

A Conception of 4-H

Part I

A well conceived 4-H program can provide significant learning opportunities within the ordinary life experience of young people

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EXTENSION people who have responsibilities for 4-H Club work are repeatedly reminded of the problems of working in the interest of young people. Problems often posed include: (1) the rapidly changing technology, (2) the accelerated shift in places of residence, and (3) the fact that, on the national average, 85 per cent of farm young people must earn their livelihood off the farm. Extension people are often reminded that, in light of existing circumstances, young people must be prepared for an uncertain future.

Personnel responsible for 4-H work are often given the impression that they must anticipate what young people will be doing 15 or 25 years hence¹ and, on the basis of such insight, devise programs that will prepare them for whatever career they may pursue off the farm—a future completely unrelated to the present.² Such a responsibility is often suggested in a manner to imply that existing programs are not sufficient to accomplish such a task.

Such, in fact, may be the case: Existing programs may not be adequate to make their maximum potential contribution to the future of young people. It may be appropriate to ask if they have ever been. It may also be appropriate to ask that, if this be the case, to what should we address ourselves. Do we conclude that what has

¹For elaboration on this idea see John W. Gardner, *Excellence* (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1961), pp. 34-35.

²For a discussion of the contradiction in the idea of using the present simply to get ready for the future see John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Collier Books, 1963), p. 49.

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been the traditional 4-H program is no longer adequate—that something entirely new and different is the answer; that the potential for making the kind of contribution to young people which Extension should consider its responsibility does not exist within the scope of what has become known as 4-H Club work. Or do we address ourselves to the task of gleaning from past experience significant factors that have contributed to the impact 4-H has had on the lives of some young people and build on them?

The purpose of this article is to formulate and present a conception of 4-H that may serve as a basis for examining Extension's efforts in working with young people. An attempt will be made to (1) structure the place 4-H may occupy in the education of young people, (2) outline the process through which young people may learn in 4-H, including how such learning may effectively be arranged, and (3) to substantiate the ideas presented by drawing on what has been generalized from research about the circumstances under which young people may be motivated and activated to learn.

This conceptualization will be attempted in two parts. This first part deals with the structure and the process. The second part, dealing with the bases for learning, will be carried in a subsequent issue of the *Journal*. Ideas presented in this conceptualization will not be original and may not be identifiable with their source in some instances. But, even though the ideas themselves are not original, this method of attempting to conceptualize 4-H Club work may be considered so.

THE STRUCTURAL SETTING

It may be reasonable to assume that 4-H Club work has been a vital factor in the education of some young people—this is true insofar as we are able to judge. Therefore, if we are analytical and insightful educators we should be able to sort out from past experience what may be the *real* and *worthwhile* aspects of 4-H and to capitalize on these in our present efforts. It appears that we are in no position to enjoy the luxury of trial and error. We find ourselves confronted with such obstacles as: (1) competing opportunities for young people; (2) a social climate that appears more inclined to foster and reward mediocrity than excellence; (3) a social climate that seems to place increasing stress on security and decreasing stress on opportunity and challenge; (4) pressure for change—often without evidence or purpose for change except for the sake of change; and (5) a widespread attitude on the part of parents, educators, and others that assigning arduous duties and

expecting excellence in performance is an injustice—an imposition on the right for self-determination.³

The modern teenager has been described as a boy or girl whose energies are already sapped by the sheer process of physical growth, caught up in a whirl of school work and social activities in and out of school, confronted by decisions which will affect his entire life, confused by the shifting attitudes of parents, teachers and society in general, all of whom doubt him and his behavior—and bewildered by the complex and rapidly changing civilization into which he must soon fit, assuming all of the responsibilities of maturity.⁴

Facing such situations, if they do in reality exist, what do we do? What are we expected to do? What are we commissioned to do? What can we do within the resources at hand?

This conception, addressed to such questions, is based on the premise that Extension's responsibility in working with young people is through a program called 4-H Club work. (This has been identified and defined by legislative intent.⁵) It is based on the assumption that the most effective and lasting contribution Extension can make to other institutions and organizations who seek to serve youth is to have the most dynamic 4-H Club program possible. In examining Extension's efforts with young people from these points of view it is possible to take issue with some current attempts to devise innovations that appear designed to have 4-H identified with social trends⁶ and "fads" of the "adolescent society."

