

Research in Brief

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SPLIT-LEVEL TEACHING

Extension deals with diverse audiences. There is accumulating evidence that some of these broad groups need to be divided and handled differently in certain learning situations.

In a study of Washington State's training program for 4-H leaders, the researcher found several ways that audiences might profitably be split up for best teaching-learning. Findings indicated that leaders must be trained early in their first year if such training is to be effective in shaping their attitude toward and philosophy about 4-H. If possible, they should not be trained with more experienced leaders.

For leaders with less than a high school education, more time was needed to present and discuss the information in each lesson. Therefore, it is recommended that these leaders should be trained separately from leaders with a higher education.

Findings indicated that 4-H service leaders—presumably lay leaders—trained new leaders as effectively as did the agent. In many counties, 4-H service leaders were the only persons available to give new 4-H leaders the training they needed, when they needed it most—early in their first year of leadership. The more training sessions the new leader attended, the more likely he was to remain a 4-H leader. Thus the author recommends that greater efforts be made to promote attendance at new 4-H leader training meetings.

James E. Havens, "An Analysis of a Training Program for Washington's New 4-H Leaders." Summary of Master's degree special problems report, E. J. Kreizinger (ed.), Washington State University, Pullman, Washington, August, 1966.

DEFENSE AGAINST DEFENSE?

Who does and doesn't get and use civil defense publications? What are the attitudes of county agricultural agents toward civil defense educational work? These are the central questions in this field study carried out cooperatively by Federal Extension Service and Extension workers in five states during 1964. A sample of respondents from 25 counties in

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Arkansas, Texas, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin were quizzed concerning five publications.

Who receives them? People with more formal schooling and farm people tend to get the publications. Age made no particular difference.

Who uses them? More women than men use the publications, more people with higher education than lower.

It seemed to make no difference whether people had asked for the bulletin or had gotten it without asking—about the same number found the publication useful. Neither did source of the publication seem to affect use. About 15 per cent of the respondents couldn't recall where they got the publications. It also seemed that although people wouldn't go out of their way to get one of these publications, if they did obtain one, many read it.

People tend to keep the publications, but not in a definite place, such as in a shelter area. They also tend to have no specific use in mind for the information in the publications.

In general, county agents' attitudes seemed favorable to the distribution of these publications. However, they didn't seem to make much effort to push the publications, other than by using a display rack.

Analysis

Although the avowed purpose of the study was to "evaluate the use of publications as a means of implementing the objectives of the Civil Defense program," the study provides little direct measure of use. Nor is there evident any attempt to correlate agent attitude with distribution practices. The study presents the usual kind of reader-audience analysis (and some agent-gatekeeper analysis) but does not probe in depth.

Laurel K. Sabrosky, Fred P. Frutchey, Bryan Phifer, and Ralph Fulghum, "Distribution and Use of Selected Civil Defense Publications." Federal Extension Service, USDA, Washington, D.C., June, 1966.

HOW YOU PICK A LEADER MAKES A DIFFERENCE

How should Extension-related groups pick their leaders? Goldman and Fraas, in an ingenious laboratory study, found leader-selection method makes a difference. Two methods that worked quite well were group election and arbitrary selection of a "proven performer."

Undergraduate college students were randomly divided into groups of four. Each group then played "20 Questions" (here with 30 questions)—the familiar game which requires identifying something by asking the moderator as few questions as possible. Groups were rated on number of questions and time needed to solve problems. Groups improving most were considered best, in the analysis. Four leader-selection procedures were used:

1. No leader—Groups proceeded with no formal leader designated.
2. Leader arbitrarily appointed—The researchers named the leader, apparently without attention to his personal competence. This amounted

- to use of random choice to pick a leader from the group members.
3. Leader selected on basis of merit—Researchers made the selection, announcing the leader was chosen because he had proven most adept at the game in preliminary trials.
 4. Leader elected—Group members held an election after working together in preliminary “warm-up” trials.

The leader-elected and leader-selected-on-basis-of-merit methods brought greatest improvement in group performance. These two methods did not differ from each other. The leader-arbitrarily-appointed and no-leader conditions brought less improvement.

Analysis

In applying these results to a given case, one must decide what is expected of that particular leader. Researchers divide leader functions into two broad categories:

1. Spurring interest, participation, and esprit de corps within the group.
2. Helping the group reach its goals. Functions in this area include coordinating and distributing information, suggesting problem solutions, suggesting courses of action, providing information, screening others' suggestions, and many others.

In playing “20 Questions,” leaders concentrated on weeding out poor questions suggested by other members. In doing this they were performing mostly the “helping the group reach its goals” functions—a rather limited aspect of leadership.

These results seem more applicable to groups such as advisory councils (where leaders mainly suggest, analyze, and screen ideas) than to “action” groups such as 4-H clubs. Four-H leaders clearly fail if they don't spur interest and participation in their groups.

Like most laboratory studies, this one leaves many unanswered questions. For one thing, it is not clear just how leader selection made a difference. Were the best methods good because they helped single out the best man? Did leaders behave differently when chosen in different ways? Or did followers often do a better job of following properly-chosen leaders? Probably these and many other processes often operate in real-life groups.

One final note: In considering individuals as potential leaders for on-going groups, remember that the best and most popular persons may not have time to be good leaders. A less popular person may have time to get the job done and so be a better choice. Laboratory studies such as the current one do not take this into account.

Morton Goldman and Louis A. Fraas, “The Effects of Leader Selection on Group Performance.” *Sociometry*, XXVIII (March, 1965), 82-88.