

Points of View

Other Views on Agent Qualifications

In an effort to identify as many factors as possible in regard to staff training for Extension youth work and to expose as wide a variety of points of view as possible, I asked some Missouri youth agents to appraise their own formal training in relation to their present job responsibilities. I asked such questions as: (1) How has your college work (both undergraduate and graduate) prepared you for your job? In what manner? To what extent? (2) How do you judge the appropriateness of your formal preparation in comparison to other Extension youth personnel with different formal training? (3) If you could re-do your formal training, knowing what you know now of the requirements of your job, what would you major in?

Some of the responses follow. You will note that these agents have a wide variety of formal backgrounds. Do you have a point of view different from these? How do we identify or prepare personnel to do effective Extension youth work?

G. L. CARTER, JR.
Editor

Jack McCall

Dear G. L.:

I have been reading, with great interest, the "debate" on the preparation of persons to do youth work. But I must say that I haven't been excited by anything that has been said so far on either side.

I have been asking questions of my fellow staff members about the people they have known in youth work, their successes or failures, and the kind of preparation they had. There is no pattern that I can see. For example: one youth agent I knew was highly intelligent and highly trained in the behavioral sciences and had devised a program which was truly astounding in its

scope and depth. It was the ideal youth program. But he failed miserably and was barely able to stay one full year. His failure had nothing to do with the fact that he was in an intensely agricultural county or the question of whether or not the program met the needs of the people.

I don't really know what has and what has not prepared me for this work. I am fairly certain that everything I have done has added to this preparation. But I am just as certain that I was unprepared when I graduated from seminary for work which was almost identical to this work (the name of the church is different, but the words of the liturgy are almost the same).

I was intensely subject-matter oriented at that time and that subject matter was human relations and counseling. I failed to get the people into personal projects and I was left with a lot of nonsounding words and phrases which I tried to use to soothe a lot of people who were dissatisfied. I couldn't understand it then. I was saying *all* the right things, but nothing happened.

My conclusion is that it is folly to presume that the character or amount of knowledge about anything, even human relations, can be used to prognosticate the success or failure potential of any individual. I believe that the ability to communicate is of first importance. By communicate, I mean two things. First, an understanding of self and the kinds of images one is projecting to leader to other people; and second, the grimy, difficult, boring routine of writing things down, sending things to people on time, and keeping everything up-to-date on what is happening. To sum it up, I mean an ability to communicate trustworthiness and sufficient attention to the routines of the job to be trustworthy.

So far, I haven't had any problems because I lacked subject-matter and

ance in agriculture—I think people are willing to forgive me for that if I can help them get the information they need.

I'm not sure that one can prepare people to be successful people. If I had the job of selecting for youth positions, I am sure I would pay a lot more attention to my own work in developing a process of testing and screening than to the academic preparation of the candidate.

I certainly have wished that I could re-do my formal training. (I have a B.A. in history and B.D. in church history—human relations and counseling.)

JACK MCCALL

Higginsville, Missouri

Richard Cass

Dear G.L.:

Youth work has different meaning and implications for staff people. For me, it means facilitating opportunities for meaningful experiences on the part of young people that will contribute toward their maximum development—physically, socially, mentally, and spiritually. A major focus of my work is with the adults who volunteer to guide youth, and the involvement of resources essential to the task.

I am not concerned about the number of cooks, seamstresses, dairymen, electricians, etc. turned out; nor, of judges, demonstrators, or public speakers. I am concerned about the way in which people relate to their environment and how they feel about themselves.

Consequently, my evaluation of my own preparation for the job is based on these views. In fact, I have done an about-face in the way I viewed the job after the first six years in Extension—I have been in Extension youth work for 12 years.

My undergraduate work was in dairy production at first, finishing up in dairy manufacturing. This training seemed excellent for youth work at the outset, as I was assigned to a county located in the midst of a strong dairy-based economy. It allowed me to secure a quick acceptance from the rural community as I spoke their language, understood their interests, and was able to provide subject-matter assistance. This training and

my enthusiasm carried me for a while. Gradually, I became aware of developing problems that I wasn't prepared to cope with: leader conflicts, club rivalries, criticisms of contests, etc.

In 1960, I participated in the Human Development-Human Relations Workshop in Washington, D.C. This was the first time in my academic world that I was forced to approach education from the learner's viewpoint. From this experience, my whole philosophy on youth work changed. From a "here-it-is-take-it" approach, I attempted to see things through the learner's eyes.

