ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to document and interpret the attitudes of Indiana 4-H/Youth Development volunteer council board members, Extension administrators, and professionals (paid state and county level personnel) toward the incorporation of a political multicultural approach into the 4-H/Youth Development program curriculum. Twenty-two participants were interviewed and documents were collected from four counties and the state 4-H office in order to understand the participants' perspectives toward the infusion of this approach. The findings revealed that attitudes must be changed before a political multicultural approach can be infused successfully into the 4-H/Youth program. A comprehensive training program including everyone from administrator to volunteer leaders must be planned and implemented. The training should emphasize building relationships, since relationships create the real structure and texture of the organization.

A Political Multicultural Approach for Volunteer Advisory Boards

By Dr. Pamala Morris

The research reported here was part of a larger on-going 4-H/Youth Development project. Partners for Better Communities (PBC) was a five-year multi-disciplinary project which began in 1995 through the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES), an administrative unit of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The purpose of PBC was to build, strengthen, and nurture local community collaborations to create a safe, healthy community environment for all children, youth, and families (Partners for Better Communities Handbook, 1995).

One major strategy used in this project was to help local unpaid volunteer advisory groups/boards assess the degree to which their organizational structure, policies, and programs were being inclusive. Based on this assessment, each volunteer advisory group/board developed a plan of action to increase their inclusivity. This process was described in an article entitled "Helping Volunteer Advisory Boards Move Toward Inclu-

sive Programming for Diverse Audiences," which appeared in *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*, Spring 2000, Volume XVIII, Number 3.

Diversity/inclusivity/pluralism was one of six components being researched and evaluated in the PBC project. This component focused on helping boards to assess their progress towards inclusivity in five areas: 1) audience/clientele base, 2) program development and delivery, 3) board leadership, 4) financial resources, and 5) human resources.

Several methods were used to evaluate the progress of the diversity, inclusivity, and pluralism component. The research presented in this study was one of the methods employed as part of the evaluation process. This qualitative research report provided baseline data relative to attitudes towards the 4-H/Youth Development program becoming more inclusive.

4-H/Youth Development is one of the oldest and largest nontraditional educational

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efforts in our country (Weatherford & Peck, 1983). It provides a multitude of research-based nonformal educational programs and activities nationally to approximately six million youth and a little over 250,000 in Indiana.

Engaging volunteers as active partners of Purdue University's 4-H/Youth Development department is integral to its mission of helping people improve their lives through an educational process using scientific knowledge focused on identified issues and needs. Volunteers are identified as a part of the vision by stating that county educators recruit, and develop volunteers to multiply the program's efforts. Volunteerism has been identified in the strategic plan as fundamental to achieving the organization's mission and vision. 4-H/Youth Development programs could not function effectively without the parents and volunteer adult leaders. Approximately 3,500 men and women in Indiana volunteer each year to assist in some capacity with the 4-H/Youth Development program. Volunteers provide their time, effort, and knowledge toward planning, implementing, and evaluating programs. However, these supporters view the program as teaching or emphasizing values and life skills that they deem important. As a result, they tend to influence program direction toward a status quo situation, resisting attempts to move 4-H in any direction they perceive as threatening this basic character (Evaluation of Economic and Social Consequences of Cooperative Extension Programs, 1980).

RATIONALE

Nearly half (46 percent) of school-age youth in the United States will be people of color by 2020 (Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989). People of color, women, and immigrants will make up more than 83 percent of the new additions to the U.S. workforce between now and year 2030 (Johnson & Parker, 1987). Therefore, it is no longer possible or profitable to maintain physical, cul-

tural, and political isolation. Only a well-conceived, sensitive, thorough, and continuous program of multicultural education can create the broadly based multicultural literacy so necessary for the future of our nation and world.

There is general agreement among most scholars and researchers that, for multicultural education to be implemented successfully, institutional changes must be made, including changes in the instructional content; supplemental materials; teaching and learning styles; the attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of all employees and administrators; and the goals, norms, and culture of institutions/organizations (Banks, 1995). In other words, a healthy culturally diverse organization is one in which an obvious effort is made to get people with different backgrounds, skills, and abilities to work together toward the goal or purpose of the organization. However, if multicultural education is to become better understood and implemented in ways more consistent with theory, its various dimensions must be more clearly described, conceptualized, and researched (Banks, 1995). It would not be possible to research every dimension of multicultural education; therefore, this study will focus only on the political aspect.

