

## **4-H Youth Participation in Leadership Development Activities: A Tri-State Study**

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Participation in youth programs provides young people the opportunity to work with other youth and adults, set goals and priorities, accept responsibility, and participate in planning, decision-making and evaluation (Dept. HEW, 1977). The mission of the 4-H program is "to help youth and volunteers in their development through educational programs using the knowledge base of the land grant universities of the United States." (USDA, 1986). Commitment to the mission involves supporting specific program objectives including helping youth develop leadership capabilities, personal standards and values, positive self concepts, and effective communication skills. (USDA, 1986, p. 5). A general perception prevails that participation in a variety of activities or programs such as public speaking or holding office develops leadership life skills and understanding. The question remains - How accurate is this perception?

Miller (1976, p. 2) defined youth leadership life skills development as self-assessed and organization specific "development of life skills necessary to perform leadership functions in real life." Seevers and Dormody (1994) found participation in 4-H leadership activities to be the greatest predictor of youth leadership life skills development among senior 4-H members in New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado. A similar study by Dormody and Seevers (1994) with FFA youth in the same three states supported these findings. Mueller (1989) found a positive relationship between participation in 4-H leadership activities and youth leadership life skills development. A Michigan study (CES, 1976) found leadership skills are learned through participation in 4-H activities and projects that provide youth the opportunity to participate in trial leadership roles.

Adults continually remind youth that the future of the world will be in their hands tomorrow. Lofquist (1987) said, "For too long we have seen

adolescence as a nonproductive time of life, a time only for becoming and not a time for contributing. We have asked young people to prepare for what they can do in the future, and we have not respected them for what they can do for themselves and others in the present." Leaders must be able to plan, implement, and evaluate programs and activities. They need to be involved in solving problems, and making decisions. Taylor, Adleman, & Howard (1986) found that children as young as eight years old can participate in the decision making process as long as appropriate adult guidance is provided.

Little research has been conducted on the participation of youth in planning, implementing and evaluating leadership activities in which they participate. Mueller (1989) found senior 4-H members participated more in the implementation phase of leadership activities than in planning or evaluation. In FFA, Dormody and Seevers (1994) found FFA members in Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico were also more involved in implementation than planning or evaluation phases of leadership activities. Level and degree of participation are factors to consider in leadership life skills development. Heinsohn and Cantrell (1986) found in a study involving 761 Pennsylvania 4-H youth that only 41 percent indicated involvement in leadership roles at the county level and 17 percent at the state level, whereas 92 percent of the leadership roles took place with the club program. They concluded the greatest impact on leadership life skills development would be made by increasing youth involvement in leadership experiences beyond the community club level.

More research is needed to determine levels of participation in leadership activities of 4-H members, leadership activities perceived to be most effective in developing life skills, and 4-H members' participation in planning, implementing, and evaluating leadership activities.

## **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this study was to describe the involvement of 1992-93 senior 4-H members from Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico in planning, implementing, and evaluating 4-H youth leadership activities. Specific objectives of the study were to:

Describe 4-H members by their years in 4-H, age, gender, ethnicity, and place of residence.

Describe 4-H members by the 4-H leadership activities in which they participate.

Describe 4-H members by their involvement in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of 4-H leadership activities perceived to have made the greatest contribution toward leadership life skills development.

Determine if differences exist between the frequencies that 4-H members participate in the planning, implementation, and evaluation phases of 4-H leadership activities perceived to have made the greatest contribution to leadership life skills development.

## **Procedures**

1992-93 senior 4-H membership rosters were obtained from state 4-H offices in Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico. The population of senior 4-H members in the three states was calculated to be 8,257. At a 95 percent confidence level a sample size of 367 was needed to represent the population (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). This number was rounded to 400 (the confidence level increases slightly to 95.2 percent with this oversampling). A random sample of senior 4-H members stratified proportionally by state was generated.

