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Participation of FFA Members in Leadership Development Activities: A Tri-State Study

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The development of "competent and assertive agricultural leadership" is a purpose of the National FFA Organization (1993, p. i). Research has provided limited, and often perceptual and correlational, evidence that participation in the FFA develops leadership skills. Brannon, Holley, and Key (1989) found Oklahoma community leaders who had participated in vocational agriculture and FFA in high school felt such participation contributed to their leadership development. They also felt vocational agriculture/FFA participation made the largest contribution to their success as community leaders. Community leaders who participated in vocational agriculture/FFA were more likely than nonparticipants to be involved in community affairs organizations, school organizations, church groups, agricultural groups, and educational groups as adults. Townsend and Carter (1983) found a positive relationship between FFA participation and leadership development for twelfth-grade vocational agriculture students in Iowa, concluding "the leadership trait is enhanced with FFA activity" (p. 21). In Tennessee, a positive relationship between FFA activeness and leadership and personal development scores was observed by Riketts and Newcomb (1984). They recommended "students should be encouraged to participate in as many (FFA) activities as possible" (p. 58). Dormody and Seevers (in press) reported a weak positive relationship between participation in FFA leadership activities and leadership life skills development in three southwestern states.

While a relationship between participation in FFA leadership activities and leadership development has been established by these studies, evidence about the nature and effectiveness of member participation in specific FFA leadership development activities is more limited. In Oklahoma, over 50 percent of the community leaders who had participated in vocational agriculture and FFA (Brannon et al., 1989) had participated in judging contests, fairs and shows, chapter banquets, chapter committees, parliamentary procedure, state convention, and community service. In Iowa, participants in FFA chapter banquets, chapter awards, Chapter Farmer degree programs, chapter office, chapter speech activities, chapter committees, county fair, chapter fund raising, chapter improvement projects, junior office, leadership camps, national convention, proficiency awards, or state convention had higher perceptions of their leadership skills than nonparticipants (Townsend & Carter, 1983). Participation in local or chapter-level FFA activities has been shown to be related to leadership development (Riketts and Newcomb, 1984; Townsend & Carter, 1983).

Loftquist (1987) said, "For too long we have seen adolescence as a nonproductive time of life only for becoming and not a time for contributing. We have not asked young people to prepare for what they can do in the future, and we have not respected them for what they can do for themselves and others in the present" (p. 1). Participating in planning, implementing, and evaluating leadership development activities enables FFA members to do the real work of their chapters and prepare for later life. Brock (1992) said "The new high-performance workplace demands a person who can work productively, think critically and make decisions" (p. 22). FFA members who plan, implement, and evaluate their FFA leadership development activities will develop these skills. Presently, little research has been conducted on the participation of youth in planning, implementing, and evaluating their organization's leadership development activities. In 4-H, Mueller (1989), and Seevers and Dormody (in press) found senior 4-H members participated more in the implementation phase of leadership development activities than in the planning and evaluation phases.

Miller (1976, p. 2) defined youth leadership

life skills development as self-assessed and organization-specific "development of the life skills necessary to perform leadership functions in real life." Dormody and Seevers (in press) found participation in FFA leadership development activities predicted only 2.3 percent of the variance in leadership life skills development among FFA members in Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico. To enable the FFA to improve leadership life skills development programming, more research is needed to determine FFA members' levels of participation in specific leadership development activities; the activities that are the most effective in developing leadership life skills; and FFA members' participation in planning, implementing, and evaluating these activities.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which 1992-93 FFA members in Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico participated in FFA leadership development activities. Specific objectives of the study were to:

Describe FFA members by their years in FFA, age, ethnicity, gender, and place of residence.

Describe FFA members by their participation in FFA leadership development activities.

Describe FFA members by their perceptions of which FFA leadership development activities have made the greatest contribution to their leadership life skills development.

Describe FFA members by their participation in planning, implementing, and evaluating FFA leadership development activities perceived to have made the greatest contribution to leadership life skills development.

Determine if there are differences between the frequencies that FFA members participate in the planning, implementation, and evaluation phases of FFA leadership development activities perceived to have made the greatest contribution to leadership life skills development.

Procedures

1992-1993 FFA membership rosters were obtained from state departments of education in Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico. From the rosters, the population of FFA members in the three states was determined to be 9,549. At a 95 percent confidence level, a sample size of 370 was needed to represent the population (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). This number was rounded to 400 (the confidence level increases slightly to 95.2 percent with this oversampling). A random sample of FFA members, stratified proportionally by state to ensure representation, was generated.

