

# A Conception of 4-H

## Part II

**The agent or leader who understands the causation  
of human behavior  
can use ordinary subjects of natural science and real-life experiences  
to deepen young people's understanding**

G. L. CARTER, JR.

IF THE PURPOSE of 4-H Club work is to help young people become mature, competent, responsible citizens—to help them progress toward physical, mental, social, and spiritual maturity—then educative efforts must be addressed principally to the individual. Learning is a personal matter even though it can occur in group environments. Also, if 4-H Club work has, in fact, contributed to the education of some young people,<sup>1</sup> we should be able to glean ideas—from what is known about learning and the conditions necessary for reaching potential growth—that will contribute to our understanding of what may have been happening to young people in 4-H and of what the current potential may be.

Ideas about conditions which contribute to the individual's reaching his potential will be explored in this article, as such ideas can be related to 4-H Club work. Part I of this "Conception of 4-H" dealt with the general idea that if 4-H has historically contributed to the development of young people, this may have been accomplished, at least in part, because it helped them make some sense out of other educative experiences. Such a contribution would have been in addition to the actual learning that was specific to 4-H.

In this article, ideas underlying the potential inherent in 4-H for contributing to the development of young people to be explored

<sup>1</sup>See G. L. Carter, Jr., "A Conception of 4-H—Part I," *Journal of Cooperative Extension*, I (Fall, 1963), 167-75.

G. L. CARTER, JR., is Associate Professor of Agricultural and Extension Education, National Agricultural Extension Center for Advanced Study, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin.

will be based on the following<sup>1</sup> assumptions: (1) that the subject matter which Extension is commissioned by law to teach (agriculture, home economics, and subjects related thereto) provides a natural, stimulating, and meaningful content for teaching; (2) that the real-to-life circumstances surrounding this subject matter can be so organized (through teaching that takes place) that experiences in the broader areas of education (i.e., leadership, citizenship, personal development) can be effectively incorporated; and (3) that no other educational undertaking has been devised equal to 4-H in the unique combination of stimulating subject matter, circumstances for teaching, and opportunity for individuals to reach their potential.<sup>2</sup>

This topic will be presented (1) by examining conditions identified by research and study that stimulate and facilitate learning, (2) by relating conditions conducive to the development of the individual's potential to the 4-H setting, and (3) by summarizing this conception by formulating conclusions suggested in this interpretation of research.

#### HOW YOUNG PEOPLE LEARN

What is understood about how young people learn and what constitutes meaningful learning experiences are derived largely from the formal school setting. Consequently, it may be difficult to translate research findings couched in a formal setting directly to the 4-H situation because of (1) the voluntary nature of 4-H, (2) its unstructured curriculum (course of study and plans for providing learning experiences), (3) its less well defined teacher-student relationship, as compared to the school, and (4) the tendency to consider 4-H more as a program for having young people do things than one for having them learn as the basis for personal development. However, if 4-H is viewed as an educational undertaking, as apparently it was intended to be, such research findings and their interpretation should have direct application.

Tyler has examined conditions under which learning occurs and has interpreted these in the 4-H context.<sup>3</sup> In so doing he describes the 4-H situation for learning under the following ideas:

<sup>1</sup>The ideas expressed in these assumptions are contained in a set of statements of beliefs ("Areas of Consensus on 4-H Club Work in California—1963") prepared by the California State 4-H Club staff.

<sup>2</sup>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. Clark (Madison: National Agricultural Extension Center for Advanced Study, 1961), pp. 12-16.

1. 4-H is a meaningful activity for those who engage in it.
2. It ties together things the young person can see and do—the direct, concrete experience with the more theoretical explanation of why or how—providing leaders are insightful enough to incorporate the “why.”
3. Most 4-H activities furnish intrinsic satisfaction in carrying out the desired behavior.
4. 4-H provides a working relationship with adults perhaps unlike other adult-youth relationship the young person can experience.
5. It provides a freer career exploration than is normally possible in the school and in the home.
6. 4-H provides a greater orientation to the world of ideas and localities beyond the young person’s own community.
7. 4-H provides opportunity to emphasize inquiry—to learn the satisfaction from and ways of carrying on inquiry and to understand that there are no final answers in the field of science.
8. It provides a wider and freer range of choices than the school.