The study used descriptive survey methodology to measure participation in 4-H leadership activities, perceptions of which 4-H leadership activities have made the greatest contribution to leadership life skills development, and participation in planning, implementing, and evaluating 4-H leadership activities perceived to

have made the greatest contribution to leadership life skills development.

All parts of the instrument were assessed for content and face validity by a panel of experts consisting of two faculty members in vocational education, two state Cooperative Extension Service administrators, a faculty member in educational administration, and two faculty members in research and statistics.

Participation in 4-H leadership activities was measured by a 21-indicator index adapted from Mueller (1989), which listed 4-H leadership activities by various levels of participation ranging from no participation through individual, club, county/district, state, and national participation, depending on the activity. Scores on the participation index can range from 0 to 68. Additionally, participants were asked to choose and rank three leadership activities from the participation index they perceived to have helped them the most in developing leadership skills. For each of the three activities identified, they were to indicate whether or not they helped to plan, implement, and/or evaluate the activity. A two-week test-retest procedure with 19 youth who were not a part of the sample yielded a reliability coefficient of .97 for the index.

Data were collected following the Dillman (1978) procedure for mail questionnaire administration. Incentives were sent with the three mailings to increase response rate. A response rate of 59 percent (n=234) was obtained. To check for nonresponse bias, 10 nonrespondents were contacted by telephone. Nonrespondents were compared statistically to respondents by youth leadership life skills development (Seevers and Dormody, in press), years in 4-H, age, gender ethnicity, place of residence, and state. No significant differences were found in any of the categories between groups. Miller and Smith (1983) suggest because the data were similar, respondents data can be generalized to the target population.

Objectives one through four were analyzed using descriptive statistics (i.e., means, medians, modes, standard deviations, ranges, frequencies, and percentages). Objective five was analyzed using McNemar tests for significance of change. A significance level of 0.05 was established a priori for the tests.

## Results

### Objective One

The number of years 4-H members had been in 4-H ranged from one to eleven with a mean of 5.9 years (sd=2.8) in the organization. 4-H members' ages ranged from 12 to 20 with a mean of 16.3 years (sd 1.4) of age.

Minority 4-H members consisted of 10.5 percent (n=24) of the sample. 4-H members who lived on a farm or ranch comprised 44.3 percent of the sample. Another 33.3 percent were either rural nonfarm/ranch residents or from a town under 10,000 in population. 4-H members were 59.2 percent (n=135) female and 40.8 percent (n=93) male.

### Objective Two

4-H members identified their level of participation in 4-H activities by circling the response that indicated their highest level of participation. Choices ranged from no participation through individual, club, county/district, state, and national, depending on the activity. Participation was greatest for most activities at the club level and the county/district levels. Participation was greatest in fairs (n=199), demonstrations (189), teaching younger members (n=184), and community service projects (n=175). Other activities with relatively high levels of participation included holding office (n=158), committee member (n=151), livestock shows (n=148), and participation in project workshops (n=142) (Table 1).

### Objective Three

Members selected and ranked the top three activities from the 21-item leadership activities index they felt contributed the most toward their leadership life skill development. The number of times a particular activity was identified as being one of the top three activities is described in Table 2. Activities identified as the top developers of leadership life skills were holding office, teaching younger members, fairs, livestock shows, judging contests, demonstrations, public speaking and community service. Total participation in the activity was determined by the number of individuals that identified involvement in the activity. A more standardized measure of the perceived leadership development value of the

activities was determined by dividing the overall participation frequency in activity by the frequency each activity was identified in the members top three leadership activity choices. The highest ratios obtained were for holding office (.58), teaching younger members (.53), Washington Citizenship Focus (.53), Ambassador program (.50), and judging contests (.50) (Table 2).

### Objective Four

4-H members identified by a yes or no response if they were involved in planning, implementing, or evaluating of the top three leadership activities they identified as contributing to leadership life skill development. 4-H members indicated in eight of the leadership activities that their greatest involvement was in implementation (X=88.2%), followed by evaluation (X=69.7%). The least involvement by members in leadership activities was in the planning phase (X=49.7%) (Table 2).