The study used descriptive survey methodology to measure participation in FFA leadership development activities, perceptions of which FFA leadership development activities have made the greatest contribution to the leadership life skills development, and participation in planning, implementing, and evaluating FFA leadership development activities perceived to have made the greatest to leadership life skills development.

All parts of the instrument and a parallel instrument for 4-H were assessed for content and face validity by a panel of experts consisting of two faculty members in vocational education, two state Cooperative Extension Service administrators, a faculty member in educational administration, and two faculty members in research methods and statistics. Participation in FFA leadership activities was measured by a 25-indicator index adapted from Mueller (1989) utilizing the Official FFA Manual (National FFA Organization, 1993), three state supervisors of agricultural education, and an agricultural education teacher to identify FFA leadership development activities. The index listed FFA leadership activities by various levels of participation ranging from no participation through local, district, state, regional and national participation, depending on the activity. Scores on the participation index could range from 0 to 62. Participants were asked to choose and rank three leadership activities from the participation index they perceived to have helped them the most in developing leadership skills. For each of the three activities identified, they were to indicate whether or not they helped plan, implement, or evaluate the activity. A two-week test-retest procedure with 19 youth who were not part of the sample yielded a reliability coefficient of .97 for the index.

Data were collected from March through June 1993 following the Dillman (1978) procedure for mail questionnaire administration. Incentives were sent with the three mailings to increase response rate. A response rate of 67 percent (n=266) with complete data from 56 percent (n=224) of the respondents were obtained. To check for nonresponse bias, 10 nonrespondents were randomly identified and contacted by telephone. Nonrespondents were compared statistically to respondents by youth leadership life skills development (Seevers & Dormody, in press), years in FFA, age, gender, ethnicity, place of residence, and state. The two groups differed significantly only by ethnicity, with respondents having a higher percentage of minority members than nonrespondents.

Objectives 1 through 4 were analyzed using frequencies and percentages. Objective 5 was analyzed using McNemar tests for significance of change. A significance level of 0.05 was set a priori for the tests.

Results

Objective One

Years in the FFA ranged from one to eight with a mode of one (n=71), median of two, and mean of 2.3 (sd=1.3) years. The FFA members' ages ranged from 13 to 22 with a mode of 16 (n=64), median of 16, and mean of 16.3 (sd=1.5) years. Of the 224 FFA members, 185 (82.6%) were Anglo, 39 (17.4%) were from a minority group (including 12 Native Americans and 25 Hispanics), 129 (57.6%) were male, and 95 (42.2%) were female. Most (51.3% of n=115) came from a farm or ranch. Others said they were from a rural nonfarm setting or town under 10, 000 in population (29.9% of n=67), a town or city between 10,000 and 50,000 in population (12.9% or n=29), or a suburb or city over 50,000 in population (5.8% or n=13).

Objective Two

Over half the FFA members participated in eight of the 25 leadership development activities listed in the questionnaire. Chapter meetings had the highest frequency of participants (n=210) followed by participation in fundraising activities (n=191), chapter banquet (n=184), judging contests (n=178), committees (n=141), parliamentary procedure (n=133), public relations (n=125), and SAEP (n=119). Other activities with relatively high participation were Achievement Award Program (n=108), public speaking (n=106), state convention (n=103), and holding office (n=101) (Table 1).

Only 23 percent (n=51) of the FFA members had participated in Program of Activities (POA) planning. For activities that were offered at and above the chapter level, participants did not advance beyond the chapter level 66 percent of the time. Of the 178 FFA members who participated in judging contests, 157 (88%) participated beyond the chapter level and 121 (68%) participated at the state Level (Table 1).

Objective Three

FFA members were asked to identify the three FFA leadership development activities they felt made the greatest contribution to their leadership life skills development. Judging contests (n=110), public speaking (n=67), chapter meetings (n=62), holding office (n=55), and parliamentary procedure (n=54) had the top five frequencies (Table 2). Only four members had POA planning in their top three leadership development activities. To obtain a more standardized measure of the perceived leadership development value of the activities, the frequency each activity was identified in the top three was divided by the overall participation frequency in the activity. The five highest ratios obtained were for the Washington Conference Program (.67), public speaking (.63), judging contests (.62), holding office (.54), and National FFA Convention (.49). Only 24 percent of the members with SAEP considered it a top leadership development activity (Table 2).

