs are where a 4-H member learns about their responsibilities as a food producer. Members become familiar with the Good Production Practices (GPPs) that should be followed by anyone raising market animals.

Participants indicated that moving, sorting, loading, or unloading animals involves demonstrating and communicating critical thinking and problem-solving skills. At this quality assurance station the skillathon facilitator could change the situation for each skillathon participant. This required the application of critical thinking and problem-solving skills to be demonstrated by children. The researcher also concluded that giving medications, calculating withdrawal times, and other health-related situations were specific quality assurance stations that allowed youth to demonstrate critical thinking, application, and problem-solving skills. In these stations youth were given livestock situations to figure, calculate, and solve. In order to correctly answer the questions, youth have to use reflective or reasonable thinking (Jones, 1996) and problem-solving skills. As in real life, each situation can be different. Jones (1996) describes critical thinking as an essential component of everyday thought and deliberations. By
using a problem-oriented approach to teaching, learning can improve (Newcomb, McCracken, & Warmbrod, 1993).

**Theme 3: Many skillathon stations do not require any demonstration of decision-making skills.**

The researcher concluded that, although there were examples of decision making stated by the participants, there was no agreement on stations in a skillathon that demonstrated decision-making skills. Therefore, the researcher could not tell if these skills were demonstrated in specific skillathon stations.

Participants indicated that only first-time skillathon participants might be making decisions. The participants included that to enhance the demonstration of decision-making skills, skillathons need more scenarios or problematic situations. They expressed that everyday animal husbandry scenarios would demonstrate these skills. Knowlton Ward (1996) concluded that decision-making skills were positively influenced by participation in a 4-H animal science program. Decision-making skills are important to take positive action in problems faced everyday (Gibbons, 1995). Therefore, it is important to know if decision-making skills are strengthened through their participation in the skillathon.

**Theme 4: Skills developed and enhanced will depend largely on the skillathon's educational design.**

Participants indicated that learning needed to be challenging and age appropriate in order for skills to be developed and enhanced. In support of this finding, Hendricks (1996) stated that youth programming needs to provide developmentally appropriate opportunities for youth to develop life skills. The researcher concluded that basic
skillathon kits challenge the first-year learner, but more is needed to challenge the more advanced learner. Also, skillathons need to be challenging each year for learning to take place. Basic needs of youth require achievement that keeps pace with their abilities but is challenging (Black, 1996). Based on parents and guardian perceptions, counties that have developed the skillathons to progress over time claim to have a higher success rate of knowledge gained.

**Theme 5: Children have widely diverse feelings about skillathons.**

The researcher concluded that there were mixed feelings about skillathons among participants’ children. Most children enjoyed skillathons and felt they were fun. Many times younger members enjoyed them more than older members and many members were interested in learning and being challenged. Some members hated them and feel as though they were in school during participation.

Findings indicated that some older members felt that skillathons are becoming stagnant and too easy. The level of challenge was not there for some older members. The same stations and scenarios were being used over and over again. Newcomb, McCracken, and Warmbrod (1993) state that learners can be motivated when tasks fall in a range of challenge such that success is perceived as possible, but not certain. Skillathon kits needed to be revitalized to challenge all learners, especially, the beef, sheep, and swine kits.

**Theme 6: A skillathon is perceived by parents or guardians as encouraging their children to learn basic project knowledge through hands-on learning.**

According to 30 participant responses, parents perceive skillathons as learning basic project knowledge. Children gained and expanded project knowledge through
participating in skillathons. The researcher also concluded that learning takes place through hands-on application. These applications can be used in everyday life. Papalia and Olds (1998) stated that human beings are born with the ability to learn from experience. Children learn what they practice (Newcomb, McCracken, & Warmbod, 1993). It appears that skillathons provided youth with an opportunity to demonstrate what they know about livestock education topics.

**IMPLICATIONS**

Based upon the preceding conclusions the researcher suggests the following implications. These implications are for Ohio 4-H members and Ohio 4-H Youth Development.

**4-H Members**

Experts recognize that communication skills are important for developing leadership skills (Bradley et al., 1991). Members can gain or strengthen communication skills by participating in skillathons. Members can gain these skills to effectively communicate with an adult for job or scholarship interview. Students who possess communication skills meet a demand of many employers and are better prepared to enter the world of work (Carter, McCarroll, & Popek, 1998). Murphy and Jenks (1982) also identified communication skills as necessary or desirable for obtaining employment.

All 4-H members can participate in skillathons to gain project knowledge. Hendricks (1996) stated that learning subject matter is one of the reasons youth participate in youth programs. Members who demonstrate project knowledge gained have additional opportunities for recognition (Black & Black, 1997). Project knowledge
a young person gains through the skillathon is then applied to project animal care. Youth who do a good job at caring for their animals produce a better and safer product for human consumption (D. Glauer, personal communication, December 11, 1999).

4-H Youth Development

All of the objectives developed for skillathons are not being met. 4-H Youth Development needs to re-evaluate these objectives. Re-evaluation should be based on the results of this study and the eight critical elements of youth development (Peterson et al., 2001).

Communication skills are life skills developed by skillathon participants. The Educator’s Resource Material Set (Black & Black, 1997) designed for each skillathon kit identifies tips for station facilitators. Using the tips for station facilitators, 4-H Extension agents remind facilitators that “young people and their positive development, are more important than their projects” (Black & Black, 1997, p. 5). Facilitators are to put the young person at ease and find something the young person knows about the information or task and build on it. Facilitators should be trained and oriented by 4-H Extension agents before skillathons to continue to encourage communication development.

Quality assurance stations can be used to demonstrate and strengthen critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The goat learning laboratory Educator’s Resource Materials Set (Black & Black, 1997) lists animal handling guidelines, medication label and insert reading, medication label tasks, and injection site identification as quality assurance stations. 4-H Extension agents can use quality assurance stations in skillathons to provide opportunities to demonstrate and strengthen critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
4-H Youth Development needs to develop skillathon stations that are designed with more scenarios or problematic situations in order for youth to demonstrate decision-making skills. The research participants suggested animal husbandry scenarios would demonstrate these skills. 4-H Extension agents who have a specialization in educational design and life skills should collaborate with animal science specialists to develop these stations.

4-H Youth Development should develop skillathons that are challenging to all learners. Cognitive development needs to be considered when developing 4-H Youth Development programs (Cox, 1994). Ohio State University, 4-H Youth Development specialists need to collaborate with animal science specialists to develop skillathon stations that meet the level of challenge needed by older members. The TLS Model (Hendricks, 1996) could be used to develop stations that are developmentally age appropriate. There is need for the revitalization of the beef, sheep, and swine kits. The 2001 resource handbooks for beef, sheep, and swine could be used by youth development and animal science specialists to develop new stations that are challenging to all ages.

4-H Youth Development should continue to utilize skillathons to develop project knowledge. Gaining project knowledge meets 4-H membership expectations (Horton & Farrell, 1999). Livestock education is very important and has a long history in Ohio (OCES, 1987). Hands-on skillathon stations are needed to encourage learning. Dale (1969) indicates that when students are involved in doing, the greatest amount of learning takes place.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations based upon study conclusions and implications include:

1. Ohio 4-H Youth Development should continue to design skillathons using communication skills and applications of project knowledge. Skillathon facilitators should communicate with all participants. All skillathons should include an interview with an adult. Project knowledge should be applicable to situations encountered in everyday life.