### Objective Five

Significantly more ( $p<.001$ ) 4-H members implemented but did not plan the leadership activity perceived to have made the greatest contribution to life skills development (n=90) than those who planned but did not implement the activity (n=3) (Table 3). Significantly more ( $p<.001$ ) members implemented but did not evaluate their top leadership activity (n=56) than those who evaluated but did not implement the activity (n=14). Significantly more ( $p<.001$ ) members evaluated but did not plan their top leadership activity (n=58) than those who planned but did not evaluate the activity (n=25).

## Conclusions

Twenty-one 4-H leadership development activities were identified. Over 100 senior 4-H members participated in ten leadership activities: fairs, demonstrations, teaching younger members, community service projects, holding office, committee members, livestock shows, project workshops, judging contests, and public speaking. These high numbers indicate that 4-H members are participating in many different leadership activities. Mueller (1989) and Blackwell (1990) found a significant relationship between frequency of participation in 4-H leadership activities and youth leadership skill gain. Participation in 4-H

Table 1. 4-H Members Levels of Participation in 4-H Leadership Activities (n=213)

Activity	County/ District/State					Nat.	Total Partici.
	None	Indiv.	Club	District	State		
Fairs	15	-	-	94	105	-	199
Demonstrations	24	24	91	53	21	-	189
Teach younger members	29	43	80	51	10	-	184
Community service projects	38	8	95	72	-	-	175
Holding office	55	-	111	47	-	-	158
Committee member	62	6	81	54	9	1	151
Livestock shows	65	12	9	78	37	12	148
Project workshops	71	18	51	50	23	-	142
Judging contests	100	13	16	40	37	7	113
Public speaking	100	14	41	43	14	1	113
National 4-H Week	123	6	44	34	6	-	90
Officer training	134	-	35	44	-	-	89
Food shows	155	6	8	36	8	-	58
Camping program	158	-	-	35	20	-	55
J.O.L.T*	161	-	-	-	53	-	53
Fashion shows	165	3	5	28	12	-	48
National 4-H Conference	177	-	-	-	35	1	36
Citizenship Days	185	-	-	-	28	-	28
Citizenship Focus	196	-	-	-	-	17	17
Ambassador program	205	-	-	6	2	-	8
National 4-H Congress	207	-	-	-	-	7	7

\*J.O.L.T. is a state 4-H leadership activity held only in Arizona

leadership life skills activities was greatest at the club level. This result is similar to Heinsohn and Cantrell (1986), who found in a Pennsylvania study of 4-H members that 92 percent of the leadership roles occurred at the local club level. High participation was also found to exist in several activities at the county/district levels, suggesting that more 4-H members may be participating in a wider range of leadership development activities.

Activities identified and ranked as the number one contribution toward leadership life skills development were holding office, teaching younger members, fairs, livestock shows, judging contests, demonstrations, public speaking, and community service. The top three activities contributing toward leadership development remained the same when frequencies from the top three activities were combined. These findings are consistent with Blackwell (1990). These results support the Michigan study (CES, 1976) that states that trial leadership experiences, such as holding office and teaching projects and skills to others, develop leadership skills.

4-H members indicated their greatest

involvement in leadership development activities was in implementing activities (88.2%), followed by evaluating activities (69.7%). Only 49.7 percent of the respondents indicated involvement in planning leadership activities. These results are similar to Mueller (1989). Dormody and Seevers (1993) also found similar results for FFA members in Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico. 4-H youth are doers and not planners or evaluators of leadership activities in which they are involved. One possible explanation for this finding is that adults who work with 4-H programs (4-H leaders, parents, agents, and state faculty) may not be providing youth the opportunity to be involved in the total leadership process (planning, implementing and evaluating).

