Evaluative Paper

Summer Agent Orientation

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April 2004

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Situation

Each summer, approximately 15-20 counties in Wisconsin hire summer 4-H agents to assist with the hectic and adventure filled summer youth programs offered by UW-Extension. Most often the primary job responsibility of this summer agent is to assist with coordination and facilitation of such activities as 4-H camps, day camps, project events, county fair, state fair or county older youth groups. Most summer agents begin their employment immediately following the completion of the school year and are quickly immersed into a busy and long workweek. Time for orientation, beyond where to park your car, the location of the restroom and direction on how to use the phone is rare due to the short time frame of the summer and the often high level of activity which occurs during the summer months. Rarely is time available for in depth discussions which would help the summer agents to better understand the mission of Extension and the reasons for the way we do business.

Orientation is an integral part of the success of employees. They need to feel comfortable in their roles and have an understanding of the operational methods and purpose of the organization they have chosen for their employment. This is especially critical with the summer agent role as this is many times an “internship” like opportunity and will assist many of these individuals in the potential selection of an Extension career.

Most of the summer agents are college students in their junior or senior years at school. Many of them have had prior 4-H membership experience which has led them to try the summer agent role. Usually their professional type of work experience is quite limited and their perspective is one of a participant in educational programs rather than a lead role in the development of the programs. They often recognize the organizational aspects of educational events but have not usually processed or evaluated the educational components of the 4-H programs.

To fulfill the need for orientation to all summer agents, a one day program was developed which addressed the Extension Mission, professionalism and commonly used educational methods. A day was selected early in the summer to bring the summer agents together for the orientation. The program was co-taught by Melanie Miller, 4-H Youth Development Specialist and Frank Ginther, Pierce County 4-H Youth Development Agent in the Western District and a different county 4-H Youth Development Agent each year in the Southern District. These two districts were chosen due to having the highest number of summer agents in the state of Wisconsin and this program was requested by several of the faculty in these two districts.

The teaching outline for the day long workshop included a number of experiential learning activities to serve as role modeling for the learners.

Objectives

1) Summer Agents will understand their role as short term Extension educators.
2) Summer Agents will identify and apply basic methods of the Youth Development program and utilization of volunteers.
3) Summer Agents will develop an awareness of professionalism.
Methods

The learners were presented with a packet of written resource materials which included:

- The UW Extension website for employees as an introduction to the Institution. - http://www.uwex.edu/employees/
- Pages from the 4-H Youth Development Resource Manual featuring:
  - Program definitions
  - Program delivery modes
  - Noteworthy dates in Wisconsin 4-H History
  - The relationship of Extension and County Fairs
- Listing of Life Skills – from CCS Project Manuals
- Ages and Stages of Development of Youth – from CCS Project Manuals
- The 40 Developmental Assets of the Search Institute – Search Institute Web Page
- The Volunteer Behavior Expectations – UW-Extension Youth Development Form
- The Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development Website – http://www.uwex.edu/ces/4h/
- Strengthening Goal-Centered Learning in the Exhibit Experience from Iowa Coop Extension

These items offered support to the lecturettes and activities included in this orientation.

The agenda for the day began with a welcome to the participants, the distribution of the pretest and a brief get-acquainted activity.

An overview of Extension, its mission and history was then presented. Included in this lecturette was the history of Extension, the organizational chart, and explanation of the Cooperative Extension partnership.

This was followed by a similar overview of the Wisconsin 4-H program featuring the vision and mission statements which were shared with program participants in the form of a laminated business card with the vision on one side and the 4-H mission on the other which could be carried in their wallet or calendar as a visual reminder of the 4-H purpose. Noteworthy moments in 4-H history were also highlighted.

Following the lecturette, participants were then engaged in several small group activities focused on Youth Development principles and programming goals. Topics included examples of Life Skill and Asset Development and how to build these goals into activities which the summer agents will lead during their employment. Typical summer youth activities such as Day Camps, 4-H Camps, county fairs and youth trips were used as examples. The summer agents worked through ways to apply these youth development principles and practices to the proposed educational events. Each participant was presented with a bookmark which displays six questions regarding the educational impact of a 4-H event or activity. Small group discussions also included application of Ages and Stages information from the packet handout.

The importance of volunteers and volunteer development was emphasized by having the learners draw the ideal volunteer and then citing and discussing challenges which have occurred with program volunteers. A discussion of the need for and importance of screening volunteers was also included. The major elements of volunteer orientation were highlighted. Possible ways to deal with the volunteer challenges were proposed and evaluated by the group participants.
Professionalism was then introduced with a definition and discussion of application with youth, volunteers, support staff and professional staff. Scenarios of past summer agent experiences were shared and discussed.

In wrapping up the agenda, communication with the various types of media was discussed. Once again, the educational focus was emphasized and ways to build that message with the media communication. The summer agents generated ideas on methods of helping the media focus on education rather than the “winners” at various events.