2. Ohio 4-H Youth Development should design all skillathons to incorporate quality assurance stations that enable youth to demonstrate critical thinking, application, and problem-solving skills. Ohio 4-H Youth Development should review other current stations claiming critical thinking, application, and problem solving and develop more stations to demonstrate these skills.

3. Ohio 4-H Youth Development needs to develop more scenarios or problematic situations in order for youth to demonstrate decision-making skills. Ohio 4-H Youth Development needs to develop situations that demonstrate decision-making skills that are progressive and are designed for learners beyond the first year.

4. Ohio 4-H Youth Development should evaluate the educational appropriateness of county skillathons. Ohio 4-H Youth Development should design skillathons that are educationally age appropriate to challenge all members. Ohio 4-H Youth Development should research counties claiming
learning progression in skillathon design and incorporate this progression of learning in other county skillathons.

5. Ohio 4-H Youth Development should continually develop more stations for all skillathon kits. Beef, sheep, and swine kits need to be revitalized and expanded.

6. Ohio 4-H Youth Development should continue to utilize skillathons to encourage basic project knowledge. Include hands-on learning in all skillathon stations.

7. Ohio 4-H Youth Development should include the eight critical elements of youth development in 4-H livestock education programs.

Recommendations for Further Research

1. The researcher recommends that a similar study should be conducted utilizing 4-H alumni who have participated in a skillathon in the last five years. Perceptions of life skills developed can be identified by adults who participated in skillathons. Adults can easily identify skills and the source of development of these skills.

2. The researcher also recommends that survey research (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1996) be conducted. The researcher recommends a survey be designed from the six resulting themes. The data should be collected, responses summarized,
and analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques. Results can then be compared to the findings from this study about 4-H member life skills strengthened through the use of skillathons. The goal will be to support, refute, or extend the six themes as identified in the findings from this study.
APPENDIX A
Targeting Life Skills Model
APPENDIX B
Letter of Invitation to Participants
January 16, 2001

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Since 1994 thousands of 4-H members across the state have been participating in livestock skillathon contests. The objectives of livestock skillathons are to strengthen certain life skills. As in any educational contest or activity, individuals question the educational purpose and objectives as designed.

As a parent/guardian selected by _______, your perceptions of livestock skillathons and the perceptions of strengths your child has gained through his or her participation in a livestock skillathon is very important to the success or improvement of this educational program developed for Ohio 4-H members.

With fellow parents/guardians, we would like to invite you to participate in our research study to informally discuss your perceptions. We would like to meet as a group on February 5, 2001. The focus group interviews will be start at 7:00 p.m. and last until approximately 8:30 p.m. at the Extension Office in Bowling Green.

Please contact ________ by February 4th if you wish to participate. Thank You!

Sincerely,

R. Dale Safrit
Extension Specialist
Leadership Education

Rebecca A. Barker
Extension Agent
4-H Youth Development
APPENDIX C
Interview Schedule
Interview Schedule

Good evening. I would first of like to thank you for joining us. I know you are very busy and I appreciate you taking the time to participate in this research project. I know by the selection of your names by your Extension agent and your willingness to participate that you care about the educational programs 4-H has to offer.

As I stated in my letter, the purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of Ohio 4-H members' parents/guardians regarding selected life skills strengthened in their children through their participation in livestock skillathons.

The procedure of this study includes a question and answer session lasting no longer than an hour and a half. All questions involve your perceptions of your child's involvement in the 4-H program.

The study should not create any discomfort to you. The questions are not intended to reveal personal life information. You may answer the question to the degree that you feel comfortable. You may benefit from participating in this study by discovering skills strengthened through participation in skillathons and by helping Extension educators enhance the relevance and importance of skillathons.

Please, do not give us your name at any time. I am not concerned with who or where the answers come from. A letter will be used as your identification and has been given to your seat prior to your entrance. Please identify yourself by letter only. The information you will share will be reported and shared in a manner that would permit you or any other individual to be identified. Once transcribed, all recordings will be destroyed.

Your participation in this research project is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate in this study at any time. You may withdraw consent at anytime.

Summaries of information you provide may be published.

The two investigators who are conducting this research project are Dale Safrit and Rebecca Barker. If you have any questions please contact Dr. Safrit at 208 Agr. Admin. Bldg. 2120 Fyffe Rd. Columbus, Ohio 43210, 614-292-6321 and you may contact Ms. Barker at 871 W. Marion Rd. Suite 102 Mt. Gilead, Ohio 43338.

If you have any questions I would be happy to answer them.

Please read the following consent form and sign if you agree to participate.
Please feel free to answer or explain your feelings freely. No one is going to judge you. All answers are confidential. Please do not discuss participants and answers once you leave.

**Let’s go around the room give us your name, how may kids you have, and what kind of projects did they take last year?**

1. I would like to begin by asking you to think of your child and his/her involvement in 4-H. What do you feel are the positive aspects of 4-H?

2. What parts of 4-H does your child enjoy the most? The least?

3. What ways has your child benefited through his or her involvement in 4-H?

Let’s talk about the livestock skillathon your child has participated in this past year.

4. When you hear the word skillathon what comes to your mind?

5. What is your child saying about skillathons?

You know your child the best. That’s why you were invited.

6. What type of skills or life skills has your child gained or strengthened because of their participation in a 4-H skillathon event?

   Probe #1. If skills were gained or strengthened, what impact do these skills have on your 4-H member?

   Probe #2. What skills are the most important?

7. Please identify and or describe the types of communication are utilized by the 4-H member in a skillathon event.

   Probe #1. Are any of these communication skills strengthened by the use of a skillathon?

   Probe #2. Why or why not?

Critical Thinking: Reflective and reasonable thinking is focused on deciding what to believe or do. It is the alternative to making decisions by blind acceptance, impulse or whim, tradition or habit. (Part of or element to decision making or problem solving)

8. In a skillathon event how do you feel critical thinking is strengthened?
Probe #1. Do you feel that critical thinking is an important part of skillathons?

9. Think about your member solving problems and the skills that are needed, in what ways are the problem solving skills utilized by your 4-H member through skillathons?

Probe #1. In what ways are they being strengthened?

Probe #2. Are the skills strengthened by skillathons or by something else?

10. Please identify and describe your perceptions how decision-making skills are used by your 4-H member through the use of skillathons?

Probe #1. Are the skills being strengthened with the use of the skillathon?

Probe #2. Why or why not?

11. How many years has your 4-H member participated in a livestock skillathon event?

Probe #1. Do you feel that this has an effect on skills developed? Why or why not?

12. What other benefits, if any do you believe are gained or strengthened by your child’s participation in livestock skillathons?