### Recommendations

Seevers and Dormody (1994) found participation in 4-H leadership activities predicted 12.6 percent of the variance of leadership life skills development among senior 4-H members in Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico. 4-H professionals and volunteer leaders should not only continue to encourage participation in

Table 2. 4-H Members' Perceived Involvement in the Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation of the 4-H Leadership Activity Identified as Contributing Most Toward YLLSD. (n=213)

Activity	No		Yes		No		Yes		Top Three	Total Partici.	Ratio
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes			
Holding office	14	29	1	42	9	34	91	158	.58		
Teaching younger members	11	20	-	31	8	23	80	151	.53		
Fairs	14	7	3	18	9	12	74	199	.37		
Livestock shows	13	6	5	14	11	8	72	148	.49		
Judging contests	11	7	1	17	3	15	57	113	.50		
Demonstrations	3	14	-	17	3	14	44	189	.23		
Public speaking	3	9	1	11	6	6	36	113	.32		
Community service	3	7	1	9	2	8	35	175	.20		
Committee member	10	19	1	28	12	17	29	151	.19		
J.O.L.T.	19	1	7	13	2	18	20	53	.38		
Camping	9	9	3	15	4	14	18	55	.33		
Project workshops	9	9	4	14	7	12	18	142	.13		
National Conference	13	0	3	1	5	8	13	36	.36		
Food Shows	6	4	2	8	6	4	10	58	.17		
Citizenship Focus	9	0	1	8	1	8	9	17	.53		
Fashion Shows	3	6	1	8	3	6	9	48	.19		
National 4-H Week	4	4	0	8	3	5	8	90	.08		
Officer Training	3	3	1	3	1	3	6	89	.07		
Ambassadors	2	2	0	4	1	3	4	8	.50		
Citizenship Days	4	0	1	3	1	3	4	28	.14		
National Congress	1	0	0	1	0	1	2	7	.29		
Total		164	156	38	282	97	223				
Percent of 320 responses	51.3	49.7	11.8	88.2	30.3	69.7					

leadership activities at the club/county levels but also provides opportunities and support for involvement at higher levels. Participation in many different leadership activities at a variety of levels promotes personal development as well as the opportunity to work with other youth and adults, set goals and priorities, accept responsibility, and have a greater role in the planning, implementing and evaluating of leadership development activities. Further research should be conducted to determine why specific 4-H leadership activities were chosen by members as the most effective in developing leadership life skills development.

Leadership life skills development should be enhanced by greater participation of 4-H members in planning and evaluating 4-H leadership activities. Further research should be conducted to determine the perceptions and attitudes of 4-H members, volunteer leaders, and professional staff regarding member participation in these phases of leadership activities. Staff development and 4-H leader training should be conducted to ensure greater participation and leadership by youth in planning,

implementing, and evaluating program activities. Adults who work with 4-H programs may not be providing youth the opportunity to be involved in the total leadership process (planning, implementing, and evaluating). They may need to be taught to share authority roles and respect youth for the contributions they can make to the leadership process.

Mueller (1989) found a significant relationship between leadership life skills development and involvement in planning, implementing and evaluating leadership activities. Experience in implementing leadership activities is a necessary reference from which to draw in planning future activities. A significant number of 4-H youth are involved in implementing leadership activities; however, most are not taking the next steps of reflection, evaluation, and drawing on experience to plan future activities. Further research needs to be conducted to determine why youth are not more highly involved in planning and evaluating leadership activities.

Table 3. McNemar Tests on 4-H Members' Participation in Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating Their Top 4-H Leadership Activity (n=216)

Contingency table cell	n	X <sup>2</sup>	p
<b>Planning by implementing the activity</b>			
Didn't plan or implement	18		
Planned and didn't implement	3		
Implemented and didn't plan	90		
Planned and implemented	105	69.4	p<.001
<b>Implemented by evaluating the activity</b>			
Didn't implement or evaluate	8		
Implemented and didn't evaluate	56		
Evaluated and didn't implement	14		
Implemented and evaluated	138	25.2	p<.001
<b>Planning by evaluating the activity</b>			
Didn't plan or evaluate	39		
Planned and didn't evaluate	25		
Evaluated and didn't plan	58		
Planned and evaluated	94	13.1	p<.001

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