

Points of View

More Dialogue—Agent Qualifications

Dear G. L.:

Regarding our discussion on the three points in your September 5 letter relative to youth agent qualifications (Winter, 1967 issue), I am sure that if we could discuss the first two points (i.e., the engineer vs. the child psychologist, and source credibility) over a cup of coffee, we would not disagree at all.

Your third point, that early Extension history indicates 4-H was designed mainly to help youth, admittedly caught me by surprise. I realized that early Extension workers were interested in youth development, but I believed their principal objective was to increase agricultural production.

The significance of your letter is manifest in the key questions you posed. Before attempting to answer, let me establish a premise for argument. I feel that the best youth employee in the Extension context depends upon the job description written for him. I feel in a broad sense that an Extension youth worker must be both a program developer and a teacher.

With this background, let me try to answer your questions. You first ask about the importance of academic preparation or field of study. From my experience, I believe that courses *most* useful to the prospective youth worker would be courses such as adult education, educational psychology, group discussion methods, group dynamics, social psychology, oral communication, and program development. Once again, I do not believe this kind of training guarantees success, but I do believe the likelihood of success is increased. I realize these courses do not represent a "field of study." One could probably apply them to many fields. I do believe, however, they contain concepts that would help a youth worker if he could apply them in his work.

What about grades? I do not believe

that high grades guarantee an agent's success. However, I do believe that high grades increase the likelihood of success. Furthermore, if we (Extensionists) claim to be educators and wish to be identified as members of the academic community, then we must realize that the main prerequisite for maintaining academic membership is advanced training. This will be more important in the future. Therefore, we must hire people who possess the academic qualifications necessary to do graduate work.

I am sure there are other important characteristics. I believe that a prospective youth agent must appreciate youth and the youth environment. I also believe that an Extension agent must decide early in his career whether to make youth work his profession, and if he so decides, then he must dedicate himself to be a professional youth worker. For these reasons, I do not believe that a youth position should necessarily be used as a "stepping stone" to another Extension position.

Personality, dress, and manners are certainly important. But how do we measure personality?

Perceptive ability, persuasive ability, and ability to maneuver in small group situations are also important. All of these have to do with what you call being able to "practice" what one has learned. Once again, how do we measure these things in the prospective worker?

I agree, G. L., that the points we are discussing are vitally important to the Extension Service. We must somehow find answers.

EUGENE ROSS
*District Extension Supervisor
Manhattan, Kansas*

Dear G. L.:

Your "Dialogue on Agent Qualifications" was certainly interesting. Here are a couple of my reactions.

I think that you will stir up additional letters concerning whether or not we hire the person who is youth centered or subject centered. You pretty well clarified one point that one or the other or both can be very effective or ineffective. I think you hit the nail on the head when you stated that training needs will have to focus on what constitutes 4-H Club work and identification of the issues at stake. I have become more alerted to this situation on the ECOP Subcommittee now named Staff Training and Development. Pat Boyle and Maynard Heckel have continually stressed the point that we can train people if we know what they need.

The notion of "expectation" seems to be a useful concept in this area. In other words, what kind of expectations do you have for a person performing in this position? Our training is then centered around the expectations or expected behaviors. I ran across a little model that may indicate how a dairy agent or an engineer may be a better youth worker than an educationalist or sociologist might be. In the triangle shown, you will note that we get a trinity of what's involved in helping another person.



1. Reality means recognizing the true situation. "This is it."
2. Empathy is feeling with and for a person, not like him. Empathy means you accept and respect a person, yet you may not agree with how he lives.
3. Support offers material help and boosts the spirits. "I am here to work with you if you want me and can use me."

This little diagram is discussed in PA-681, USDA, FES, "Training Home

Economics Program Assistants to Work with Low Income Families."

DENZIL O. CLEGG

Education and Research Leader
Fort Collins, Colorado

Dear G. L.:

I will not take issue with or try to answer directly any of the statements made in the exchange in "Points of View" (Winter, 1967 issue of the *Journal of Cooperative Extension*). Rather, I would like to express my views and philosophy with regard to the training needs for Extension personnel who will be active in youth programming.

It is my view that the role will differ in the urban and rural areas. However, I am going to qualify this statement by saying that if the agent will be handling more than one county, his or her role will be about the same whether urban or rural.

In the broad view, I see the professional youth agent spending most of his time planning and administering programs of all types. If this person is going to be trained specifically for youth work, then there should be courses in office administration to better equip him to be more efficient in utilization of time and staff.

This person should have sociology courses which will better equip him to understand the people and society with which he will be working. For those who will be working in low-income areas, special courses on understanding particular ethnic and racial groups are necessary.