Multiculturalism from a sociopolitical perspective is one way to present historical and social issues so that all sides are empowered. Political multiculturalism is both a process and a goal. The process involves organizations being able to assess every aspect of their culture in order to create and embrace a pluralistic environment. The goal is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. It includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members share in the power by having a voice in the decision making process that directly affects them. It is inclusive of, but not limited to, issues of ethnicity, race, linguistics, religion, gender, economic status, sexual orientation, and the differently abled.

GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What knowledge and beliefs do the state 4-H/Youth Development paid faculty and staff, 4-H/Youth Development volunteer policy council board members, and 4-H/Youth Development paid county administrators and personnel, in four selected counties in Indiana, have regarding multicultural education?
2. What are the participants' perceptions of the existing 4-H/Youth Development educational program[1] as it relates to multicultural education?
3. How do the participants' beliefs and ideas about a political multicultural approach influence how the educational program is developed, implemented, and evaluated?
4. What are the implications for policy and administration of educational programs as a result of the incorporation of a political multicultural approach?

METHODOLOGY

Site and Participants

The potential population in this study was defined as: 4-H/Youth Development paid state and county staff, inclusive of specialists, educators, administration, and volunteer policy council board members. The population was a purposeful sampling because of their involvement with the development and/or implementation of the 4-H/Youth Development program in Indiana.

Only four counties out of Indiana's 92 counties applied. Three of the counties were defined as rural and one county was urban.

All interviews were taped and conducted at a convenient and comfortable meeting site within the participants' respective counties or workplace.

Data Collection

Data were collected by the following methods: in-depth interviews and document analysis. There were a total of 22 participants who were informed, by official correspondence, of the nature and purpose of the research.

The in-depth interviews were designed to tap into the participants' prior knowledge and beliefs relative to political multiculturalism. A one time face-to-face interview with each participant was conducted during a four-month period. Content analysis of documents was used in triangulation to strengthen the findings.

Program records and documents evaluated for this study included, but were not limited to: brochures, newsletters, correspondence to 4-H/Youth clientele, organizational rules, regulations and policies, expansion and review committee reports, and any other official or unofficial documents. These documents revealed private interchanges, goals and decisions that might not have been reported through an interview. An analysis of all data sources provided sufficient information to interpret and discuss implications for policy and administration of programs.

Procedures

Throughout the study, the researcher utilized a personal journal that contained general observations, descriptions of how decisions were made, personal reflections, all correspondence, and a calendar of activities.

The researcher developed a pool of questions (see Appendix A) which solicited information directly related to the research questions.

All tapes recorded were transcribed. Each transcription was mailed to individual participants for their review. Participants were asked to make corrections, deletions, or additions to their transcripts in order to reflect the accuracy of their responses.

Data Analysis

Data from open-ended interview questions were gathered and coded using qualitative methodology (Lincoln & Guba, 1989; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Using content analysis, existing documents from participating counties were reviewed. All documents were analyzed by using a checklist (see

Appendix B). The procedures included reading the transcripts and identifying salient information, and then sorting these phrases and sentences into categories consisting of units with similar content. Upon the completion of the sorting, categories were reviewed for exhaustiveness and consistency. Finally, the category set was reviewed for interrelations among categories, overlap, and completeness. Findings were summarized to reflect the major themes that emerged.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Overall, findings indicate that a political multicultural approach will be difficult to infuse into the 4-H/Youth Development program in Indiana without a major shift in paradigms. While some participants responded enthusiastically, others expressed concern as they shared their thoughts and beliefs about possible changes in a program that had a strong tradition and was held in high esteem by participating youth and their families. In order to describe and interpret the participant responses and documents collected from the state 4-H office and each of the participating counties, four assertions were generated. These assertions are discussed along with emerging themes in this section.

Assertion One: 4-H/Youth Development program perceived as worthwhile experience for youth currently being served.