With this new outlook, I felt the need for more training on understanding people as opposed to my prior concern with things, animals, etc. In 1963, I enrolled in the Graduate School of the University of Missouri—majoring in sociology. Two semesters in sociology and psychology plus two months at Merrill-Palmer Institute have given me a much greater insight on how learning takes place, and my role in working with groups.

Until 1960 youth agents in Missouri were strictly agriculturally trained. As I survey their career development, I find that a large majority still in Extension are now in a subject-matter field and/or county director position. Several have left for positions in agriculture-business; very few are still in youth work.

The new focus of Extension in Missouri since 1960 (total youth—not just 4-H) has placed these agents in an uncomfortable position. Agricultural backgrounds are no longer seen as sufficient training for the job. Many have expressed dissatisfaction with their present duties. Since 1960, youth agents have been hired from education, recreation, and social-work backgrounds.

The ideal preparation for youth work would provide academic training in education, sociology, psychology, and family life development. I would have taken a curriculum equally balanced in these four fields if possible.

My future formal training will be built around these four areas. Since I am trying to complete a Masters in sociology, this may be the discipline to pursue.

RICHARD L. CASS

Springfield, Missouri

Mary Marshall

Dear G.L.:

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the matter of youth agent preparation.

My undergraduate work was in Christian education. It is a liberal arts degree with a major in studies concerned with administering a local church's total education program. I also have training in piano and choral music.

Courses of specific help with Extension youth work are those which dealt with principles of education, psychology, principles of Christian education, teaching methods, adolescent psychology, and the practicum (two semesters of practical work plus a problems seminar). I also had numerous courses in theology, history, and English (to satisfy what might be called "subject matter" in Extension).

The courses which provided methods or principles have been far more helpful (even in church work) than the subject-matter courses, perhaps because new subject matter and its interpretation is constantly being published and revised; the professional must read these to keep up-to-date. He can't learn all the data in college!

Let me hasten to say I believe I learned more on the job than in college! Even my practicum did not prepare me for the numerous and varied job responsibilities, from personal counseling to selecting equipment for a new education building, to serving as associate director for a youth camp, to directing choirs. I do feel adequately prepared for teacher training, leadership training and counseling, and for working directly with youth and leaders of youth groups.

It is in the sphere of "community" that I would desire more study. New-agent training in Extension was good in introducing concepts of the community (adoption processes, power structure, etc.) but I still find it hard to seek out audience groups. Working with a ready-made audience is quite different from knowing you have an entire county or multi-county unit and its population to serve.

To answer your question on the "ideal preparation," I think liberal arts, plus

psychology, sociology, and "community development" courses would be helpful. In-service training on special problems or areas of deficiency is also good.

I have not done graduate work, but hope to pursue studies in counseling.

Relative to the appropriateness of my formal training as opposed to others': I feel the general courses on principles of education, etc., are better for youth programming than a specific field (foods, animal husbandry, etc.) because these fields tend to limit the agent, especially when he or she doesn't have the principles courses also.

And somewhere along the line, a person in youth work has to be motivated to be concerned and informed on total community and world situations and problems (schools, teacher competency, military service, juvenile delinquency and its causes, loneliness, drugs, careers and vocational preparation, marriage and family, *ad infinitum*).

MISS MARY MARSHALL

Salem, Missouri

Don Bailey

Dear G.L.:

My college background includes a B.S. in agriculture in 1959, and a Master's degree in extension education in 1966, from the University of Missouri.

My career as an Extension agent began in 1959, and has continued to the present date, except for time in the Army (1960-61).

I have worked in only two counties, both rural with a high per cent of rural people. I feel my agriculture background and formal training has been of extreme value in helping to carry out a successful Extension program in each of these assignments. Both counties have had what I consider a strong 4-H program, and within the past few years, have enlarged the program to include educational opportunities for youth other than 4-H. We have not de-emphasized 4-H, but rather have widened the scope of our over-all program to include resources from our Land-Grant University that might be of help to all youth-serving groups and organizations.

Today as we look at the over-all youth program, I can see where an agriculture background is no longer so important in

carrying out a successful youth program, particularly in an urban county.

In recent years I have had several Youth Agents in Training, representing a varied background of experiences. A majority of these were people who have been in the school-education fields, ministry, and so forth.

Perhaps an agricultural background is not so important as might be a person's ability to understand people, leadership ability, personality, and so forth. I do believe, however, that those of us in rural counties with a large percentage of rural population will be looked upon to give guidance to agriculturally-related programs as well as other programs; therefore, a professional worker with an understanding of rural people certainly would have the edge over someone from a large city, for example. On the other hand, I can visualize that an Extension youth agent in a highly populated urban setting might well feel out of step in developing new programs to meet the needs and interests of this group.