At the completion of the agenda, time was available for the participants to ask any remaining questions which they may have and then the post test was administered.

**Evaluation**

With the Summer Agent orientation sessions of 2001, 2002, 2003 learners were given a pretest (Appendix A) as they arrived at the orientation session. A post test (Appendix B) was administered at the completion of the program and a phone survey (Appendix C) was administered to randomly selected past participants in fall of 2003. A total of 44 summer agents attended the orientation sessions over the 3 year period. Nine summer agents, who had participated in the orientation program responded to the follow-up phone survey.

**Objective 1:** Summer Agents will understand their role as short term Extension Educators.

Question on pretest and post test: *What is your role for the summer?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pretest n = 44</th>
<th>Post test n = 41</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This open ended question included terms such as:</td>
<td>Open ended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help with events and activities (14)</td>
<td>Educator, educational programs, teach or help youth learn (26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-H assistance (21)</td>
<td>Help with 4-H program and assist with 4-H definition (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinate events and activities (5)</td>
<td>Assist 4-H Agent (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (4)</td>
<td>Other (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prior to the orientation, 91% of the participants described their role as that of helping or assisting with 4-H events and activities rather than an educational focus. In the post test, 63% of the summer agents anticipated education as part of their role and only 24% perceived the role as helping and assisting with events and activities.

The final question on the post-test asked participants to “list 2 things you learned today which you will apply in your work this summer”. Twelve of 41 or 29.2% specifically cited their role as educators and the importance of the educational focus for their programming. Here are several direct quotes from their answers.

“Always have an educational goal or outcome in mind. Remember to keep everything in perspective.”

“When working with projects remembering the learning experience is important at all times.”

“Keep in mind that education is the foundation of 4-H.”

“Education is a very important part to this program. I always knew that, but not the extent.”
In the follow-up phone survey, participants were asked to describe their overall purpose as a summer agent. Four of the nine (44%) referred to education or learning the role of the 4-H agent. When specifically questioned about their role as an educator, 8 of the 9 (89%) reflected having supported or directed an educational component in the programs and activities with which they worked during their summer employment. They were also able to site examples of educational components with the camping programs, day camps, action centers and trips.

**Objective 2:** Summer Agents will identify and apply basic methods of Youth Development programming.

Question on pretest and post test: *What are two things you should consider when working with youth?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pretest n = 44 2 answers per question</th>
<th>Post test n = 41</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age &amp; developmental stage (14)</td>
<td>Age &amp; developmental stage (22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have fun, make it fun (8)</td>
<td>Positive Role model (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive role model &amp; attitude (9)</td>
<td>Program has ed focus, life skills assets (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be patient (5)</td>
<td>Safety for learner &amp; instructor (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remember their individuality (3)</td>
<td>Patience (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the pre-test, 32% or 14 of 44 summer agents were aware of the importance of age and developmental stages of youth when developing and leading educational activities. This number may be this strong due to past 4-H Leadership experiences as 4-H members or the selected fields of study of the summer agents. After the orientation session, 54% or 22 of 41 participants cited ages and stages of development as an important consideration for programming. This exhibited a 22% increase in those articulating this as an important element in working successfully with youth. There was also an increase in the percentage of summer agents recognizing the importance of positive role modeling when working with youth from 20.4% in the pretest to 29.2% on the post-test.

In the post-test, 26.8% identified asset building and life skill development as important elements to consider when working with youth. This had not been identified by any participants on the pre-test. Safety was another item which appeared on the post-test and not on the pre-test.

Question on pretest and post test: *What is important when working with Volunteers?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pretest n = 44</th>
<th>Post test n = 41</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thank/appreciation (24)</td>
<td>Thank/appreciation (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen/communicate (9)</td>
<td>Respect their time &amp; abilities (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be prepared (3)</td>
<td>Help them keep ed focus (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible, patient (4)</td>
<td>Listen/communicate (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect them (2)</td>
<td>Avoid negative conversation (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage them (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the pretest, 54.5% (24 of 44) of participants identified “thanking and showing appreciation” was important when working with volunteers. “Listening and communicating” was at 20%, the second most identified element in the pretest.
After the completion of orientation, the summer agents identified more elements and a broadened perspective of working with volunteers. Forty-nine percent identified “thanking and appreciating volunteers, 36.5% noted respecting volunteer time and abilities and 24.3% felt it was important to help keep the volunteers focus on the educational purpose of the events and activities.

From the final post-test question, 20 of 41 or 48.7% mentioned they would apply asset building, life skill development, ages and stages of development and volunteer development principles during their summer programming. Some of their direct quotes included:

“The life skills/assets helped me understand how to make activities beneficial to members. “To include the life skills and assets in all activities and events. Use all of the resources that we received today as much as possible this summer and in the future.”