Participants viewed the 4-H/Youth program as a worthwhile experience because it provided a variety of learning opportunities for youth to experience success, positive and meaningful relationships, develop leadership and basic life skills, develop a sense of belonging and a positive self-concept.

Youth working in partnership with adults was cited as a crucial source of supportive relationships and vital experiences. Nurturing, caring partnerships are formed when youth work closely with adult leaders and volunteers. Therefore, most participants agreed that one of the basic and critical components of the 4-H/Youth program was the adult volunteers who guide, mentor, and support 4-H/Youth members through their learning and activity involvement. Without these volunteers, the program could not function effectively and efficiently.

Surprisingly, although volunteers were cited as a strength, some participants seemed to think that they were also barriers to youth participation. Some volunteers were cited as being traditional in their thinking; therefore, not quick to branch out and embrace new ideas or new audiences. It was noted that volunteers who held these views usually participated in the 4-H program from the time they were young through their adult years.

Assertion Two: Diverse backgrounds and experiences shape views regarding multicultural education.

With few exceptions, most of the participants did not link multicultural education with a collective social movement aimed at redistributing resources across groups. For most of them, it was a tool for addressing problems they saw in their communities, in the workplace, or to educate people about cultures different from their own.

Participants also noted that relationship building was a primary challenge for an organization's growth and development. Relationship is the most powerful, under utilized resource available to organizations addressing constant change. It is key to managing and valuing diversity. Relationships, whether personal, civic, or organizational, serve as the basis of our growth and development, our expression of warmth and creativity, our support and strength, in everything we do. Therefore, it should become the focus of conscious organizational strategies.

Assertion Three: Perceptions of an inclusive and shared decision-making process for program development.

Most participants felt that incorporating this approach would encourage program development committees to have a better representation of diverse groups. The voice of

diverse groups from across the state and from within individual counties would enrich the entire program planning process by adding different perspectives reflective of values and beliefs from existing cultures within our society.

There was one over-arching theme relative to implementation: A change in mindsets. In other words, some attitudes needed to change in order to work effectively with new audiences. Participants felt that attitudes should be changed using a top-down approach from management to volunteers.

It was also suggested that incorporation of a multicultural approach would encourage staff responsible for evaluation to obtain the input from a broader cross-section of youth and adults and develop a variety of methods for evaluating programs.

Assertion Four: A disparity between policy and practice is perceived.

The majority of participants agreed that the present policies would not have to change to accommodate the concept of inclusiveness. They felt that the policies were in place, but implementation was the problem. Implementation appeared to be problematic because some staff and volunteers were not equipped with adequate knowledge and tools to work with diverse audiences. It was suggested that additional training and experience was necessary. Some participants felt that the challenge was in developing relationships, contacts, and community respect. Staff and volunteers need to be more open and receptive to including people from different backgrounds, experiences, and cultures. Therefore, it was suggested that a total team effort would be necessary where the organization and community would work together from the beginning of the process. It is important to bring along groups of constituents in order to build a solid foundation for political and financial support within the communities.

IMPLICATIONS

The goal of valuing and managing diversity is to develop a practical and strategic response to changing demographics, a response that will establish effective relationships for all staff, volunteers, and clientele. Findings emerging from this study will set the stage for the development of productive relationships between and among culturally diverse employees and volunteers. These implications are useful, not only for youth-serving agencies and organizations, but can be applicable for any volunteer service management.

1. Ensure the meaningful participation of youth, racial/ethnic and other marginalized groups on advisory councils, boards, and committees. Representation of marginalized groups should be included as part of any decision making process within a community. In addition, representation of these groups must be afforded equal voice and respected as a viable member of the decision making body. This may require some additional training for those constituents that are not skilled in and knowledgeable about the decision making process.

2. Engage in a critical review of policies, rules, and procedures with an aim toward reducing the number and scope of the rules. A critical review could assist with more consistent implementation resulting in increased participation by more diverse groups. There are too many procedural barriers and regulations that prevent participation of some community members. It is important to note that policies establish values, beliefs and direction for staff and volunteer involvement. They connect the volunteer program to the larger organization and its mission. Formalize your policy decisions by putting them in writing. Writing decisions in the form of policies and distributing them to paid and volunteer staff can lend them greater import and perhaps better ensure compliance.