Perhaps the area that is of most benefit to me is the additional in-service training such as was held in Columbia for Extension youth agents just recently. To me, an understanding of the many topics discussed in this conference (behavioral science concepts) broadens our scope and understanding of people, so very important in this professional area.

DON W. BAILEY

Marshall, Missouri

Bill Young

Dear G.L.:

Thanks for requesting an appraisal of my formal college preparation for the job I am now doing. In my short experience as a youth agent, I have come to the conclusion that the type of formal education a person has will make a big difference in the success he will have in working a total Extension youth program.

I have a B.S. degree in political science and history with emphasis on state and local governments. My basic undergraduate work was quite liberal with considerable work outside of my major fields in the areas of psychology and sociology. I have a Master's degree in educational administration from the Uni-

versity of Missouri, Columbia. I feel that this background has prepared me rather well to deal with the clientele groups that I face in the area in which I work.

It is my firm conviction that a youth agent needs a wide background of subject areas and that he needs particular emphasis in the areas of human relations—psychology, sociology, and kindred fields. This will prepare him to work rather well with most any group that he should contact.

My graduate work in educational administration is a very valuable asset; in a total youth program one of our major audiences is the school. With this background I have been able to penetrate some schools that previously had been closed to Extension youth programs.

If I had the opportunity to start my college work again, knowing that I would find a job in Extension youth work, I would do the program very much as previously. However, I would want more work in the area of human relations—sociology and psychology. These are the subject areas that are the key to a successful total youth program. Some in-depth training in the area of public relations would also be a great asset. Additional work in the area of child development and family relations would be a real help in my program.

After observing other field staff, I believe that those who are specialized in agriculture and related subjects with very little formal schooling in the behavioral sciences and education are at a distinct disadvantage in working a total youth program.

BILL YOUNG

Marble Hill, Missouri

Jim Freeman

Dear G.L.:

As I studied over the questions you asked, I soon discovered it was somewhat difficult to give direct answers.

In 1958, when I graduated from the University of Missouri with a degree in agriculture and a major in animal husbandry, and having both a personal and family background in Extension work, it seemed these were important requirements. While I was given a title of assistant agent, I requested work in the

area of the 4-H program.

At that point, and for the next two or three years, I think my undergraduate work in agriculture was very beneficial. Since my work in Extension has been in rural counties, I feel my degree has helped me feel and understand some of the rural people's problems and needs. Through the 4-H program we were able to involve families and help their children select projects that would best fit into the family situation.

Being in a rural county with the major project emphasis on agriculture, my experience in agriculture could also have contributed to my ability to train and help leaders.

Today as we have broader responsibilities in youth work, it is apparent we have needs far greater than knowing how to feed or fit a calf, for example. With these broader responsibilities for youth and without clear-cut guidelines explaining how to set up an educational program (such as organizing a 4-H Club), it is apparent that a person needs additional resources in program planning, humanities, and education, to name a few.

As I have started my graduate work (extension education), and have taken courses in these areas, I feel they are helping me get at some of the problems.

In summary of how college work prepared me for my job: Possibly the greatest value has been the knowledge that, while many times I don't know or have the answer, there is an answer if I look for it.

In comparing the appropriateness of my formal preparation to other youth personnel: This I feel greatly depends on the situation. If compared to a person with a degree in education or sociology,

but new in Extension, my experiences might be of equal or more value in some ways. While we do have new responsibilities, we are still responsible for the former (such as the 4-H program).

With our present state youth program arrangement, I don't believe I could suggest any one ideal preparation. The opportunities for youth programs are far too great for any one person to become competent in all.

In re-doing my own formal training, I would definitely want to increase the number of courses in the humanities. Possibly due to my background, I'm not ready to say I wouldn't want a degree in agriculture. However, my major might change.

For the last few years, a number of in-service training programs have been offered in the state, that have given insight to the need for new approaches in our Extension education programs.

It would seem that for continued effectiveness in Extension education a person will need to continue a professional improvement program. This might be through active in-service training and formal training.

JIM FREEMAN

Mount Vernon, Missouri

Workshop Scheduled

Readers of the *Journal* might be interested in attending the Workshop for Administrators of University Adult Education. It will be at the Center for Continuing Education, University of Chicago, from June 30th through July 17th. Further information and application forms can be obtained from me at 1307 East 60th St.

MISS PHYLLIS CUNNINGHAM

Chicago, Illinois