Insights from research into conditions that nurture effective teaching suggest that the unstructured, voluntary nature of 4-H may contribute substantially to its potential. Rogers<sup>4</sup> says that significant learning occurs more readily in relation to situations perceived as problems—the volunteer who comes to class is likely to learn better than someone who attends because he is required to do so; the volunteer brings a problem to class with him. Rogers argues that we should permit the student to be in real contact with the relevant problems of his existence. In this way the student perceives problems and issues which he wishes to resolve.

The volunteer may bring to the 4-H program many problems—some of which he may recognize and others he may not. For example, he may wish to improve his skill at a very tangible, observable undertaking he has seen performed (i.e., giving a demonstration, feeding and fitting an animal, collecting, identifying, and appraising the role of insects, making a garment). Or he may join because he has a curiosity which represents a fertile field for guidance into meaningful pursuits by some insightful adult. In either case, the young person is likely to also bring unrecognized, but equally real, problems that only the astute and interested adult (leader) can comprehend (i.e., awkwardness at getting along with his peers, timidity, a need to be accepted for his ability to excel at something). Recognizing such problems, the volunteer teacher can arrange to involve the interests and potential skills of the club mem-

<sup>4</sup>Carl R. Rogers, “Significant Learning: In Therapy and in Education,” *Educational Leadership*, XVI (January, 1959), pp. 232-42.

ber in tangible, observable undertakings in such a way that less tangible, personal problems can be resolved.

The volunteer leader appears to be in an advantageous position to demonstrate the teacher real-ness which Rogers describes as an attribute that facilitates learning. The volunteer teacher has an ideal opportunity to be himself—"not a faceless embodiment of a curricular requirement, or a sterile pipe through which knowledge is passed from one generation to the next."<sup>5</sup>

Such adult-youth relationships also provide a setting whereby the teacher (leader) can accept the student as he is and can understand the feelings he possesses—recognizing, as Rogers puts it, that resources for learning one's self lie within and that resources (of knowledge, techniques, and so on) can be made available but need not be forced upon the learner.

The historical setting in which 4-H had its beginning<sup>6</sup> sheds light on how 4-H has utilized the student-centered learning idea to great advantage. Fleming's summary of research findings on how children learn emphasizes the 4-H potential in another way:<sup>7</sup>

1. They learn what they live.
2. They learn what they do.
3. They learn with others.
4. They learn as they are helped to clarify purposes.
5. They learn as they have rewards.
6. They learn as they have teachers who are guides.

In summarizing the work of Thorpe and Schnuller, Fleming also points out that learning is facilitated and tends to be permanent when:<sup>8</sup>

1. The learner is motivated—when he has some stake in the activity.
2. The learning is geared to the learner's level—when it is compatible with the learner's physical and intellectual ability.
3. The learning is patterned—when learners can see meaningful relationships between the activity and the goal.
4. The learning is evaluated—when the learner has some way of knowing what progress he is making.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237.

<sup>6</sup> G. L. Carter, Jr. and Robert C. Clark, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-11. See also R. G. Monosmith, "Review of Literature and Research on 4-H Club Work," typed rough draft of Chapter II of a Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, pp. 3-6, in which the development of 4-H objectives is traced from the early recordings.

<sup>7</sup> Robert S. Fleming, "How Children Learn," presentation to Nutrition Education Conference, January 30, 1962, Federal Extension Service, 4-H 36, p. 3 (mimeographed).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

3. The learning is integrated with personal-social development—when the learner experiences satisfactory growth and adjustment.

#### DEVELOPING INDIVIDUAL POTENTIALITIES

Changes in the behavior of young people (resulting from changes in what they know, understand, and perceive) depend upon what happens within the young person rather than what activities the teacher may arrange and execute. Rogers says, in exploring the student-centered learning idea, that basic reliance should be placed on the self-actualizing tendency in the learner. He maintains that "students who are in real contact with life problems wish to learn, want to grow, seek to find out, hope to master, desire to create."<sup>9</sup> The teacher should see his function as developing such a personal relationship that natural tendencies come to fruition.

