

4-H Youth Development Program's Influence on Public Speaking Confidence

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Public speaking

Public speaking is an essential skill for the workforce, yet many professionals lack confidence when speaking in front of an audience. However, most people are terrified of public speaking.

“Nearly 90% of people reported feeling shy or uncomfortable speaking in front of others at some time in their lives” (McCain, 2012).

Building confidence

While developing communication skills involves learning content, practicing skills, and improving attitudes, one of the most essential goals of a public speaking education program is to strengthen confidence. We use the concept of self-efficacy: the individual's belief in their skills and ability to perform.

Methods

Our two-year (2020 & 2021) survey study used validated public speaking self-efficacy scales (quantitative analyses) and open-ended questions (qualitative analyses). Surveys were administered to 4-H youth members (aged 9 to 18) participating in State 4-H Presentation Events.

Future work is ongoing with other state 4-H programs and with 4-H members who do not attend presentation days.

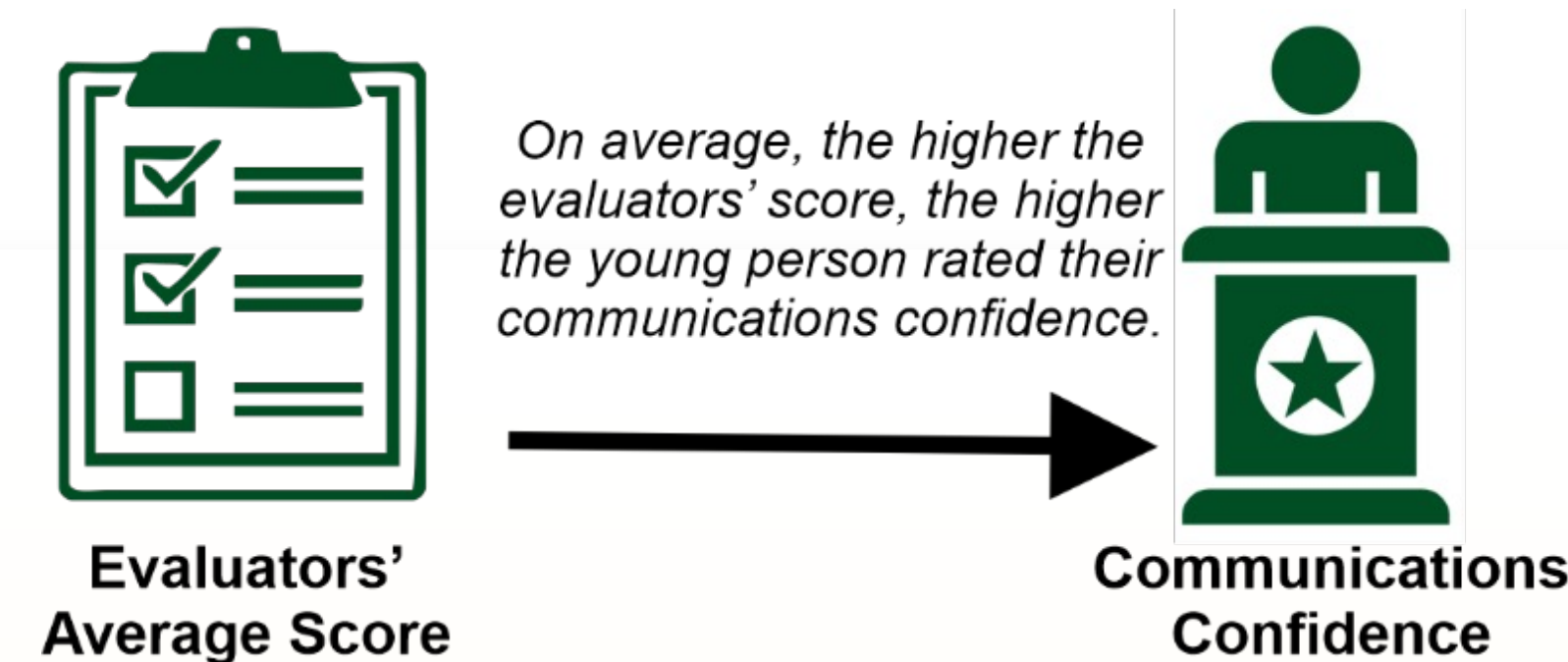
Findings

#1 Building confidence involves positive mastery experiences (practicing presenting).

Regression calculation demonstrated that successful presentation (mastery) experiences ($\beta=0.435$, $p<0.001$) had a statistically significant relationship with young people's public speaking self-efficacy (adjusted $R^2=0.31$; $p<0.001$). Other sources had minimal relationship: observing presentations, positive feedback, or negative emotional state.

#2 Youth with higher confidence were also generally scored higher by evaluators.

A Pearson's correlation showed a statistically significant positive relationship ($r=0.191$; $n=126$; $p=0.034$) between youth self-reported public speaking efficacy and external evaluator scores.



#3 Confidence grows over time in 4-H (even controlling for age).

Regression calculation demonstrated that years in 4-H was statistically significant ($\beta=0.26$, $p<0.001$), while age was not statistically significant ($\beta=0.07$, $p=0.340$).



#4 Youth need both informal and formal experiences presenting.

67% of youth members reported public speaking at 4-H Club meetings (e.g., project reports, committee reports, practice presentations) and 64% at formal 4-H presentation days.

Conclusions

Recommendation: Both low-stakes, friendly venues (such as club meetings) and formal higher-stakes settings (presentation days) are needed to provide youth with a comprehensive set of mastery experiences.

Conclusion: The 4-H youth development program plays a vital role in providing opportunities for young people to grow, practice, and improve their public speaking.

California 4-H alumni share the impact of 4-H

88% said 4-H boosted their confidence in public speaking