Objective Four

FFA members said they participated in the planning, implementing, and evaluating of their top leadership activities 48.2 percent, 84.8 percent, and 67.1 percent of the time, respectively (Table 2). For the 12 activities cited by more than 20 members, over 50 percent of these members said they participated in planning public speaking, SAEP, committee, and officer activities. For the 12 activities cited by more than 20 members, over 50 percent of these members said they participated in implementing and evaluating all except the chapter banquet.

Table 1. Highest Level of FFA Members' Participation in Leadership Development Activities (n=220)

Activity	None	Local	Distr.	State	Region	Nation	Total Part.
Chapter meetings	10	210	-	-	-	-	210
Fundraising	29	191	-	-	-	-	191
Chapter banquet	36	184	-	-	-	-	184
Judging contest	42	21	27	112	7	11	178
Committee member	79	126	7	6	0	2	141
Parliamentary procedure	87	75	36	22	-	0	133
Public relations	95	125	-	-	-	-	125
SAEP	101	119	-	-	-	-	119
Achievement Award Program	112	108	-	-	-	-	108
Public speaking	114	54	35	17	0	0	106
State convention	117	-	-	103	-	-	103
Holding office	119	85	21	2	-	0	101
Officer training	127	71	-	18	2	2	93
Proficiency Award Program	128	65	-	21	4	2	92
Food for America	136	84	-	-	-	-	84
Achievement in Volunteerism	144	74	-	2	-	0	76
BOAC	146	60	-	10	-	4	74
National Convention	163	-	-	-	-	57	57
Computers in Agriculture	165	54	0	0	-	1	55
POA planning	169	51	-	-	-	-	51
National Safety Award Program	174	30	-	14	-	2	46
Made for Excellence Program	186	-	-	34	-	-	34
Agriscience Recognition Program	188	30	1	1	0	0	32
Summer leadership camp	199	-	-	21	-	-	21
Washington Conference Program	217	-	-	-	-	3	3

Note: a hyphen (-) indicates the activity was not offered at that level.

Objective Five

Significantly more ($p<.001$) FFA members implemented but did not plan the leadership activity perceived to have made the greatest contribution to leadership life skills development (n=90) than those who planned but did not implement the activity (n=3) (Table 3). Significantly more ($p<.001$) members implemented but did not evaluate their top leadership activity (n=58) than those who evaluated but did not implement the activity (n=15). Significantly more ($p<.001$) members evaluated but did not plan their top leadership activity (n=71) than those who planned but did not evaluate the activity (n=27).

Conclusions

Over 100 FFA members participated in 12 leadership development activities: chapter meetings, fundraising, chapter banquet, judging contests, committees, parliamentary procedure, public relations, SAEP, Achievement Award Program, state convention, and holding office. This list matches the list obtained by Brannon et al., (1989) in six of seven activities: judging contests, fairs and shows (overlaps with SAEP), chapter banquet, committees, parliamentary procedure, and state convention. The fact that Brannon et al., (1989) researched adult community leaders with vocational agriculture/FFA backgrounds suggests that present-day FFA members may be participating in a wider variety of leadership development activities.

Most FFA members do not proceed beyond the chapter level when leadership development activities are offered at and above the chapter level, except for judging contests. Judging contests are providing many FFA members with an opportunity to travel outside of the home community.

One of the goals of the chapter Program of Activities (POA) is to achieve "total chapter

Table 2. FFA Members' Participation in Planning, Implementing and Evaluating Their Top Three Leadership Development Activities (n=220)

Activity	Planning		Implementation		Evaluating		Total Top Three	Total Part.	Ratio
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes			
Judging contests	61	49	13	97	38	72	110	178	.62
Public speaking	27	40	3	64	20	47	67	106	.63
Chapter meetings	34	28	14	48	28	34	62	210	.30
Holding office	16	39	0	55	19	36	55	101	.54
Parliamentary procedure	38	26	7	47	12	42	54	133	.41
Fundraising	22	18	1	39	13	27	40	191	.20
State convention	26	7	15	18	9	24	33	103	.32
SAEP	4	25	0	29	2	27	29	119	.24
National Convention	23	5	14	14	8	20	28	57	.49
Committee member	10	17	4	23	12	15	27	141	.19
Officer training	19	5	5	19	8	16	24	93	.26
Chapter banquet	15	6	11	10	15	6	21	184	.11
Public relations	9	11	1	19	5	15	20	125	.16
Achievement in Volunteerism	10	5	1	14	4	11	15	76	.20
Proficiency Award Program	4	10	1	13	3	11	14	92	.15
Made for Excellence Program	8	3	2	9	1	10	11	34	.32
BOAC	4	5	1	8	3	6	9	64	.14
Food for America	3	5	1	7	2	6	8	84	.10
Summer leadership camp	7	1	2	6	2	6	8	21	.38
Agriscience Recognition Program	4	3	3	4	4	3	7	32	.22
Computers in Agriculture	3	3	0	6	2	4	6	55	.11
Achievement Award Program	2	2	0	4	4	0	4	108	.04
POA planning	0	4	0	4	4	0	4	51	.08
Washington Conference Program	2	0	0	2	1	1	2	3	.67
National Safety Award Program	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	46	.02
Totals	342	318	100	560	217	443			
Percent of 660 responses	51.8	48.2	15.2	84.8	32.9	67.1			