13. How would you measure the success of the participation in a skillathon?

14. Have you ever volunteered or were paid to help with a skillathon event?

Thank you for participating. Please contact me if you have any questions.
APPENDIX D
Focus Group Interview Data
Wayne County (Group A)

1. In what way have your child benefited through their involvement in 4-H?
   
a. Leadership skills. Finishing something they have started.

b. Whatever they've started is self-accomplished. If it doesn't make weight it's their fault.

c. I think another thing they learn a little bit of patience. Especially in the animal projects it doesn't want to cooperate with you and you have to just work with it and be patient. Don't get upset and keep calm.

d. There's just not a lot of fun of going to the fair there's a lot of work to it.

e. When you start out breaking the heifer at the beginning of the summer. "I'm doing this next year!" But the time the fair is over what are we doing next year.

f. Our kids have gained a lot from the club activities too. The service projects. The leadership roles in the club the responsibilities and relationships and also everybody is so busy these days, when kids take 4-H projects parents do become involved. It creates a situation where mom and dad and kids have to interact and work together on things. Which is really good.

g. It also helps to meet different friends involved in what they are involved in.

h. It's a great group of kids too. Kids in 4-H have pretty similar values, moral values, family values. It's a good influence on your kids.

i. That follows through to camp. Kids will see somebody and say "Hey I know that person from camp". How many times have I heard that? They're from different school districts and meet them again at fair and chum around with them.

j. When they get to college they find that they live down the hall from them.

k. It's not just a one-time friendship I mean, there are friendships being forged that will carry through their entire life.
2. When you hear the word skillathon what do you think of?

   a. Learning stations
   b. Knowledge
   c. A goal. It's not the end of a project but it basically is. I always tell my kids your reward for accomplishing what you need to participate in the skillathon, then you are ready to show at the fair. Study the project material twice.
   d. Accountability. There are a lot of times a kid could easily get through a 4-H project before we had skillathons. No one ever really looked to see if the books were completed. I don't know if the kids studied or learn the material they needed to. To do a good job on the project.
   e. Some may study the book as they walk in.
   f. But at least they have to look at it. They have to take some of the information seriously. So it does hold them accountable.
3. What are your children saying about skillathon?

a. Truthfully! A waste of time.

b. My oldest daughter loves them. She goes to the state fair just to do that. My middle daughter hates them and my son loves them too. It is a challenge.

c. They want to win. It’s a competition. Even with your daughter who takes a different project. They compete.

d. I would say it’s not a highlight but they enjoy it.

e. My kids and several years we’ll show at state fair and do the skillathon at the state fair, but they will also want to do the county one. This one was on the state fair and the county one is different. And you know to see what’s different. “I missed this one here, is it going to be on the state fair one?” They look forward to it and actually enjoy them. I have noticed that in the years that we have had it, that on identification of animals, I think that they are more aware that there are more breeds of animals out there than what you realize. And the other thing is on meats they can now identify cuts of meat that I could never have at their age. As an adult I have trouble still doing it. I can see my own girls that they have grown in there own knowledge. And that way it has been a good deal. And there is more to the fair than just getting the animal in the ring and showing it. There is a lot of prep work and background work that needs to be done too.
   i. If we are going to have our kids participate in the agricultural sector.
   ii. Probe: Why do some of them say that it is a waste of time?

f. Well my youngest one say’s “How soon is this fair over?” It’s maybe the same thing every year. They know it. It seems the older they get it’s like it’s the same thing over and over. They’ve already had it and it’s the same thing.

g. To be real honest our county fair is not very challenging.

h. The level of challenge is not there.
i. But also with my youngest daughter there is a lack of putting a lot of effort to knowing the information before she get there. So it’s not challenging because she really doesn’t care.

j. When I help with the skillathon you can tell the younger kids really are interested and want to learn. The older kids seem to don’t care. We just have to do it.
4. What type of skills or life skills has your child utilized through their participation in a skillathon?

a. One important skill that I think they gain is that there are not too many opportunities for kids to have one-on-one oral interrogation and I have seen as my kids get older they get more comfortable with standing before an adult and being quizzed orally. That’s a skill that some adults are terrified at. So I think it is really good practice that, ... it builds confidence even if they know the answers it’s still good for them to stand before an adult and ask questions, think on their feet and talk and I feel that is an excellent learning opportunity for them.

b. Learning to be prepared.

c. When the kids know what they are paying for their steers, how much the feed costs and what they get at the end.

d. You can see a tremendous amount of difference in the books when you’re judging. Out of the 25 points it is only worth 2. Something’s not right there. There are some kids that do their books and usually know what’s going on and some, even if they copied down figures from last year.

e. The younger ones the most years that I did it, we gave them points if they tried. Math being maybe not their strong suit. And we had seniors that came in and didn’t do it at all.

f. Record keeping, that is something that is not going to end when you’re out of 4-H. I know with us with the maple syrup, there are things that we keep track of, dates, how much is gathered, how many gallons we make and everything like that. And you know you compare those from year to year and it’s the same thing with your animals. If you have the records you can go back and see where you need to change things. Where maybe if I would have done this a little bit different, weight gain would have been a little bit different. Keeping those records, you want to know where you want to be headed down the road.

g. Sheri always prompts us to always look for the teachable moment, if the kid is really struggling to help them a little bit. When actually score them to look for something you can say positive about the. So you can help them to be better prepared for next year. There are those teaching opportunities.
h. It's still a learning thing. You'll go through questions and they'll get stuck on one and you help to look for a clue. You're still trying to teach them a skill to carry-on. It's not what you learn it's the ability to know how to learn.

i. Kids that can't read. You're there to help them.

j. I think we really have been encouraged as judges to be really sensitive to kids. We are not here to put them down. We are here to make it a positive learning experience. And that's the best part about being a facilitator.
   i. That's why I like doing it.

k. I don't like to have kids go away from the skillathon thinking "Well I missed this." I think we need to help them realize that this is an important part of that industry and to take a little more time. And go over and tell them what it is and what it shoots for.

l. Kids think it's a waste of time but afterwards you can hear them talking to each other. "What'd you get for that one?" They're outside talking about it.
5. Critical Thinking is reflective and reasonable thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do. It's not making decisions by blind acceptance, impulse, guessing, tradition or habit. In a skillathon event where do you feel your children are using critical thinking skills?

a. I think as individual they do use critical thinking as in school. My daughter is a good test taker. She doesn’t study that much. My younger son gives up. It exercises your mind. And we have to step in and create that moment or exercise that part of your thinking. It’s like school in that respect. Taking a test.

b. I know the state skillathon is that way, because my daughter has come home and said “I got to this part of the skillathon and I had to stop and think, why are they asking this question? And if I would stand back and think about that usually I can find the answer”.

c. I think that one area of the skillathon that you see the critical thinking is the like on medications, you have that paragraph that the kid has to read. An animal weighs so many pounds and they should have this much medicine, the animal weighs double the amount, what about the medication. Some of the kids will stand there and really don’t get it. And others will be not sure and I will go through it and say “It’s just double”

d. Our the withholding. What’s the with hold on that? And they are just thinking. What does it say the withhold is? It doesn’t say. It doesn’t have one.

e. I would agree with all of you. I think it makes a big difference if the facilitator can really help encourage that in the kids. Just the way they help them go through the questions. You can sit there like a blob and let the kids struggle. It’s pretty easy to kind of make a comment or a leading question and really helps the kids to do some critical thinking, which then they learn something from it.

f. We want them to succeed.

g. That’s true when you are facilitating you are trying to set that kid up for success. You’re not trying to set them up to fail. What ever it takes so when they leave and they know the answers but they did learn something
h. I think really that is the purpose of the skillathons. It's not to frustrate the kids, we want the kids to be able to learn and expand on that knowledge.

i. There really a lot of opportunities for critical thinking in the skillathon. You really need to have the type of facilitator we talked about.