The Scope of Education

Perhaps the principal concern of Extension (as well as other educational institutions and endeavors) in its work with young

³For research related to these circumstances see James S. Coleman, *Social Climate in the High School* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1961) and *The Adolescent Society* (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1961). For a philosophical discussion see John W. Gardner, *op. cit.*; and Wilbur H. Pease, "Youth Development in the 1960's: the 4-H Club Contribution" (Ithaca, N.Y.: The New York State Colleges of Agriculture and Home Economics at Cornell University, 1962), pp. 2-3 (mimeographed).

⁴H. H. Remmers and D. H. Radler, *The American Teenager* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1957), p. 50. Copyright © 1957 by H. H. Remmers. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

⁵From a private conversation with Professor C. M. Ferguson (Madison: National Agricultural Extension Center for Advanced Study, University of Wisconsin, 1963) based on his interpretation of the legislation authorizing the expenditure of public funds for Extension's work with young people.

⁶Pease (*op. cit.*, pp. 3-4) suggests that some may over-emphasize the needs of society and the specific needs of youth in a changing society to the exclusion of other important ideas.

people can be identified as that of developing mature, competent, responsible citizens. We are concerned with helping young people move from immaturity to maturity—to becoming individuals who are physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually mature. Such an effort is commonly referred to as *education*. Wriston describes the true character of education as a life-long process of physical, mental, moral, and aesthetic growth. He says that “it is not primarily training, though training is part of it. Central is the stimulation and the discipline of the individual.”⁷

Several avenues of education can be identified:

1. *Experience of living*—we learn by merely existing.
2. *School*—a highly organized effort to aid young people in their growth, with special emphasis on mental development.
3. *Church*—an effort to contribute substantially to spiritual growth.
4. *Family*—where, among other things, cultural and social patterns are transmitted from one generation to another. The family is described as the heart of society. “The educational process begins and is served most deeply in the home.”⁸
5. *Other contacts*—often determined by the community in which the young person lives.

It is perhaps possible to view these educative opportunities (curricula)⁹ on a continuum, based on the extent to which learning experiences are structured:

EXPERIENCE OF LIVING ←	— — — — —	→ FORMAL SCHOOLING
(The curriculum of life where choices know only limited bounds—informal)		(Where curriculum is so structured that choices are greatly restricted—formalized)

It is apparent that, with this structure of learning opportunities provided young people, 4-H Club work (along with the other activities between avenues for learning) fits somewhere between the two extremes (the experience of living and the school curriculum). However, rather than being a separate entity—an educational experience apart from other experiences—4-H appears to have been effective in pulling the extremes closer together, thus permitting the young person to make more sense of both extremes. A study

⁷ Henry M. Wriston, “The Individual,” *Goals for Americans* (New York: The American Assembly, Columbia University, 1960), pp. 55-56.

⁸ The President’s Commission on National Goals, *Goals For Americans* (New York: The American Assembly, Columbia University, 1960), p. 22.

⁹ For the purpose of this paper the term *curriculum* will not be restricted to the conception of a formalized course of study; it will be used to denote any of educative experiences encountered in the normal course of events for young people.

of the historical setting from which 4-H evolved¹⁰ suggests that it has had the effect of integrating learning experiences—of relating all learning to real life—rather than encouraging the viewing of each educative effort in isolation.¹¹ (The idea of integrating learning with real life experiences is described by Dewey as starting with material within the experience of the learner—material within “the scope of ordinary life-experience.”¹²)

THE PROCESS

If 4-H has in fact provided opportunities for learning within the scope of ordinary life experience and if it has also had (or can have) some influence in bringing other learning opportunities within a broader range of real-life experiences, we should be able to construct a process or a basis for a “4-H curriculum.” To do so we are confronted with such matters as: (1) what to include in the curriculum (program), (2) how to organize it, (3) how to present (execute) it, and (4) where or under what circumstances it can best be presented. Decisions on these matters can be influenced by our interpretation of who is to be reached by the program.

No attempt will be made to spell out specifically and in detail who is to be taught, what is to be taught, etc., because answers to these concerns will vary with the situation. The purpose is to indicate the bases for a 4-H curriculum and to identify considerations that should be taken into account in any set of circumstances.

What We Teach

The law authorizing the expenditure of public funds for Extension work specifies Extension’s subject matter to be “. . . agriculture, home economics, and subjects relating thereto. . . .”¹³ Institutional affiliation also identifies Extension’s program content in the context of the subject matter of the parent institution.¹⁴ Also, there are unique characteristics in the way subject matter is or-

¹⁰The historical setting of 4-H is treated at length in Franklin M. Reck, *The 4-H Story* (Ames: The Iowa State College Press, 1951); and in briefer form in L. Carter, Jr. and Robert C. Clark (eds.), *Selected Readings and References in 4-H Club Work* (Madison: National Agricultural Extension Center for Advanced Study, 1961), pp. 3-11.