“The developmental aspects. How to get kids to learn without really realizing it.”

“How to work better with volunteers. Ages and stages of youth and what activities should done with them. Also how to treat them and act with them.”

One hundred percent (9 of 9) of the participants on the phone survey stated they had taught life skills during the summer but only 3 (33%) replied “yes” to the question of including asset building in their programming. Implementation of the concepts of “ages and stages of development” in programming was cited by 100% of the participants in the phone survey.

Several of the questions on the follow-up survey phone survey focused on the Summer agent work with volunteers. Their responses were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Were you flexible and listened to the ideas of volunteers?</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you avoid negative comments and conversation when working with volunteers?</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you show your appreciation for their expertise?</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you empower volunteers in their roles as leaders?</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you recognize volunteers for their efforts?</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Objective 3:** Summer Agents will develop an awareness of professionalism.

Question on pretest and post test: Define professionalism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pretest n=44</th>
<th>Post test n=41</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proper behavior</td>
<td>Present &amp; conduct self as a positive role model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive role modeling</td>
<td>Be accountable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Display positive attitude about program</td>
<td>Courteous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be courteous</td>
<td>Responsible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proper dress</td>
<td>No answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the results of the pre and post-tests, the summer agents had a good idea of professionalism as their employment began, however, from their comments, the discussion and the examples used in the orientation helped them apply professionalism to their positions.
Fifteen participants mentioned some aspect of Professionalism and its importance on the final post-test question. Here are examples of those answers.

“Professionalism = I understood the concept, but now can use the ideas.”
“Role modeling is key little eyes are always watching. Fulfill responsibilities to the best of your abilities. Ask your agent if you are unsure. Be positive.”
“Professionalism (constantly keeping the professional attitude)”
“Do not put yourself in a situation that could get you into trouble. Be positive and be a role model.”

Question on pretest and post test: What do you want the media to tell the general public about the events which they will cover in your county?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pretest  n=44</th>
<th>Post test  n=41</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worthwhile event</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Details of event, who, what, etc.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available to all</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within their professional role, most summer agents will work with the media at various events and activities. Part of the orientation session was focused at helping the agents to understand the types of information they should present to the media. On the pre-test, only 22.7% knew to focus on the educational aspect of the summer activities. On the post-test, 95% of the participants realized the importance of sharing and emphasizing the educational benefits of the programs with the media.

In the phone survey regarding professionalism, summer agents were asked to cite examples of their professional growth in working with colleagues. All 9 were able to respond with positive answers. Here are a few of the examples:

“Gained understanding and I’m sure I grew about atmosphere and etiquette in office. Letters got more businesslike as summer went on.”

“Interesting to learn the give and take. I thought I was responsible for my own things all of the time but sometimes the secretaries could really help you out. Neat to watch agent dealing with people and complaints and how to do that professionally.”

“I learned a great deal more about what UW-Extension people do in their everyday work. It was a good challenge for me to work with people I had known for a long time, my patience was tested at times but it was a character-building experience. I enjoyed getting to know other agents and other summer agents and learning how things are done in different counties.”

In regards to professionalism with adults, their answers included:

“I gained a great appreciation for time, talents, and energy that adult leaders contribute to the 4-H program. I gained experience in working with volunteers, learning how to provide the proper level of advisement, support, and encouragement.”

“How being a parent affects being an adult volunteer. It’s very hard to be impartial and you as a volunteer have to make decisions that benefit the entire group. Had to work hard at being the mediator in decisions for the group and helped realize her own possible parenting role.”
“I grew with patience and understanding. Listening, using their ideas and using them as a resource to tap into. I listened to them as much as possible. Teamwork and communication were very important.”

When asked about professional growth with the youth clientele, examples of participants replies included:

“Understood children more on a learning level. You realize things and people tell you more as you go. Understood the learning process.”

“I was working with youth in a whole different setting than ever before. I worked WITH them, not you doing it for them, working with them toward a common goal and getting them to that goal without you interfering. Helping them get satisfaction out of it. Communication was very important.”

“I learned a lot about the stages of youth, teaching to their interests and capabilities. I learned how to relate to a whole variety of ages.”

The final question on the follow-up phone survey was “How have you implemented the concepts that you learned at Summer Agent Orientation since your summer Extension experience?” Several of their replies follow.

“Public school work made me realize how much experience I had working with all age levels. Trying to find ways for kids to lead in the classroom, I’ve tried to use motivating techniques and apply them in the classroom. Working with parents has helped. The talk about role models and our choices for our own time really stuck with me. Kids are always watching you and they need good role models.”

“It all comes together. I’m still using these concepts as a teacher, working with colleagues and youth in Ag Education. I don’t realize always where I got the skills from but being able to work with people, much of that came from being a summer agent and working with all those types of people. I use the concepts all of the time.”