- Probe: How important do you think it is that we have critical thinking in the skillathons?

j. Very

k. Very, otherwise there is not much point to it.

l. It's not the facts it's how you grasp the facts.

- Probe 2: Do you feel the skillathons are meeting the goal of utilizing critical thinking?

m. I think the state skillathon does. There is a big difference between the states and ours.

n. It takes longer it is a whole different world. My daughter would come home every year so frustrated
6. Think about your children solving problems. In what ways are problem-solving skills utilized by your 4-H member in the skillathon?

   a. Probably in the QA station is the only place they solve problems. Everything else, at least in sheep, pretty much seems as though it is identification.

   b. I know there was one last year that I hadn’t seen before in beef, where the pasture’s laid out and you had to load the animals. I don’t know if you had to segregate or what. I would think as a facilitator, “OK this is your situation to get these cattle loaded, how would you set your fencing up or something?” That is pretty wide open and I thought that was a different angle. That would be problem solving I guess.

   c. The medication would be too. You’ve got something wrong with the animals. What do you need to give to them and how much to give them.
7. Please identify and describe your perceptions of how decision-making skills are used by your member through the use of the skillathon.

a. I'm not sure in the sheep skillathon that they have been presented the situations where they have to make a decision. It's much more identification or what something does, what the dosage is. It is mostly identification. Breeds, meat, feeds, meat cuts. So I will just speak for the sheep, it's mostly identification. I think that, that is really interesting giving them a situation. Of course that's harder to judge quantitatively.

b. I know those that have to look at the books and the QA and that's a lot harder to judge.

c. You identify ten you get ten points.

d. I think that solving the problems and making the decisions are like similar things.

e. The pedigrees could address that. The sire selection. Especially if they get into the inbreeding part. I think that is something they are going to have to address.

f. I know the sheep, I have questions too. We need to give them situations and ask questions. Like this lamb is chilled. What would you do? Those are some areas you could go into. But you would probably get into it more with our breeding sheep rather than the market lambs. But still you have to watch your market lambs. What are some signs of this...?

g. I remember in college, I had a professor give us questions like "If you see this symptom or the animal is acting like this what do you do?" It was constant critical thinking and decision-making. There was very few guessing. It was enjoyable and you learned. It was tough. You could apply a lot more of that in the skillathons to I think.

h. You wouldn't really have to get hard situations. There are situations that aren't as life threatening. But I think they need something like that.

i. Most of our skillathons can be easily quantitatively graded on the grading sheets. It's not the discretion of the judge.
j. They've kind of kept it cut and dry.

k. You could give the critical thinking questions to the older members.
8. Do you feel that the skills we have been talking about are developed by participation in the skillathon?

   a. No. Not developed.
9. Do you feel these skills are strengthened by their participation in the skillathon?

b. It's like a muscle you use it you strengthen it.

c. Like in the beef they give all the feed ingredients. I myself don't use all of them. So what good is it that they need to know all these different feeds?

d. It kind of lets them know that there is more out there than our own farm. It broadens their knowledge a little bit.
10. Do you feel that the number of years a child takes the skillathon has an effect on skills they use? And why?

a. Sure. They are not going to figure it out the first year. They're going to build upon that every year. Or they should be.

b. I think it is a life-building thing. If they go through 10 years of 4-H and 10 years of skillathon. Every year they are going to learn, if the skills are challenging each year. That's the clue to keep it challenging for the kids.

c. Their communication, they do it the 3rd or 4th time, I think they can realize that no one's going to bite their head off. They can be a little bit more relaxed.

d. It's like interviewing the more you do it the better you get at it.
11. What other benefits, if any, do you believe are gained or strengthened by their participation in the skilathon? Are there any we haven’t mentioned?

None
12. How would you measure a successful skillathon participation by your child?

a. I think it’s more how a 4-H’er feels they have done.

b. My girls a lot of times, won’t look at how many possible points there are or how many they got. They feel that if they were able to identify… To give you an example. The first year my daughter took the beef skillathon. She could only name the Texas Longhorn. The next year she came back and she got many more right. I don’t think it’s so much, the point system as it is they realize “I now know some of this is”

c. The growth potential.

d. And she didn’t look at it is a hindrance, something that they had to do. She was able to learn through it and those points did not matter. As she got older yes they did.

e. It’s sometimes fun.
Butler County (Group B)

1. In what ways have your children benefited through their involvement in the 4-H program?

   a. I think they have benefited in a lot of ways. 4-H for me helps, teaches the things that I feel like I want them to learn at home. It teaches them respect responsibility, morals, hard work. All those good things that are hard to come by in this day and age.

   b. One aspect is working with the other kids the cooperation. Working with groups or committees. With kids in the same barn keeping alleys clean. Working together is sometimes pretty tough, to be an Indian, it's tough to be achieve, but when they work together it works pretty good.

   c. I know my children have benefited in 4-H in leadership skills. They like to have the officer positions in the club itself and they tend to want to help a lot. I think that all comes with leadership.

   d. The things I like the best about doing 4-H is they have something to do in the summer. They just don't sit around and watch TV, they have a purpose.

   e. I feel that they have a project and they are working towards something. Whatever they put into it is what they benefit from.

   f. Also to add to that, it provides an incentive, there are rewards at the end. They work hard and sometimes for a job it is the money they receive. For 4-H it is the trophy, it's the pat on the back, the picture in the paper and kids will strive to get those kinds of rewards.

   g. With my daughter it has also helped with setting goals, in what she wants to be career wise.
2. When you hear the word skillathon what do you think of?

a. Just skills.

b. The ability to do a whole bunch of skills.

c. The ability to learn the different species and about the different species.

d. I’m going to say a skillathon is “Can you do it?” One thing that sometimes gets taken away from skillathons is that it is a memorize and that’s it. Skillathon kind of means more, “Can you actually do this?”
   i. In a regular situation can you apply the information you have learned?
   ii. Maybe that’s something different than the actual contest.

e. At our 4-H meetings we do practice skillathons a lot and we go through those a lot. They like to participate in it. It is like anything else you get out of it what you put into it. Some don’t put a lot into it and some do, but what ever they do get out of it, they can take and apply to there project.
3. What are your children saying about skillathons?

a. The ones who don’t win year after year get frustrated. They’re in 4-H for 10 years and after the first couple of years they don’t do very well. On the other hand the kids that are first, second or third want to keep at it. If they are not first they want to keep at it to get first place. In our county the way it is set up a kid can win the skillathon and come back and win it again because he is trying for premier exhibitor and in our county we’re intermingling two separate entities, but they are tied together and so what happens is that kids will win one year and they’re not out of it. They come back and… I’ve got a daughter in that situation. Sometimes you say “OK, why don’t you not do this and let someone else win” but that person is going for this real nice director chair that they are going to get if they are premier exhibitor and then they’re going to back off. All of our kids are that way they’ll go in again with the kids and they want to win to get that spotlight.