Gardner says that, in terms of education, "*what we must reach for is a conception of perpetual self-discovery, perpetual reshaping to realize one's best self, to be the person one could be.*"<sup>10</sup> Willhelm describes this idea as "conditions for self-actualization."<sup>11</sup> It may be possible through exploring these conditions to reveal how learning may effectively take place for young people in 4-H.

#### *Stimulation*

For a young person to reach his intellectual potential he must be stimulated. He must develop and maintain an inherent desire to explore—to learn. This does not refer simply to techniques or manners of teaching that may be designed to attract and maintain attention. It relates specifically to comprehensible subject matter. It has been observed that well taught subject matter is the chief instrument for stimulation. We are aware of what happens when 4-H members view an eye-catching and revealing demonstration—they become fascinated by the content of what is presented.

The person who *knows something* will be more inclined to seek additional knowledge. A young person who knows something about wildlife (flowers, trees, animal life) will be more curious about what he sees as he walks through the woods—he will be stimulated

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>10</sup> John W. Gardner, *Excellence* (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1961), p. 136.

<sup>11</sup> This discussion of "Conditions for Self-Actualization" is taken from preliminary reports of the Committee on the Individual in Mass Society to the published by the National Education Association late in 1963. These conditions have also been related to the professional staff setting. See Denzil O. Clegg, "Work as a Motivator," *Journal of Cooperative Extension*, I (Fall, 1963), 146-48.

to seek additional information. He will find deep and increased joy in learning and will develop the conscious power to stick to a tough problem until it has been mastered. "The thrill of discovery is one of the highest rewards of science."<sup>12</sup>

There is one caution: it is possible to overstimulate. However, overstimulation is more likely to come from adult pressures and emotional forcings (i.e., efforts to have the 4-H member achieve the ultimate and participate in all possible activities the first year). Stimulation must not exceed the capacity of the young person to assimilate experiences and derive meaning.

### *Responsible Freedom*

Freedom is stimulating; regimentation dulls the curiosity. Total orderliness and efficiency which may result from regimentation may not be compatible with essential freedom. Yet freedom must exist within some framework of orderliness. The fact that we say our purpose in 4-H is to develop responsible citizens implies that the immature person lacks a sense of responsibility—at least in some measure.<sup>13</sup>

A diagram depicting the job of the democratic "named leader" used by Dildine and his associates<sup>14</sup> illustrates effective relationships between adults and youth in developing responsible citizenship and freedom (see Figure 1). As the young person progresses toward maturity, as shown in this diagram, he is given increasing freedom to direct his own affairs. He will rise to full stature only as demands challenge him to rise (high performance takes place in a framework of high expectation).<sup>15</sup> The essential ingredient is responsibility. A growing responsibility is necessary for self-testing—for developing a sense of capacity.<sup>16</sup> The opportunity is to devise conditions that will extend the young person to his full stretch without introducing pressures that distort. However, overloading can lead to defeat. To avoid this, support is essential.

<sup>12</sup> Karl S. Quisenberry and Gary L. Seevers, *A Study of the Possibilities of Expanding the Understanding and Use of Science Through 4-H Club Work* (Washington, D.C.: National 4-H Club Foundation, April, 1963), p. 76.

<sup>13</sup> Dewey discusses this idea by comparing individual freedom and social control. See John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Collier Books, 1963), pp. 52-60.

<sup>14</sup> National 4-H Club Foundation, "Understanding Kinds of Leadership Roles as a Basis for a Democratic 4-H Club," *Your Citizenship Improvement Study*, No. 5 (September, 1957), 2 (mimeographed).

<sup>15</sup> Gardner, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

<sup>16</sup> Weaver describes responsible freedom as the mainspring of human progress. See Henry Grady Weaver, *The Mainspring of Human Progress* (Irvington-Hudson, New York: The Foundation for Economic Education, Inc., 1953).