3. Institute a continuous comprehensive process of training paid and volunteer staff to work with diverse audiences. Training alone does not change organizational cultures. It is only one part (albeit an important one) of a larger systems-change initiative. All employees should go through a series of cultural diversity workshops that provide insight into knowledge, awareness, skills, and action. Additional training should be provided in the areas of leadership, collaboration, grant writing, and working with boards and councils to prepare new and existing staff and volunteers for their work with diverse audiences.

4. Develop and conduct a needs assessment of all state and county level personnel (including administration) and volunteers resulting in effective and appropriate training. Representatives from all levels of the organization should participate in each step of designing the needs assessment plan and interpreting the results. Participation in the needs assessment, as in many organizational activities, is essential for building ownership among key stakeholders.

5. Collaborate with other organizations on joint workshops, conferences, and training sessions. Collaborative efforts could reduce training cost, provide for more effective marketing, and create a network essential for the development of new and innovative ideas. Consider who might be a good collaborative partner. These can be other community organizations, local businesses, professional societies, schools, and etc. Keep in mind that a collaborative partner does not have to share the same interest or goals.

6. Recruit people other than traditional volunteers in order to reach out to different audiences. Identify key people within the community, i.e., community leaders, church members, public housing, and business owners to become volunteers.

Establish an Outreach Team or Diversity Task Force to assist with the recruitment. Stay away from tokenism. This concept can be spotted quickly and will not be supported by staff and other volunteers.

7. To encourage program expansion, inspire staff and volunteers to take risks with new programs and new audiences, but remember to reward them for their risk-taking. Begin with a paradigm shift, where the old ways of functioning are no longer appropriate or acceptable, but where the new paradigm, is not yet visible. Place more importance on creative and innovative programming and delivery modes to reach constituents. Be willing to accept a drop in numbers in exchange for quality programming and reaching a broader cross-section of the population.

8. Encourage the development of evaluation instruments that measure increased knowledge, skills and improved attitudes or quality of life. Select a cross-section of the population from across the state, along with an evaluation specialist, for their input in developing evaluation instruments. Examine: a) different methods and instruments that will measure program learning outcomes; b) a variety of assessment procedures that reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity of the intended audience. Network with other organizations, agencies, and universities to locate previously prepared instruments and methods that would assist in this effort.

9. Promote your organization as being inclusive, accessible and beneficial for the entire community. Some organizations that have not been open to differences in the past are now seeking diversity. These organizations are trying to rectify years of being oriented to a Eurocentric way of thinking. It is difficult to introduce diversity into an established program structure, but it can be done. Reaching

out to diverse populations and attracting new audiences with information about the availability of your programs can accomplish this. Reaching out to new communities may require re-thinking some of the services your organization provides. It is also suggested that you analyze your paid and current volunteer staff and clientele. After you have analyzed who your participants are, ask if this is the diversity you want or need in order to address challenging issues in the diverse communities you serve.

10. Identify program areas that would appeal to culturally different audiences. Nontraditional project areas that would appeal to and meet the needs of the new audiences should be developed and implemented. Traditional delivery methods may need to be modified or new methods developed.

11. Provide a structure where all levels of staff and volunteers can come together to discuss controversial issues, encouraging them to examine and understand their own and others' beliefs, values, attitudes. Consider the location and facility when offering an opportunity for people to come together to discuss critical and sensitive issues. An opportunity should be provided for an open dialogue relative to issues of diversity and any other controversial issue. Participants should be given a chance to reflect on and examine the effect of prejudice, discrimination, and cultural conflicts in their life experiences.

12. Establish a Resource Center for the collection of culturally inclusive teaching materials in the office. The resource center should be established with the intent to assist in the enhancement of diversity awareness among staff, volunteers, and clientele. It should include a variety of reference materials on the histories, experiences, and cultures of many racial, ethnic, and cultural groups; diversity aware-

ness curricula; audio-visual training materials; periodicals; and other types of articles or clippings pertaining to cultural diversity; sexual harassment; disabilities; and affirmative action issues in general.