b. With my children it’s always a big contest and in fact one of my children is in completion with his child every year. And it seems like kids are getting stagnant and sometimes my kids come out of there and say “Well the questions are too easy or it’s the same as last year or there not challenging enough they weren’t worded correctly. So it’s kind of mixed emotions by each one as they do it and come out.

c. But it’s a big contest. To see who’s going to win each year. They try the best that they can.

d. My kids enjoy skillathon. They’ve both done well in the skillathon. Our oldest is real good, is a good student, gets good grades, can memorize stuff. It is kind of up his alley, but yet he has learned it and applied it. Our youngest one was the only skillathon for the juniors last year and is not quite that way. It’s a little bit contrasting. He’s not the greatest reader in the world. But he really has a focus on the goats. He’s really gotten into still projects. Developed a really good interest. So I think that that has combated the negative side of his reading ability and memorization enough that he can overcome that.

e. I go back to you get out of it what you put into it. Here’s a student who’s getting out the book and studying it a month prior to the skillathon. He’s working more, putting the extra hours in, because he wants to win that thing. That’s what he has to do to win, because it is a tough contest.

f. I agree about the stagnant questions. It would be really nice if they really changed the questions. They’re pretty much limited and there is a
guideline as to what you can use in the skillathon and everybody has the skillathon kits. There are only so many things in that skillathon kit and you got to repeat. Where are you going to get new questions, so looking through the book material. So again the kid that can read the book, remember what that book says, that's the kids that has the advantage.

g. We also find that in swine that the skillathon is stagnant.

h. In sheep we tried to do some things last year that were totally different, even as far as the tiebreaker questions. Things that they would have to figure in their head, as far as weight gain. Something totally different than what is in the kit itself.
4. What type of skills or life skills has your child utilized through their participation in a skillathon?

a. You have to communicate. You’re going to be asked some questions about, intramuscular injections and what it is, you have to be pretty articulate in how they explain it where it occurs and things like that. There are certainly communication skills involved and being able to speak and that type of thing.

b. A lot of it is memorization skills. “Put this feet structure with the picture.” You just memorize from the book. So a lot of it isn’t the hands-on type of thing. There was some introduced last year using math skills in the weight gain. You had to think a little more and use math skills and a few science skills. But for the most part it is a lot of memorization.

c. Some of the kids I have in class they can talk about the size of that pig and where that pig came from, but if you ask them to calculate the rate of gain. They know what it is but they can’t calculate it, their math skills aren’t there.
   i. They can compare “Black Magic” to “Dirty Dungers” and know which bear they want. They know about what the rate of gain is and means, but they have a tough time.

d. Communication skills for sure. I have heard my son talk and of what he picked up at skillathon and seeing them going to farm and taking what they have learned from the skillathon and talking to others about it. Or at their meetings, talk to the other members about skillathon. They have a practice in our club and they help the younger kids understand it. So I think that communication is important.

e. I think within the station you do very little talking. You put the Velcro stickers on the other one. A lot of times you don’t talk to the person at the stations. A lot of times they aren’t allowed to talk to you. Outside of the contest and talking about learning those skills. You gain that ability. On how you can learn things, apply it and communicate it.

f. At state fair the tiebreaker was timed. It was using memorization because it was the parts.

g. In real life agriculture you have to go out and read and calculate and do these things. You can’t just do it like the good old days. The kids go to 4-H we have to teach them the correct ways to do things and if it is reading out of the book then that’s what we’ve got to do. I’m not negative on skillathon at all. It is an absolutely great program. It helps
all the kids learn about different species. Any kid can learn to do the different species.

i. And we have had kids do them. They don’t even show in that specie. It’s a great program. I would like to see a little more hands on. Maybe something a little more for the kid that is a little more slower in the memorization area.

h. Something they learn is cooperation. I don’t know if everybody does. Our oldest and her daughter compete against each other every year. Last year they felt they needed to study the feeds. So they spent the day working on the feeds together learning that.

i. I can agree with that I remember our kids all sitting in the swine barn studying in their swine books together. Asking each other.

j. One thing about the contest itself, I didn’t help last year, but the year before I worked the stations and you’re in the barn and all the other contestants are waiting and watching everybody else. So you are really limited as to what you can do and why it is, stick the Velcro here or point to this or that, because if you talk to them then the other people will be paying attention. And you have to ask the same questions or you’ve got to have them actually pick up a piece of equipment and demonstrate how to use this. Well you really can’t do that because everyone will see what is going on. You would have to have a big place and take them into separate rooms. So you are pretty limited as to doing the actual contest.

k. I think we are spread out more in the county contest then they are at the state contest.

l. We just don’t have the facilities.
5. Critical Thinking is reflective and reasonable thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do. It's not making decisions by blind acceptance, impulse, guessing, tradition or habit. In a skillathon event where do you feel your children are using critical thinking skills?

a. In the questions we talked about rate of gain. They have to do the math. Once we don’t spend time on, maybe beef or dairy does, is the digestive systems. “Why don’t I feed this to this animal?” OK, they go in and say it’s a ruminant, this and this is why. To me that’s a really critical thinking. That kid that reads the book and knows how the rumen works. From that stand point an Ag. Student has a little bit better advantage. They have this in class.

b. The tiebreaker had some really critical thinking. That’s why we changed it.

c. Another one is the barnyard set up and how you move animals. I think that is one where you really have to think about. It is usually a different setup each time. It’s not just total memorization. It’s applying the skill of making a path of loading animals.

d. Withdrawal times with medication.
6. Think about your children solving problems. In what ways are problem solving skills utilized by your 4-H member in the skillathon?

a. One is the rate of gain when they do math. The residual with antibiotics that's a critical thinking/problem solving.

b. Solving health-related problems. Like a goat not eating and is limping.

c. A tiebreaker may have it.

d. I don’t know if the problem solving is at the skillathon, but I know some of the things my kids have learned at the skillathon helps them solve problems and with selection. So that’s how they would carry it back.

e. Figuring out what to do when one of their lambs has diarrhea, they know what to do right away. They have learned some of that through the skillathon. They bring a lot of it back from the skillathon and apply it. Like the feet and legs with selection.
7. Please identify and describe your perceptions, how decision-making skills are used by your member through the use of the skillathon?

   a. I think that applies to all the stations. Whether it's where to put this Velcro piece or to answer a question to make a decision what to say.
8. Do you think that skillathons help develop these skills we have talked about?

a. All of those skills are indirect qualities they learn because of they want to compete in order to compete they have to do all these things. So every one of those are basically indirect results of the skillathon itself. If we did not have the skillathon, there would be a lot of kids out there that wouldn’t know nearly as much as they do now.

b. We have a very large club and very few will participate in the skillathon. They think it isn’t cool to participate, they think it is the same every year so why do it. Parents will say “Oh, you won’t do good so why do it?” I agree that it’s a hands-on experience, but if they don’t want to do it. They don’t want to do it, then they don’t realize how much they have actually lost.