Certainly some courses in educational psychology would be valuable since such a worker will have to understand why people act and react as they do. Courses in group dynamics and group methods would be helpful.

The time for subject-matter trained personnel is soon going to be a thing of the past. I believe that subject matter will be handled by specialists on an area basis.

I certainly believe that a competent person with a degree in some subject-matter area can handle the job. But if we know the type of job we are training for, and we should, then let's be realistic and offer courses that will bear

directly on the type of job I believe most such workers will be doing—programming and administering youth programs for all types of youth and youth-serving agencies.

We are no longer training for the horse, heifer, and hog era. Let's give personnel vital new training for a challenging new job that confronts and awaits the competent young Extension youth worker.

JOHN A. HASSERT
President, National Association
of Extension 4-H Agents
Verona, New Jersey

Dear G. L.:

I appreciate the opportunity to join the discussion on professional requirements for those who do youth work.

As in the past, it seems important that a 4-H agent continue to be technically competent in one field of economic importance in his geographic location. This is his passport to legitimation among the adults with whom he works. One subject area is enough. He can't hope to be the subject-matter resource for every project area and interest group found in today's 4-H and youth programs.

And certainly he must have that ingredient which combines concern for people with enthusiasm and the ability to identify with their needs. Training can sharpen his vision and skill but it can't build a fire where there is no spark.

Unfortunately, the success of past 4-H agents has created sizeable administrative and service loads for many Extension youth workers today. So the agent faces the problem of how to accomplish this task within the limitations of the budget and the image of traditional responsibilities and still get on with helping people help themselves—people who really need him.

KARL GRIFFITH
Extension Associate
Nevada, Iowa

Dear G. L.:

I would like to join the discussion on qualifications for 4-H agents and add my viewpoint as one Extension home economist who has worked with 4-H

agents in both rural and urban counties.

In my opinion, the person employing youth agents must consider several questions:

1. What is the agent's job description? Will he (or she) be working directly with boys and girls or be training adults who in turn will train club members?

2. Will he be teaching or training in subject-matter fields? Or is he in a situation where there are specialized agent or resource persons who will be responsible for subject-matter information? Development of the boy or girl or "developing better citizens" is the objective of the youth program. However, it takes more than abstract teaching of citizenship to accomplish this. I think we'll need to retrain club projects as a tool through which young people have new experiences, assume responsibility, learn fairness, and know satisfaction of work well done. This would involve some subject-matter competence either from the youth agent or through the help of others in his area.

3. In which particular county would he most likely be employed? Is the agent who hasn't at least a talent knowledge of livestock if he finds himself in a rural county in which the major income comes from livestock enterprises. Or is he to be in urban situations where livestock know-how is an asset and where a specialized degree in such might even be a liability in relating to the public?

4. What academic training has he had in group leadership and organization, time management, program planning and evaluation, psychology, human relations? I'm not implying a degree in psychology or sociology is needed, but, in my opinion, such courses in these fields are a must. They should be included either in undergraduate work or receive major emphasis in a program of advanced study. Most of the home economics graduates study child psychology, human relations, or similar courses in their undergraduate work. This may be true, too, for agriculture majors.

5. And what are the apparent motivations that the applicant is enthusiastic

about working with people? Does he understand and have faith in young people? Of course, there are many other important nonacademic characteristics. Many of these would be apparent in the following question could be answered favorably: Is the applicant one whom adults and youth will be glad to have as their youth agent?

If a personnel officer were to consider the above questions, he would find himself choosing a person for a specific county and for specific programs. This would mean a variety of people and a variety of academic backgrounds chosen to fit the situation. And if the youth program is to progress with both current and new audiences, I think this will be necessary.

GRACE M. WRIGHT
Home Economist

Liberty, Missouri

Dear G. L.:

I cannot resist the temptation to react to the dialogue which appeared in the Winter issue of the *Journal of Cooperative Extension* ("Points of View"), even though my reaction will not be concise, nor as lucid as one would desire.

I must start with the question of "What is a better citizen?" Surely contributing to the development of better citizens is the ultimate aim of any educational endeavor. Succinctly stated, to be a "better citizen" is a competent, responsible person. Economic, social, and technological changes influence the qualities and characteristics needed for competent, responsible citizenship.

Some qualities of competent, responsible citizens in contemporary society are discussed in an ECOP Ad Hoc Committee Report, "Extension Youth Programs in the 20th Century," March 24, 1965, pp. 10-11, and in my own mimeographed paper "The 4-H Program as a Part of Our Nation's Total Educational Effort," October, 1966, pp. 2-3.)

