Philosophical Paper

Transformational Education and 4-H Program Management: Discussion Points for Increasing Their Compatibility

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April 2007

Published by the Department of Youth Development
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Abstract
The community 4-H club program is an arena that consistently provides an array of opportunities to engage in transformational education with youth and adults. It also requires a variety of managerial tasks that are a necessary component of a reputable, well-organized program. These two dimensions of the work increasingly compete for the faculty member’s time and energy on a regular basis. A willingness to consider and pursue alternative strategies to shift appropriate managerial duties away from the professional staff will have a direct positive impact on transformational education in the field of youth development.
**Introduction and Situation**

Fleming and Johnson (1996), in their paper “Youth Development: A Primer”, identified three fundamental needs of young people. According to Fleming and Johnson, young people have a need to associate with caring people, a need for safe places in their community, and a need for challenging possibilities in their lives. Fleming and Johnson conclude “Thus, development that prepares a young person for healthy adulthood must be guided by what young people require, interests they wish to pursue, and skills they need today and in the future. Adults committed to helping youth develop must believe young people can be participants in their own development. This is central to the youth development approach” (page 1).

This youth development approach, described by Fleming and Johnson, has long been a cornerstone of the 4-H program. National 4-H Headquarters (retrieved March 15, 2007 from http://www.national4-hheadquarters.gov) highlights the importance of “educating adults to important youth development principles and practices to ensure that 4-H Youth Development programs create positive opportunities for young people to reach their full potential”.

Are the youth development principles, coupled with the focus on adult volunteer development in the 4-H program effective? According to The University of Connecticut’s Center for Applied Research the answer is yes. In 2006, the Center for Applied Research conducted a comprehensive synthesis of evaluation studies conducted on sustained 4-H youth development program experiences in the last 10 years. Forty-nine studies were reviewed for the synthesis, and after selection criteria were applied, 27 studies were included. The results of the synthesis evaluation reported in *The Impact and*
Sustainability of 4-H Youth Development Programs suggested that “Sustained involvement in 4-H programs was perceived by current members and alumni as critical to the development of life skills that were linked to effective communications, successful interpersonal relationships, self understanding and management, working with and leading others and engaging in self-directed learning and technical skill development.”

In March of 2004, UW-Extension-Cooperative Extension’s Dean and Director Arlen Leholm unveiled “Transformational Education: Advancing the UW-Extension Mission” at a statewide meeting for UW-Extension County Department Heads. The concept of transformational education has subsequently been discussed at many levels throughout Cooperative Extension: All Faculty Conferences, District Conferences, and a statewide satellite videoconference. As stated on the UW-Extension-Cooperative Extension web site “Transformational education is the process that Cooperative Extension in Wisconsin uses to work with communities to tackle complex issues in ways that result in system changes, positive outcomes, stronger organizations and innovative policies that transform communities in powerful and long-lasting ways. This is accomplished by building trusting relationships with partners, bringing research-based information to bear on the issues and increasing leadership capacity in individuals and organizations that will result in improved quality of life.”

The community 4-H club program is a vital tool in transformational education. 4-H Youth Development professionals create opportunities for young people to build skills, exercise leadership, form relationships with caring adults and help their communities. By their very nature, reputable, well-organized community 4-H club programs also have a plethora of managerial tasks that cannot be dismissed. The purpose
of this paper is to explore what could be done to help 4-H Youth Development Professionals create compatibility between the managerial demands of a community club program and engaging in transformational education. What are the challenges? What are discussion points for possible responses from UW-Extension? What are the implications for 4-H Youth Development Professionals?

**Challenges**

Descriptive information, specific to the St. Croix County 4-H program, is included because it is used as a point of reference in the examples. Membership in the St. Croix County 4-H Program annually ranges between 750 to 800 community club members and 275 to 300 adult volunteer leaders in 24 Community 4-H Clubs. In addition, there are 15 county project committees that are governed by the St. Croix County 4-H Leader’s Council. In some respects, a large community club program requires more managerial time simply because there are more members, families, clubs and committees involved. It is also important to acknowledge that many managerial tasks require the same amount of time regardless of the program size. For example, it takes the same amount of time to develop a registration form that will be used in a program that has 10 clubs as it does for one with 24 clubs. The difference occurs in the time needed to collect and enter the information.

Federal law protects the 4-H name and emblem and the United States Department of Agriculture is responsible for overseeing its proper use (USDA Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service). This valuable partnership with the federal government presents unique demands for accountability in addition to the managerial
aspects necessary to sustain an on-going community 4-H club program. There are three main areas of managerial tasks for which professionals working with a community 4-H club program bear responsibility.

- Adult volunteer management includes the annual distribution, collection and data entry of 4-H enrollment forms, behavior agreement forms, reference checks for all new volunteers (if necessary), processing of criminal background checks for all new volunteers and repeat checks every 4 years for current volunteers.

- Management of the 4-H membership also includes the annual distribution, collection and data entry of 4-H enrollment forms with parent information, photo release forms, and in the case of St. Croix County, annual distribution, collection and data entry of county fair entry forms and data entry of judging results.

- Program management includes a combination of annual and on-going responsibilities. Annual reports generated include the ES237, the 4-H Name and Emblem Use and Federal Tax Exempt Status Report, Civil Rights Charts and Questionnaires. It also includes collecting the Wisconsin 4-H Club and Committee Information Sheet, 4-H Club and Committee Financial Report, club dues, and the end of year member, leader and club award forms. Distribution and collection of program registrations and health/expectation forms is a function that occurs year around. Last year, in St. Croix County, the 4-H committees offered 96 countywide educational programs for members. Twenty-five of those programs required a registration form.
Further complicating the managerial aspects of the community 4-H club program is the fact that county funding for support staff is eroding. Over the last few years, at least three counties in the Western District have been forced to operate their Extension Office with reduced support staff. While all program areas are affected, this trend disproportionately affects the 4-H Youth Development Program due primarily to the membership component. These managerial responsibilities are frequently being assumed by professional staff as secretarial support needed to monitor and complete the tasks decline.