c. I think a lot of kids don’t learn the common sense skills being in 4-H and in more rural areas. As far a developing some real common sense skills this enhances those. Only a small amount of things do develop skills. This is one of those things that enhances all of those skills that you mentioned. It just enhances them.

d. It enforces the problem solving and decision making skills.
9. Do you feel these skills are strengthened by their participation in the skillathon

2. I think the development of those skills have to happen at an earlier year. Hopefully before they're 10 years old they've gotten some of those skills, naturally at home. I think at that age they should have a basis. That this could be a leapfrog to enhance, to greatly to enhance those skills.
10. Do you feel the number of years your child participates in the skillathon effects the skills they utilize?

a. I think they get better year after year.

b. Every year with age they are able to draw more and more from it.

c. I can see a lot of things. The younger kids get so nervous. It’s like a test for them. They make a mistake and they feel so bad, by the next year they won’t get it wrong. They get a little more confident each year. By the time you are a senior, they are really confident. Every year they learn more, they read more about the species and the industry. That’s the whole purpose of the skillathon to do that. And they are doing that. It’s unbelievable what these seniors know.

d. Parents play a large role in getting our children involved in the beginning and encourage them every year to study and to learn as much as they can and to compete. And encourage them to do the best they can. And by the time they are seniors they have just bloomed so much. They have confidence.

e. I think it has brought more into their species too. Because by the kids doing the skillathon they learn more about their animal and know we have kids that really know how to take care of their animals.
11. What other benefits, if any, do you believe are gained or strengthened by their participation in the skillathon?

None
12. How would you measure a successful skillathon?

a. If they volunteered to be in the contest and if they went to each station and did not guess, but were prepared to answer.

b. I've seen some kids do this, they go in and have no idea what the question was and they are dying to find out the answer. There's where there is education. The success of a contest is when a kid comes out asking what is the answer.

c. Come back and do it again next year.

d. Everybody that participates is a success.

e. Improvement on one thing.
Wood County (Group C)

1. In what ways have your children benefited from their participation in the 4-H program.

   a. I think leadership ability. I think helping others has been a big part of it. My eldest daughter has been president for a couple of years and I think that has helped too. I think they have learned a lot of camaraderie at the fair and just overall fun. And I think a lot of what she has learned she will be able to take on to what ever she wants to go into.

   b. Leadership has defiantly been a growth factor as far as an ability to speak, by participating in the demonstrations and things. Being more comfortable in front of people. I think the leadership for me is the biggest.

   c. Responsibility, that’s all in addition to learning about animals, taking on responsibility.

   d. Skill sets. In the process in being able to learn something and understand the process that you have to go through, plus the ability to build, take a project and if you want to continue with that and you want to build or take a project and learn something in general and not do that project again. There’s such a wide variety of different types of things this allows them to pursue some interests that they might not have really felt they had, but they wanted to find out a little bit more about it and the project allows them to explore. They have done everything from woodworking to financial accounting to family history and animals and traditional, clothing, cooking. So it is a wide gamut of things. It’s all embodied with 4-H. I think the other thing is just the opportunity to meet others, other kids and more importantly other kids outside their school district. So now when they are at other events where their schools are mixed, whether it is athletic or otherwise, they know the other kids. They realize that they’re really people. It gives them a wide range of individuals that they have ran into and in other kinds of settings. Otherwise they would be kind of isolated.

   e. I agree with the four so mentioned. Leadership is a big thing and also the ability to meet new individuals, youth and adults even outside the county and state wide from different events and activities that they participate in. They also gain knowledge from the 4-H projects that they might be interested in for the rest of their life.
2. When you hear the word skillathon what do you think of?

a. The learning involved in the particular area of choice. This is for our county have done the skillathon twice. And it really prompted them to go out and learn more. My kids are all on the Horse Quiz Bowl team, which helps a lot toward the skillathon. And that’s where they gain most of the information. But we did take the packets home and they were able to study and there is a lot of information with the feeds and such. So I think that any time that they can learn more about what they really like, it’s exciting. And I have learned a lot more than I ever did.

b. Skillathon to me means knowledge of your animal. How to take care of it and everything that goes with it. In depth knowledge.

c. Skillathon is a way of understanding an animal. They need to try and learn the knowledge for that animal that they are working with.

d. For a lot of kids, it’s competition. My kids love competition. And they get to see where they are at. “Do I need to learn more?” And I think that’s good too. They always are being pushed.

e. My girls have even have gone so far as finding other books about their animals and other information that they can get a hold of to study for the skillathon.

f. It’s a carry over to in all the areas. It helps in showmanship, in a sense that they are more knowledgeable about the animal, in terms of being able to identify parts or what the other components are, be more responsive to the judges, increases the level of care. When you asked the question I kind of chuckled because what it also means is a lot of hard work. Because someone has to put them together, which is the end I have been on. But the other part of it is in our rabbit youth we used to have a written exam, which has predated the skillathon. I think in some ways the youth are happier with the skillathon than they were with the test. It does allow for a mix of learning skills for the youth in terms of different ways that they present it and different types of things that are in there. Plus you can do some other things that you couldn’t do with the written test. I think it just broadens the whole concept that we have moved to in terms of the overall project. But it becomes a critical point because it supports the other elements in terms of the showing of the animal and in terms of the condition of the animal and in showmanship and any other components that are within their project books.
3. What is your child or children saying about skillathon?

a. Can’t wait for the next one.

b. My kids went to state fair this year so they are anxious to do better. Their first attempt at it was at state fair for us and it was an eye opener how much they didn’t know at that point when they first did it. So they are anxious to see if they have learned more and stepped up in their abilities. They know more what to expect too.

c. The written exam was mentioned; I think that children look forward more to the skillathon type of idea than written.

d. Like he said, some people don’t test well, written test well, they basically get visual aids. And that does help.

e. The reaction of our kids is that it is another challenge. In terms of trying to enhance their overall information in the areas. Some of the kids would like to just go and take all of the skillathons and learn more about the different animals. Just because they don’t know.

f. It’s a learning process for them. I said earlier that it is an opportunity for them to learn what they do know but also an opportunity for them to realize that there are other things they should know. And based on the information that is there, encourage them to study further, do some additional reading, talk with some people that are involved a little bit more.
4. When you think of the skillathon what skills or life skills have your children utilized?

a. Remembering, they are remembering what those things were.

b. If they are doing any kind of preparation, they have done some research. Looked things up. Maybe from a previous year, look at where their lack of knowledge is and go out and read about it.

c. My kids have made their own little study cards.

d. I think that you never know what the information is going to cover, so again you are going to get a broad range of information in anticipation of what you might or might not be asked and if you’re not asked you still have the information. If you are asked its “Ah Yes!!” it’s a matter of them getting that information and being able to use it again.

e. It’s an application type of thing; it’s not only memorizing to use it in that type of setting. It’s to say, “Well here it is over here” or actually to put into practical. If you are looking at diseases or conformation of an animal, the thing you look at an animal you look at a picture and you put into practice. It’s not just that they have to have it for the skillathon.

f. There are decision-making skills, critical thinking skills in the skillathon added to the practical.

g. They know the questions to ask when they are asked. “What’s the background on the breeding?” How do they perform in this particular situation? What’s the conformation? They realize that there really are bloodlines or there are medical kind of issues that are surrounding.