As related to the educational endeavor, Dr. Robert E. Bills has stated that no longer can we predict with any reasonable degree of assurance the information and the skills that youth will need for success beyond school. The rapidity of change is the cause of this.

The development of personality, of attitudes, and of values, therefore, merits increasing emphasis in educational efforts.

It is in the development of these qualities, as well as in imparting information and in teaching skills, that 4-H makes significant contributions. The 4-H program does this by providing concrete experiences, observations, and practice which encourage the learning of theory, principles, concepts, and the like. Subject matter is basic to such efforts; little learning takes place aside from subject matter.

Let me illustrate, using the following two qualities needed for competent, responsible citizenship:

1. Know and apply the principles of management and of decision making in daily living.
2. Develop a positive attitude toward learning as a lifelong process and of personal responsibility for this.

One can learn the principles and processes of management and decision making; but in order to successfully apply them, practice and subject matter (information) on which to base management and the decisions made are needed.

Research is the base of the subject matter we use in the 4-H program. Research findings add new information and make obsolete some former "facts." Technology makes practices and methods used obsolete and develops new ones. In short, the agriculture and home economics subject-matter base of the 4-H program is dynamic, changing. The 4-H educator can use this fact to help youth understand the need for and develop a positive attitude toward continuing learning. Indeed, a 4-Her can hardly escape this lesson!

An excellent mental exercise would be to take a list of qualities needed for competent, responsible leadership and make a judgment as to which of these the 4-H program can contribute; and then make judgment as to how the program could contribute *without* subject matter.

We recognize the excellence of citizenship education programs in our schools, but a number of studies indicate that many such programs lack one

thing—a laboratory for carrying the theory into practice in the community beyond the school. The 4-H program provides natural experiences for this in many areas of citizenship, including the highly important one of interpersonal relationships.

In the 4-H program—in any educational program—it is not a question of subject matter or of methods or of learning experiences or of the understanding and sensitivity of the “teachers” (professional or volunteer). The lack of any ingredient can mean the difference between effectiveness and ineffectiveness. The task of the 4-H educator, or 4-H educational administrator, is to blend skillfully subject matter, methods, learning experiences, and effectiveness with individuals and groups so that 4-H contributes to the development of youth to the maximum possible. It is high time we stop enunciating the role of a 4-H agent as that of an administrator unless we use the word “educational” with “administrator.”

I have led myself to the key questions: What kind of persons do I want to employ in 4-H work? What should be their educational backgrounds?

First, I must reconcile myself to the fact that only rarely will I find a person who has all of the competencies and educational preparation needed. These rare ones are not likely to be just out of college, but are persons with proven experience.

I would like a person of high intelligence. Here I run into difficulties in appraising “just-out-of-college” candidates. The I.Q., according to recent research, does not measure all components of intelligence. Nor do I accept the judgment of some that college grades are the best indicators of intelligence. Testing has been made a fetish by many and persons are “cataloged” wrongly by results of tests. I must depend upon grades (to some extent) so I want good grades—good enough to qualify for a graduate school. But I do not make decisions based only on the highest grades. I want to find out all I can about what the candidate did in college besides study. How much did he have to work? What kind and quality of his extracurricular activities are related to

situations he will face as a 4-H agent, such as working with people, what leadership was displayed, what harmonious relationships?

Yes, I want intelligence because it is an important component of ability, but I want to look for motivation clues, evidences of a desire to do all things to the best of one's ability. An important quality is the ability to work well with people, and I look for clues to this in interviewing persons with experience.

As regards educational preparation, I will look for competence in subject-matter fields basic to the 4-H program, but make exceptions according to specific county situations. If other staff members can be the subject-matter resource persons, I would employ a sociology, psychology, or other behavioral science major (I have done so); but somehow there must be subject-matter resource persons since a limited college staff cannot meet this need alone.

A continuing and well-designed in-service educational program must support recruitment and employment efforts in order to build into staff members the competencies needed.

WILBUR F. PEASE

*Assistant Director of Extension
Ithaca, New York*

Dear G. L.:

I have read the comments in “Points of View” (Winter, 1967). No wonder there is confusion in 4-H! Some of the statements clearly indicate that the entire objective has been missed. Your respondents are degree heavy.

Would you agree that 4-H is not intended to be or should not be the same for all people? If this is true, then you have to state your teaching objective in terms of needs of a specific group of 4-H members. This determines your overall objective and from this you can make a decision as to the best qualifications of an individual. It really intrigues me to see people trying to develop qualifications for a person to do 4-H work before they even consider the teaching objective in relation to 4-H member needs.

W. E. SKELTON

*Dean of the Extension Division
Blacksburg, Virginia*