¹¹For a discussion of this idea in terms of “learning in isolation” see Dewey, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-48.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹³Smith-Lever Act as amended and in effect October 5, 1962 (code reference 7 U.S.C. 341, *et seq.*).

¹⁴Pease, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

ganized in 4-H Club work; it is organized into what we refer to as projects. Such projects provide the opportunity to organize subject matter into graduated and related experiences¹⁵ that incorporate the potential for tangible evidences of progress.

But regardless of how valuable, mere knowledge of agriculture, home economics, and related subjects may not be enough to insure maturity. The subject matter must be so organized that it is real to the life of the young person—so that it has meaning *here and now*. It must also be so organized and taught that those participating are exposed to desirable citizenship,¹⁶ leadership, and personal development experiences. However, the crux of the idea is that, regardless of who is involved in 4-H work (youth and adults), the subject matter which Extension (through the Land Grant institution) is uniquely qualified and equipped to teach may offer the most realistic opportunity to meet basic developmental needs¹⁷ of those involved, if the potentials are recognized and materials are properly organized and effectively taught.¹⁸

Who We Teach

It is difficult to separate who is to be taught (the learner) from what is to be taught (the program) in a voluntary educational undertaking; each influences the other in varying degrees. There may be limitations on what subject matter (in the ordinary sense of the word) can be included, but the built-in curriculum (i.e., leadership, citizenship, personal development, etc.) can be totally flexible. However, who is taught will be determined largely by the nature of the ordinary subject matter.

¹⁵ The "principle of continuity" suggested by Dewey deals with learning based on what has gone before and how such experiences modify the quality of experiences which come after. See Dewey, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-36.

¹⁶ According to Remmers and Radler, "the most significant blind spot in our high school youth concerns concepts of citizenship." See Remmers and Radler, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

¹⁷ For a discussion of basic developmental needs of young people and their relationship to the fashionable concern for "psychological needs," "emotional needs," "ego needs," and other such therapeutic needs, see E. J. Tyler, "Rural Youth: Their Needs and Interests," *Agricultural Institute Review*, XVIII (March-April 1963), 15-18.

¹⁸ Findings of research being conducted at the State University of Iowa suggest that, in the context of the public school, not only can knowledge of the natural sciences help young people understand themselves, but the manner in which the subject is taught influences the student's perception of the world around him. See Ralph H. Ojemann, *et al.*, "The Effects of A 'Casual' Teacher-Training Program and Certain Curricular Changes on Grade School Children," *Journal of Experimental Education*, XXIV (December, 1955), 95-115. Pease (*op. cit.*, pp. 6-7) discusses the same ideas in the context of 4-H Club work.

Aside from the influence of what we teach on who we teach, however, we can expect some guidance from an understanding of the nature of those involved. Those who participate in 4-H¹⁹ bring with them certain interests and needs shaped from previous experiences, as well as individual ability levels and motivations. An understanding of varying ability levels and developmental tasks²⁰ will influence not only how we organize what is to be taught but how we teach—and what we incorporate into our teaching beyond the specific subject matter.²¹

How We Teach

People do not learn simply by being told what they should know.²² This appears to have been recognized by the framers of the Smith-Lever Act. The Act not only specifies the areas in which Extension is to teach, it commissions the Service to “. . . encourage the adoption. . . .” Encouraging adoption introduces the necessity for utilizing knowledge of many disciplines in our universities. To be effective educators we need to avail ourselves of the insights available within different disciplines in the universities on such matters as teaching and learning, motivation, how human beings behave as individuals and as members of groups, why they behave as they do, how to communicate, etc. We need, within our own grasp, understandings of psychology, sociology, anthropology, and other behavioral sciences. We must comprehend, insofar as there is understanding, the learning process.

Another factor that greatly influences how we teach is that in 4-H work the teaching of young people is accomplished largely through volunteer leaders. This means, in effect, that the professional worker is a teacher of teachers (and volunteer teachers at that).²³ This factor not only influences how we as professional edu-

¹⁹ See Burton W. Kreitlow and Robert F. Barnes, *4-H Impact*, Wisconsin Agricultural Experiment Station Special Bulletin 8 (Madison: University of Wisconsin, July, 1962).