Probe: These skills that they have gained or are utilizing, what kind of impact does this have on their lives?

a. Learning how to judge which direction to head. It might pertain to buying a new car. I can see the aspects of this I need, the economy has to come in. You have to learn the best-feed rations.

b. It is the application across in other areas. Whether they are reading something and come across and discovered as a result of working with the animals.
5. Critical thinking is reflective or reasonable thinking. Not taking a guess or doing it by blind acceptance, impulse, tradition, or habit. Where in a skillathon event do you feel your children are using critical thinking?

a. We have a section on diseases. I think matching the cause, the treatment and the effect. You had to identify what the disease was and to say how it is caused and how you would treat it and how is it preventable. I defiantly see critical thinking.

b. There are several areas in ours. It could be in the matching parts. The hardest part for the kids was the skeleton. So they had to use critical thinking. Where is that, oh my gosh there are 260 parts. I think they had to use critical thinking. “All right this was here but, was it this point of it or this point of it”. It is not just guessing. They had to get good answers for it.

c. If you were good in one animal and you were now taking a different animal, if there are similarities in terms of structure. It is on this animal in this place then it must be here on this animal. And even from a human skeletal, individuals that have got the chance to study that information, it crosses over. What are the things you know that from other sources that help you draw into this kind of situation.

Probe: Do you feel that critical thinking is an important part of the skillathon?

a. Yes I do, because there is a place and a value for role memorization. You do learn as much for that. You need to apply and generalize from one area to another. Take something with you and apply it over here and you need to be able to see that relationship.

b. We use critical thinking in our lives everyday.

c. Sometimes I think that our kids are in an elite group where our kids are involved in this as well as everything else that we can get them into. I don’t think that there aren’t that many kids that are involved in everything else. If they are in 4-H they are involved in everything else because they like the activity. The critical thinking question is good for kids not involved in a lot of other things.
6. Think of your children solving problems. In what ways are problem solving skills utilized by your 4-H member in the skillathon?

   a. A problem is where does this sticker go?

   b. I think it varies in terms of what the stations are requiring and where the level is. One of the early programs, may not have as much problem solving in them in terms of the movement of the youth through the process. We’ve got skillathons for different animals and different points in terms of where, how many years they had at the county level. I think as you move up, the challenge as you are looking at it, you are going to get into the more of the critical thinking and more of the problem solving. And also the difference between the younger and the older you want to try to give them that opportunity to do some problem solving early on. You are probably going to look for the greater connection of information with the older youth. It’s a critical part of it just like critical thinking is. If we just want memorization, everybody probably gets to that point. And so what do we learn as a result of that. You learn how to memorize the next thing. If you are talking about how do you transfer that to something else, then it is that problem solving process. If you look at the cuts of meat and the skeletal system. They look at how this connects. It is that process of saying “Oh yah”. “Where’s the shoulder you talk about the shoulder blade”
7. Please identify and describe your perceptions of how decision-making skills are used by your member through the use of the skillathon?

a. They are similar.

b. They have the choice of whether they do it or not.

c. It is not mandatory, but it is part of the overall project, the champien project evaluation. So if you don’t participate, there is probably not a good chance that you will be in the consideration for the running. You might have the best animal but...

d. The decision is made whether you are going to study hard enough for it to begin with. That’s a major one. In their active lives they have to decide which comes first, studying for that or going out to do something else. I think if they are serious about doing it they have to study. So that is a decision right there.

e. A part would be as they are looking at the material they have to decide whether they can, if they will bluff their way through it or whether they get to a certain point, “I’ve got so many cards left, I don’t know anything more so it’s time to stop.” You can sit there all night and not get any further along. We don’t really put a time limit on it to make decisions on how to match up some of those types of things.

f. Which animals, projects are you going to do. I can take multiple animals and only choose to be involved with one of the skillathons.
8. Do you feel that the skillathon develops skills we have talked about?

   a. Yes.

   b. Any time you go and put something like that together and ask them to make decisions, critical thinking they utilize those skills to better themselves in the thought process.

   c. Are these type of questions being asked to the kids because I will be anxious to see what they feel?

      - I'm not sure. I don't believe so.
9. Do you feel these skills are strengthened by their participation in the skillathon?

a. I think probably strengthened. Because in school which is much more often they have to do the same things all the time and they are developing that first and I think this is strengthening at different areas. It would be like comparing this to math or English, they are all using the skills but they are in different ways.

b. This is one shot, so I think we don't really deal... I mean the study process is basically here's the information, here's the kits if you want to check them out. It is up to your club or the individuals to make some decisions. So I think it is a matter of taking the skills that they have and make them stronger.
10. Do you think that the number of years a member has participated in a skillathon has an effect on the skills?

a. It sounds like the longer they do it the more they have to change it to keep the kids interested that have done it the longer period of time. They’ve seen the need not to have it overwhelming for the young kids.

b. It is not always the same year after the year.

c. The skillathon changes so much with their age, the challenge is there. I think that is where it gets into the strengthening of skills. I don’t know if I would necessary say that well because they did the skillathon all of these skills have improved. It is part of a whole set of experiences. A lot of which as to do with age and being older and having that different experience. I think that getting the information leading up to it helps them around in all the things that they are doing with their animals. In terms of an extension if that’s the sense of the question, I think yes as an extension it is helping strengthen their skills. They are more knowledgeable about the animal. Therefore they can sit down and analyze a situation, “why is an animal reacting that way? Oh well let’s see I remember that I studied diseases and it said if this thing would happen or if that thing would happen. Maybe it’s not quite that but maybe it’s this other thing.” It’s the getting the information in there so that they have it and can forward the process.
11. Are there any other benefits that you believe are gained or strengthened by their participation?

    None
12. How would you measure a successful participation in a skillathon?

a. Did they enjoy it number one? If they don’t enjoy it they won’t be back. I think that is an important part. Especially the little kids. It can be a total panic for them. You don’t want to scare them away. Because they won’t want to learn it.

b. I think that success can be measured by doing better each year or having studied because they are finding success. “I studied that so I knew that.”

c. I think that plus going through each station and trying it, even if you can’t totally compete each aspect within a station. Just to go through and try it.

d. Transference again of information and in terms of measurement again if they go and do the skillathon and never take any information beyond that point in one experience. It probably hasn’t had as much value as it could, but if it is transferred in terms as the judge comes back and says “Gosh these kids are more knowledgeable.” Then I can tell they do the skillathon and can find the information because they have been encouraged, by wanting to find out more information about their animal and more about the types of things about their animal. Then that is reflected in their project, it’s reflected in the quality of the animal.

e. My daughter placed higher in a horsemanship class because she knew the question. At that time it wasn’t skillathon but it was part of their project.

f. They take it so they can take their horse to the fair.

g. You have to have facilitators that can put the kids at ease. Especially your younger kids, they come upon something and they just didn’t expect that, they’re standing there crying, you need somebody there talking them through it to make it successful experience for that child.
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   a. My daughter just wrote a 4-H article for the tab. She’s in college now. She said that the thing that she feels the most comfortable with is that she is so comfortable when she interviews with different people because of all the interviews she has been through with her cooking projects and state fair stuff and officer judging’s and fair queen. She said she can talk to anybody. I’m not scared with the interview process and she attributes that to 4-H and also through the cooking she’s developed a lot of skills with that. Cooks in the dorm for girls who can’t cook, does laundry for those who can’t do laundry, because she took a laundry project. A lot of good life skills.