Engaging in scholarly work is an expectation of employment with UW Extension (UW Extension, Articles of Faculty Governance, 1.B). As outlined in the Articles of Faculty Governance, the assessment of scholarship is demonstrated through “creative, intellectual work; reviewed by the scholar’s peers who affirm its value; added to our intellectual history through its communication; and valued by those for whom it was intended”. Transformational education places the emphasis on engaging people and communities in positive change. Programming efforts that lead to transformational education is scholarly work that can be demonstrated and will be a powerful story to share with local decisions makers as well as in the promotion and tenure process. A national study on the 4-H workforce indicated that program management “keeps talented and skilled 4-H professionals from engaging in scholarly work to advance the field of youth development” (National 4-H Headquarters and National 4-H Council, 2007, page 24).
Discussion Points for Possible Responses

In the current fiscal climate of county budgets, resources have been exhausted making it difficult, if not impossible, for our county partners to provide additional funding to support Extension programs. Following are two possible strategies which could be employed by UW-Extension to relieve some of the managerial program demands being experienced by 4-H Youth Development Agents.

1. Technology -- Technology exists which could allow program participants to complete and electronically submit enrollment forms, program registration forms, health forms, etc. The technology would need to provide a secure site for the transfer of sensitive information and for the option of paying with a credit card when necessary. If the technology was adequate it would also have the capacity to import the data and generate reports, show catalogs, participation lists and merge mailing list. Re-typing information to create a report, list, program or a mailing list is a duplication of time. An adequate investment in the proper technology and training of staff to fully utilize the technology would be critical.

2. Regional Support Staff -- If the foundation of transformational education lies in trusting relationships, it is essential to have faculty members in county positions. Faculty members bring skills in facilitation and content knowledge in youth development that enhance their ability to be involved in research and teaching to facilitate learning and change in their communities which further develops trust based relationships. Time and energy that could be dedicated to developing programs and work that is transformational in nature may now be expended in the tasks necessary to manage the program. In comparison, the collection and review of paperwork and data entry do not require a
similar relationship with clientele. Employing regional support staff for the purpose of managing the necessary paperwork and data entry would reinforce the ability of professional staff to engage in transformational education.

**Implications**

Professional staff is the most significant resource in UW-Extension. Tenure is awarded to the faculty who have demonstrated a consistent and high level of scholarship.

If the managerial demands of the 4-H program continue to increase and the presence of county support staff continues to decrease, the ability of faculty to program at the rigorous levels necessary for transformational education are undermined. In a recent study, *Understanding the 4-H Workforce: Staffing, Structures and Salaries* (National 4-H Headquarters and National 4-H Council, 2007) one of the critical issues identified was balancing program management and education. As stated in the study “There are still challenges to 4-H youth professionals who must live in an academic environment and yet must manage a broad array of educational events and activities. It is a challenge to excel in both of these arenas, and often the day-to-day expectations and immediate demands of program management take precedence over academic, educational responsibilities” (page 24). At a minimum, faculty members are frustrated with their work because of these competing demands. In a worse case scenario, adding tedious work to the existing faculty may increase turnover. When salary pay plans are stagnant, a stimulating work environment can help retain staff which is crucial to create an atmosphere for transformational education.

Handling the demands of managerial tasks differently would be beneficial to faculty members and UW-Extension. Several examples of how transformational
education could flourish, if the appropriate managerial functions were “out sourced”, are described below.

- Faculty members would have additional time to concentrate on the quality of educational programming in organizational development with adult volunteers. That educational programming can be transformational for both the organization and the individuals involved in leadership roles. Conflict management in a community 4-H club program is unavoidable and makes a perfect example of the difference that can be made if adequate leadership training is provided. If the club/committee conflict is not addressed early or goes unattended entirely it can quickly grow into a situation so severe that individuals and/or families choose to leave the 4-H program. Adult volunteers who have received training in organizational leadership would be better prepared to help club/committee members find their common interests in positive youth development to alleviate the conflict with minimal damage.

- Particularly in one agent counties with a substantial community 4-H Club program, this would allow faculty members to invest more resources in other community youth development efforts such as after school programs, teen court or youth in governance efforts which are also vehicles for transformational education.

- “The time is ripe for the field of youth development to commit to a research agenda that bridges research and practice” (Blyth and Borden, 2003, page 1). At a time when public budgets are shrinking, engaging in research is imperative to prove that the public and private dollars are well spent. Stakeholders need to
know that the investment in positive youth development in “out of school time” is making a difference, they need to witness the transformation that occurs in individuals and communities as they move from “being recipients of information” to engaged in creating positive change. With appropriate focus and resources, county-based faculty are in an optimal position to participate in applied research projects that are state wide or national in scope. Faculty members have long-standing relationships with clientele and partners in the county, have a multitude of experience working with non-traditional programs and access to youth participants.

**Conclusion**

The community 4-H club program is an arena that consistently provides an array of opportunities to engage in transformational education with youth and adults. It also requires a variety of managerial tasks that are a necessary component of a reputable, well-organized program. These two dimensions of the work increasingly compete for the faculty member’s time and energy on a regular basis. A willingness to consider and pursue alternative strategies, such as investing in adequate technology and/or hiring regional support staff to oversee managerial duties are possible responses which could be considered by UW-Extension-Cooperative Extension. Shifting appropriate managerial duties away from the 4-H Youth Development Faculty will have a direct positive impact on their ability to introduce and sustain transformational education in the field of youth development.
Reference List