²⁰ For a discussion of the “developmental needs” concept and its application to education see Robert J. Havighurst, *Developmental Tasks and Education* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1952).

²¹ Rogers’ discussion of the difference between the learner who participates in study voluntarily and those who do so because it is required has relevance in terms of who and what is taught in 4-H. See Carl R. Rogers, “Significant Learning: In Therapy and in Education,” *Educational Leadership*, XVI (January, 1959), 37-42.

²² Ernest W. Anderson, “An Approach to Effective Teaching,” *Journal of Cooperative Extension*, I (Spring, 1963), 9-15.

²³ Laurel K. Sabrosky, “Role of the Agent in Leader Training,” *Journal of Cooperative Extension*, I (Spring, 1963), 31-37.

cators teach, it influences how the content of the program is organized and what is incorporated. Material cannot be included that is beyond the comprehension of those who are to teach.

Where We Teach

This conception of 4-H is based on the idea that, basically, teaching (the learning situation) occurs in the local situation—where the young people live.²⁴ This is where the unique adult-youth relationship, referred to by Tyler,²⁵ can occur. This is where the member-parent-leader-other adult (4-H supporter) relations can exist, forming the basic circumstances for implementing effective curriculum (program). All the ingredients for effective educational pursuits are present when the leadership and guidance of county Extension agents, well trained in technical subject matter and the educational process, are added.

However, this pattern is further strengthened through the assistance provided county personnel by Extension supervisors, specialists, administrators, other state staff and resource people, and state-wide 4-H supporters. In addition to this kind of adult support, 4-H activities are arranged at the county, district or area, state, and even national levels to expand and strengthen the educational opportunities provided those involved in the program at the local level. Such broadened activities can serve to provide educational experiences for those young people and adults who can profit by and assimilate into their patterns of behavior a wide range of experiences. Such additional educative experiences also provide opportunity for discovering, stimulating, and developing leadership abilities among young people and leaders. However, the core of the teaching-learning opportunities resides in the local situation—in the member-parent-leader setting.

SUMMARY

An effort has been made to formulate and present a conception of 4-H that places it in the context of the education and development of the young people involved. This has been done by

²⁴ See Lloyd L. Rutledge, "Complementary Relationship of 4-H and School Programs," presentation at the American Institute of Cooperation, 1962 (Farm Extension Service, mimeographed, 4-H 177, 7-62), p. 3.

²⁵ Ralph W. Tyler, "The Educational Potential of 4-H," *Selected Readings and References in 4-H Club Work*, (eds.) G. L. Carter, Jr. and Robert C. Cook (Madison: National Agricultural Extension Center for Advanced Study, 1961), pp. 15-16.

being the structural setting in which young people may be aided to become mature, competent, responsible citizens, and by speculating where 4-H work fits into the picture.

If the 4-H program is viewed as a curriculum—with the potential for being as well conceived and planned within appropriate structure as other educative endeavors—then bases for such a curriculum are conceivable. Such bases include: (1) who we teach, (2) how we teach, (3) what we teach, and (4) where we teach. In the second part of this conceptualization (to appear in a subsequent issue of the *Journal*) an effort will be made to glean from findings and interpretations of research (on how learning takes place) certain insights into what 4-H may offer in helping young people realize their full potential.

I HAVE been impressed by the many Extension agents who have read the new *Journal*. An agent in Wisconsin recently commented to me, "It is the first time I have sat down and read something through 'when I didn't have time'." I hope the *Journal of Cooperative Extension* will continue to be helpful.

—from LAUREL K. SABROSKY, Extension Research Specialist,
Federal Extension Service.

THE heart of the difference between the youth and the adult is that the latter should be capable of directing his own education. If he does not have the basic skills to do so, the University should try to help him. But it should also serve as a resource to which thoughtful, self-directing men and women may turn to build and refine their higher capacities.

—from CYRIL O. HOULE, "Education for Adult Leadership,"
Adult Education, VIII (Autumn, 1957), 13 (contributed by
Edwin H. Bates, Maine).

I WAS greatly impressed with the *Journal of Cooperative Extension* which I received a few days ago. Over the week-end I looked it over rather carefully and felt that it contained some very fine, basic ideas and facts which should be of great use to all Extension agents. I found it so interesting after I picked it up I didn't lay it down until I had read all the articles.

—from L. C. HOLTKAMP, County Extension Agent, Ohio.