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7. Please identify and describe your perceptions of how decision-making skills are used by your member through the skilthon?

a. Deciding they have to do it or they can’t show at the fair.

b. When it comes down to actually having to sit down and think, the majority of the kids, they’ve done this and done this, there’s no thinking to it. They see the same breed pictures, they see the same medication label, I’m going to see the same examples. I really think that there really needs to be some changes, because there is no thinking. I think there does need to be some thinking even if it is a life skill. They’re given a piece of paper with a scenario.

c. I kind of agree with you. We are farm raised here, but our children haven’t been farm raised completely. But we’re back to the farm now and when you have an animal that is sick, when to call the vet? I don’t have a problem calling the vet. Knowing when to call the vet. Can you handle it over the phone. Getting your kids to realize your animals not thriving. What could be wrong?

d. But I think with a skilthon they really aren’t making decisions anymore, because they know it all. Except for the first year people. Doesn’t matter how old you are you do the same thing for that skilthon.

e. We get a degree of complacency. They come in and flip their book down and here I am. “I know everything you can’t trip me up on anything.”
8. Do you think that skillathons help develop these skills we have talked about?

a. Some are and some aren't.

b. I know my child is and he's in high school.

c. I don't think all of them are. Some of them come in there they go through it. They think of they have to go through it and they are out of there.

d. It's just part of 4-H. They come to a meeting, they go to skillathon and "Johnny is not going to raise pigs" but all my buddies are doing this so I will.

e. They are not going to build a lot of skills if they are at the same level.

f. And it does need to be progressive. That is something we all need to look at.
9. Do you feel these skills are strengthened by their participation on the skillathon?

a. I think it depends on the kid.

b. Your going to get out of it what you put into it.

c. I was wondering if the kids in Ag. Ed. and going on are going to develop it more.

d. There’s “nothing wrong with a kid that takes a project just to go to the fair. Not everybody lives on a farm. Not everybody has the opportunity to expand. Like we live out in the country.

e. But everybody will be a consumer and that should make them stop and think.

f. To sit down face to face with an adult, somebody you don’t know.

g. Learning to be articulate. Say what you want to say. Not stumbling for words.

h. It depends on the adult they get. I’ve seen adults who sit down with that child and say “you know all this” and talk about something else and give that person a 10.

i. I wonder how many kids in 4-H will use the skills from the skillathon in their profession?

j. They all will. They will use interview skills all the time.

k. The one’s that are going to stay on the farm and I think that is one out of a hundred. I think that everyone needs the skillathon.

l. But it’s knowledge gained whether it’s meat cuts or…
10. Do you feel the number of years your child participates in the skillathon effects the skills they utilize?

a. Yes

b. Perseverance is one thing that I think that they would learn, even though they have to take it, they still some come back the next year and did the project again and again. They didn’t let the skillathon intimidate them.
11. What other benefits, if any do you believe are gained or strengthened by their participation in the skillathon?

a. It definitely helps kids to gain knowledge.

b. There is recognition. I do say though we need to do more recognition.
12. How would you measure a successful participation in a skillathon?

a. Kids smiling.

b. No tears!

c. They will do it again in a minute.

d. They say “It wasn’t bad!”

e. The kids getting a good score.

f. And happy parents.

g. I also think a consistent scoring from a judge. They need to be consistent, it’s not fair to the kids who have one hard judge and the other gives all 10’s.
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7. Please identify and describe your perceptions of how decision-making skills are used by your member through the skillathon?

a. Deciding they have to do it or they can’t show at the fair.

b. When it comes down to actually having to sit down and think, the majority of the kids, they’ve done this and done this, there’s no thinking to it. They see the same breed pictures, they see the same medication label, I’m going to see the same examples. I really think that there really needs to be some changes, because there is no thinking. I think there does need to be some thinking even if it is a life skill. They’re given a piece of paper with a scenario.

c. I kind of agree with you. We are farm raised here, but our children haven’t been farm raised completely. But we’re back to the farm now and when you have an animal that is sick, when to call the vet? I don’t have a problem calling the vet. Knowing when to call the vet. Can you handle it over the phone. Getting your kids to realize your animals not thriving. What could be wrong?

d. But I think with a skillathon they really aren’t making decisions anymore, because they know it all. Except for the first year people. Doesn’t matter how old you are you do the same thing for that skillathon.

e. We get a degree of complacency. They come in and flip their book down and here I am. “I know everything you can’t trip me up on anything.”
8. Do you think that skillathons help develop these skills we have talked about?

a. Some are and some aren’t.

b. I know my child is and he’s in high school.

c. I don’t think all of them are. Some of them come in there they go through it. They think of they have to go through it and they are out of there.

d. It’s just part of 4-H. They come to a meeting, they go to skillathon and “Johnny is not going to raise pigs” but all my buddies are doing this so I will.

e. They are not going to build a lot of skills if they are on the same level.

f. And it does need to be progressive. That is something we all need to look at.
9. Do you feel these skills are strengthened by their participation on the skillathon?

   a. I think it depends on the kid.

   b. You're going to get out of it what you put into it.

   c. I was wondering if the kids in Ag. Ed. and going on are going to develop it more.

   d. There's nothing wrong with a kid that takes a project just to go to the fair. Not everybody lives on a farm. Not everybody has the opportunity to expand. Like we live out in the country.

   e. But everybody will be a consumer and that should make them stop and think.

   f. To sit down face to face with an adult, somebody you don't know.

   g. Learning to be articulate. Say what you want to say. Not stumbling for words.

   h. It depends on the adult they get. I've seen adults who sit down with that child and say "you know all this" and talk about something else and give that person a 10.

   i. I wonder how many kids in 4-H will use the skills from the skillathon in their profession?

   j. They all will. They will use interview skills all the time.

   k. The one's that are going to stay on the farm and I think that is one out of a hundred. I think that everyone needs the skillathon.

   l. But it's knowledge gained whether it's meat cuts or...
10. Do you feel the number of years your child participates in the skillathon effects the skills they utilize?

a. Yes

b. Perseverance is one thing that I think that they would learn, even though they have to take it, they still some come back the next year and did the project again and again. They didn’t let the skillathon intimidate them.
11. What other benefits do you believe are gained or strengthened by their participation in the skillathon?

   a. It definitely helps kids to gain knowledge.

   b. There is recognition. I do say though we need to do more recognition.
12. How would you measure a successful participation in a skillathon?
   a. Kids smiling.
   b. No tears!
   c. They will do it again in a minute.
   d. They say “It wasn’t bad!”
   e. The kids getting a good score.
   f. And happy parents.
   g. I also think a consistent scoring from a judge. They need to be consistent, it’s not fair to the kids who have one hard judge and the other gives all 10’s.
REFERENCES