*Support*

If the young person is to take risks—to venture into the unknown, to try things not previously experienced—he must live in an environment of support. This requires the kind of support that will enable him to feel accepted even in failure. Figure 1 illustrates that the proportion of guidance and support should be related to the stage of maturity. As the young person becomes more mature, support can become less evident and less obvious. Ending up with a white ribbon rating is not nearly so severe a blow to the young person who knows his leaders and parents (his support) will realistically appraise and appreciate his efforts.

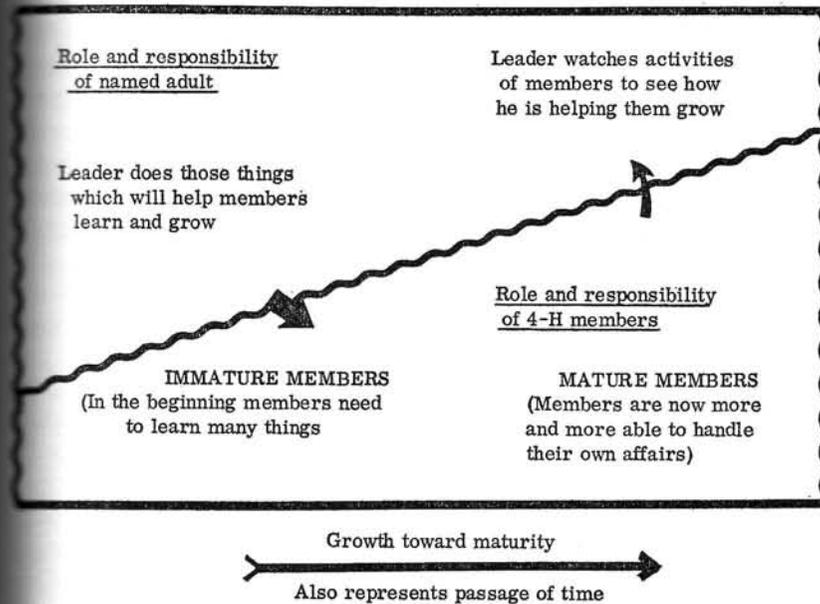


Figure 1. Adult-youth relationships in the voluntary educational setting of 4-H.

An obvious example of the young person's tendency to venture when appropriate support is evident is the child who attempts to take first steps in learning to walk. With the hands of a parent within reach, he will try; without them he is likely to resort to crawling until sufficient confidence is developed under conditions where support is provided. The non-swimmer trying his first stroke is another obvious, observable example.

Support is most manifest in terms of love. There may be a sizeable gap between the evidence of love (support) from parents and that provided by the school teacher who has 20 to 30 others look-

ing to him. It may be that in an educational effort such as 4-H the volunteer leader can bridge the gap between parent and teacher.

### *Success*

As the young person with adequate support ventures and succeeds, he will undertake more daring things. As he experiences success he will try new things more readily and with increasing boldness; that is, providing his successes are genuine and authentic—not fake. This idea can also be viewed graphically in Figure 1. Early successes may require considerable guidance and help for the young person, not only in learning but in identifying what lies within his ability and stage of development to master.

However, the inward need for success does not imply “no failures.” There is a difference between having some failures and being a failure. If properly handled, some failures can be good for a young person—in helping him grasp a realistic image of himself and the world. In this connotation, success does not mean being the best. It means doing well and recognizing that you have done well. This challenges the arrangers of such experiences to provide many ways for the young person to succeed.

### *Commitment*

Gardner maintains that “neither intellect nor talent alone can be the key to a position of leadership in our society. The additional requirement is a commitment to the highest values of the society.”<sup>17</sup> With experiences of success in some ventures, the young person is more likely to invest his full energies in something outside himself, running all the risks of rebuff and failure. He becomes concerned with doing something that is judged to be worthwhile—something that is meaningful to him, to his friends, to his family.