In concluding, it is evident that building effective relationships, or rapport, is at the heart of all diversity issues. If a political multicultural approach is to be maximized in any organization, then the basic element of good communication must come forth — respect and trust. If those two elements can become part of the demeanor of the professional staff and volunteers, then genuine relationships can be developed. Relationships developed on trust and respect will provide a strong, firm foundation upon which teamwork can exist. Upon the development of this teamwork will come the synergism in which everyone's opinion will be given equal value regardless of his or her title or position. Then and only then will an organization be all that it can be and pluralism will not be a dream, but a reality. With this newfound pluralism comes an interdependence of all individuals involved. We acknowledge, accept, value, and celebrate the opinions and thoughts of others. We debate vigorously, but we debate in the win/win mode wanting everyone involved feeling good about the solution.

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ENDNOTE

[1]Educational program is being defined in this study as the interaction with instructional content; supplemental materials, i.e. brochures, newsletters; planned activities and events; multimedia resources, and processes for evaluating the attainment of educational objectives.

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Overview Comments: Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of my doctoral research in conjunction with the Partners for Better Communities project. In this study we want to understand your perspective on the 4-H/Youth educational program. You should be assured that your comments will not be linked to you in any way, thus we hope that you will speak freely this morning/afternoon. So that I may concentrate on you and your responses, I would like to audiotape our conversation—is this ok with you? Please be sure to speak up so the microphone picks up your voice. Thanks.

1. How would you define "educational program"?
   a.   Describe the Indiana 4-H/Youth Development program?
   b.   Overall, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the 4-H/Youth Development program?

2. In your opinion, does the 4-H/Youth Development program appeal to all youth?
   a.   What terms, if any, have you heard people use when talking about educational programs that appeal to all youth?
   b.   What experience have you had with multicultural education?
   c.   What role do you believe multicultural education has in our 4-H/Youth program?

3. In your work or reading have you heard this term or one similar to "political multiculturalism?"
   a.   In your opinion, what does political multiculturalism mean? (Provide a definition of political multiculturalism)
   b.   What is your attitude toward the integration of this approach into the 4-H educational program?

Until now, we have been discussing the concept of an educational program and specifically the 4H/Youth Development program. I will now ask you some specific questions about the 4-H/Youth program development, implementation, and evaluation.

4. If a political multicultural approach is incorporated, how would this affect program development?

5. How would the incorporation of political multiculturalism affect the implementation of programs?

6. What affect would the integration of political multiculturalism have on the evaluation of programs?

7. How would Extension policy be affected by a political multicultural approach?
   a. How would this affect the 4-H Advisory Council?

8. Would the administration of programs be affected by using this approach?
   a. What would this mean for Extension Educators? 4-H Volunteers?

APPENDIX B
CHECKLIST FOR DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

❐ Are the perspectives and contributions of people from diverse cultural and linguistic groups—both men and women, as well as people with disabilities—included in the curriculum?

❐ Are there activities in the curriculum that will assist students in analyzing the various forms of the mass media for ethnocentrism, sexism, "handicapism", and stereotyping?

❐ Are men and women, diverse cultural/racial groups, and people with varying abilities shown in both active and passive roles?

❐ Are men and women, diverse cultural/racial groups, and people with disabilities shown in positions of power (i.e., the materials do not rely on the mainstream culture's character to achieve goals)?

❐ Do the materials identify strengths possessed by so-called "underachieving" diverse populations? Do they diminish the attention given to deficits, to reinforce positive behaviors that are desired and valued?

❐ Are members of diverse racial/cultural groups, men and women, and people with disabilities shown engaged in a broad range of social and professional activities?

❐ Are members of a particular culture or group depicted as having a range of physical features (e.g., hair color, hair texture, variations in facial characteristics and body build)?

❐ Do the materials represent historical events from the perspectives of the various groups involved or solely from the male, middle-class, and/or Western European perspective?

❐ Are the materials free of ethnocentric or sexist language patterns that may make implications about persons or groups based solely on their culture, race, gender, or disability?

❐ Will students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds find the materials personally meaningful to their life experiences?

❐ Are a wide variety of culturally different examples, situations, scenarios, and anecdotes used throughout the curriculum design to illustrate major intellectual concepts and principles?

❐ Are culturally diverse content, examples, and experiences comparable in kind, significance, magnitude, and function to those selected from mainstream culture?