“It gave me a general overview of what I needed to know. The experiential learning model is being discussed more in my Youth Org. class and I now have had experience with it. The training made more of an impact than I thought.”

Implications

Several of these individuals are now employed by UW-Extension as educators. They bring to the job a better understanding of their roles and have exhibited that knowledge at New Colleague Orientation. They appear to be better prepared for their jobs and are leaders in the classes of new hires.

Orientation is time well spent. Even for a short period of employment such as the summer, an orientation helps to get the employee off to a quicker start and hopefully makes them more effective quicker.

Though we will never know the actual extent of impact from the orientation session versus the employment experience, we can certainly surmise this orientation contributed and supported the professional development of these summer agents.
Collaboration with college students in the summer agent program enhances their knowledge of UW-Extension structure, 4-H Youth Development principles, volunteer theory, and professionalism creating a marketing opportunity for the Wisconsin Extension program in the campus environment.

Exposure to positive youth development principles in the orientation and the inclusion of these principles by past summer agents in their teaching careers builds a firm foundation for the application of life skills and the furtherance of asset based learning in 4-H and non-4-H youth which they encounter. Summer agent training and experience may serve as a catalyst to promote the core educational values of Extension 4-H Youth development programs.

Knowledge and practice with professionalism and media relations creates a strong and consistent vision for the public of UW-Extension interns and their impact on communities. Decisionmakers and public policy leaders can increase their support and understanding of Extension programming when interns have a successful experience and share that story through the media.
Appendix A

Summer Agent/Assistant Survey

1. What is your role for the summer?

2. What is important when working with volunteers?

3. What are two things you should consider when working with youth?

4. What is your goal in working with camp?

5. What is your goal in working with the County Fair?

6. What do you want the media to tell the general public about the events which they will cover in your county?

7. Define professionalism.
1. What is your role for the summer?

2. What is important when working with volunteers?

3. What are two things you should consider when working with youth?

4. What is your goal in working with camp?

5. What is your goal in working with the County Fair?

6. What do you want the media to tell the general public about the events which they will cover in your county?

7. Define professionalism.

8. List two things you learned today which you will apply in your work this summer.

Post-test Summer Agent /Assistant
5/01
Appendix C

Summer Agent Orientation Follow-up Survey – December 2003

WE ARE DOING A FOLLOW-UP SURVEY OF PAST WI 4-H SUMMER EXTENSION AGENTS TO MEASURE THE IMPACT OF THE WESTERN & SOUTHERN DISTRICT SUMMER AGENT ORIENTATION. AS A RESULT OF THE ORIENTATION TRAINING AND YOUR WORK AS A UW-EXTENSION SUMMER AGENT, WOULD YOU MIND TAKING SOME TIME TO ANSWER A FEW QUESTIONS:

1. How would you describe your overall purpose as a summer agent?

2. How did you fulfill your role as an educator? Site examples:

3. How did you build educational impact into the events that you facilitated over the summer?

4. During your employment as a summer agent did you:
   - Facilitate programs that taught youth life skills? yes no
   - Facilitate programs that presented youth with asset building opportunities? yes no
   - Facilitate programs that considered ages and stages of youth and their development? yes no

5. When you worked with volunteers did you:
   - Feel you were flexible and listened to their ideas? yes no
   - Avoid negative comments and conversation? yes no
   - Show your appreciation for their expertise? yes no
   - Empower volunteers in their role as leaders? yes no
   - Recognize volunteers for their efforts? yes no

6. Site examples of your professional growth from your summer agent experience
   - With colleagues
   - With adult clientele
   - With youth clientele

7. How have you implemented the concepts that you learned at Summer Agent Orientation since your Summer Extension experience?

F:\4H-AGENT\Professor\Summer Agent Survey.doc
Summer Agent Orientation Agenda

Welcome

Your Expectations of this summer experience

What is Extension?

What is 4-H? An overview of history and current program
  Our Educational Mission
  Youth Development
  Life Skills and Assets
  Ages and Stages of Development
  Volunteer Development
  Youth Protection

Professionalism in Your role
  With Youth
  With Volunteers
  With Support Staff
  With Professional Staff

Communications
  Telephone
  Newswriting
  Radio

Other Questions

2003
Abstract:

Summer Agent Orientation was designed to assist short term UW-Extension employees in understanding their role as educators, identifying and applying the basic methods of the Youth Development program including how to best partner with volunteers, and to develop an awareness in these short term employees regarding professionalism. This program is enacted in 15-20 Wisconsin counties annually that hire summer 4-H agents.

The evaluation examines the presentation of written resource materials, lectureettes and activities for orientees using pre/post test methods to measure the achievement of learner objectives as a result of the training. A follow-up telephone survey of orientation participants provides additional interpretive data and shows the application of the learner objectives beyond the orientation proper.