### *Self-Insight*

The young person needs to develop to where he sees himself and the world around with a clear eye—to understand himself and others, to be able to relate to others in meaningful and satisfying ways. Self-evaluation is an excellent way to learn a scientific approach to problem-solving.<sup>18</sup> Young people can learn a great deal about themselves through the study of natural science. Work at the State University of Iowa has begun to show that the teacher (leaders, agents)

<sup>17</sup> Gardner, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

<sup>18</sup> See Quisenberry and SeEVERS, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

who understands the causation of human behavior can use ordinary school subjects and school-life experiences (4-H Club activities) to deepen children's understanding.<sup>19</sup>

It is being observed in the work at Iowa that the teacher teaches two ways: (1) by subject matter, and (2) by example. A teacher can teach arithmetic correctly to her class and make mistakes on her income tax returns without affecting students' comprehension of arithmetic. But, if she is to teach something about human behavior (citizenship, leadership, personal development) the situation is different. The pupil learns much of this from interacting with the teacher. The approach the teacher uses provides a demonstration from which the student learns. In other words, how we teach becomes an important part of what we teach.

The idea of self-actualization far exceeds formal education, according to Gardner. He says that it not only includes the intellect but the emotions, character, and personality. "It involves not only the surface, but deeper layers of thought and action. It involves adaptability, creativeness, and vitality." He also maintains that it involves moral and spiritual growth. We wish for the individual to fulfill potentialities that are acceptable and make a contribution to society; we do not wish to develop capacities for being great criminals or great rascals. "Learning for learning's sake isn't enough," Gardner says. "Thieves learn cunning, and slaves learn submissiveness. We may learn things that constrict our vision and warp our judgment. We wish to foster fulfillment within the framework of national and moral strivings which have characterized man at his best."<sup>20</sup>

#### SUMMARY

An effort has been made to formulate a conception of 4-H Club work with the possibility that such an approach (with refinements) could serve Extension in its attempts to examine efforts in youth work and to formulate programs for the future. This conception is based on the assumptions (1) that 4-H Club work has made a contribution to the development of some young people, (2) that the purpose of 4-H and other educative experiences is to develop mature, competent, responsible citizens, and (3) that ideas gleaned

\* 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.

\* Gardner, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

from 4-H as it has operated in the past<sup>21</sup> and generalizations from research on how learning takes place can contribute substantially to an understanding of such an unstructured educative effort as 4-H.

### *Conclusion*

Legislation authorizing the expenditure of public funds for 4-H and Extension's institutional affiliation defines, in great measure, the subject matter for 4-H. However, this basis for identifying the subject matter is not the only argument for its validity; the potential in subject matter traditionally identified with Extension provides unique opportunities for helping young people reach their potential. This contention is based on a review of what is known about how young people learn effectively: (1) through real-to-life situations, (2) through meaningful identification with adults, (3) through demonstrated examples of desirable behavior by adults who attempt to teach, and (4) through the opportunities inherent in a study of natural science and other specific subject matter for helping young people understand themselves and the world about them.

Such contentions are not to suggest that the current scope of material, efforts to organize and teach it, or procedures through which it has been traditionally conducted are adequate. The real opportunity for Extension to make significant impact on the lives of young people who participate in its programs may best lie in the potential inherent in program content organized around knowledge of the natural and physical sciences available in and being accumulated by the parent institutions and other sources. Such opportunity exists, provided staffs are equipped to handle the subject matter and understand the educational process through which the curriculum (program) can be brought to bear on problems confronting young people, their parents, and leaders.

This conception of 4-H Club work suggests that if Extension can draw upon its traditional and expanding sources of reliable information, refine its techniques in dealing with and its understandings of the causes of human behavior, and incorporate these into appropriate aspects of the program, it can not only continue but greatly expand its effectiveness in helping young people become mature, competent, responsible citizens. A better understanding of how this effectiveness can be expanded can be developed through a careful appraisal of (1) what we have to teach (content), (2) the circumstances surrounding how we are organized to teach, and (3) the structure of the situation where our teaching occurs—regardless of who we have to teach (their place of residence).

<sup>21</sup> Monosmith states that "the founders of the 4-H program employed several basic principles which still are valid and important in the ongoing 4-H program." See Monosmith, *op. cit.*, p. 2.