participation" (National FFA Organization, 1993, p. 17) of the members. With only 23 percent of the members stating they participated in POA planning, a question is raised about how many agricultural education teachers are encouraging FFA members to plan, implement, and evaluate a POA. The large number of members participating on committees suggests many chapters are using committees for chapter operations. Are the 12 standing committees suggested by the National FFA Organization (1993) being adopted as an operational framework for the chapter?

According to the FFA members, judging contests, public speaking, chapter meetings, holding office, and parliamentary procedure were often cited as activities that had made the greatest contribution to their leadership life skills development. The Washington Conference Program, public speaking, judging contests, holding office, and National FFA Convention were cited by high percentages of participants as activities that had made the greatest contributions to their leadership life skills development. Although it is probably safe to assume FFA members are valuing these activities, it is not clear whether participation in these activities is really related to development of leadership skills. Three of the activities, public speaking, holding office, and National FFA Convention, match activities found by Townsend and Carter (1983) to be related to leadership development. A high percentage of the FFA members who listed public speaking and holding office as top leadership development activities were also involved in planning, implementing and evaluating these activities.

Small numbers of members cited POA planning and SAEP, two activities considered by agricultural educators to be integral to strong

Table 3. McNemar Tests on FFA Members' Participation in Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating Their Top FFA Leadership Activity (n-223)

Contingency table cell	n	X^2	p
Planning by implementing the activity			
Didn't plan or implement	25		
Planned and didn't implement	3		
Implemented and didn't plan	90		
Planned and implemented	105	81.4	p<.001
Implementing by evaluating the activity			
Didn't implement or evaluate	13		
Implemented and didn't evaluate	58		
Evaluated and didn't implement	15		
Implemented and evaluated	137	25.3	p<.001
Planning by evaluating the activity			
Didn't plan or evaluate	44		
Planned and didn't evaluate	27		
Evaluated and didn't plan	71		
Planned and evaluated	81	19.8	p<.001

programs, as top leadership development activities.

By almost a 2:1 ratio, FFA members are implementing more than planning leadership development activities. Members are also implementing more than evaluating, and evaluating more than planning activities. These results are similar to those found by Mueller (1989), and Seevers and Dormody (in press) for 4-H.

Recommendations

In a precursor to this paper, Dormody and Seevers (in press) found participation in FFA leadership development activities predicted only 2.3 percent of the variance in leadership life skills development among FFA members in Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico. Agricultural educators in the three states need to be concerned with this weak relationship. Based on the results of this study, some possible ways to strengthen this relationship are to increase members' overall participation, participation above the chapter level, participation in planning and evaluating activities (which can be realized in part by adoption of and participation in a PAO program), and participation in activities most highly associated with leadership life skills development (e.g., public speaking and holding office). The National FFA Association should also determine whether FFA leadership development activities are developing those leadership life skills central to a modern conceptualization of leadership (Barker, 1994).

Through inservice and preservice teacher education, agricultural educators in the three states should revisit the POA as a vehicle for providing leadership development for all FFA members. By participating in the POA, members plan, implement, and evaluate a portion of the FFA program. They learn to solve problems, think critically, and learn from their successes and failures. With the proper training, they learn how to behave transactionally during committee problem-solving activities (Dormody, 1991). All of these skills will be necessary for adult leadership roles. With these points in mind, inservice and preservice education should focus on teaching program planning, team problem-solving, and team communication skills to FFA members.

Further research should determine the effectiveness of individual FFA activities in developing leadership life skills development using a quantitative approach; the state of POA adoption and whether chapters using a POA are more effective in developing leadership skills; and the perceptions of FFA advisors regarding member participation in planning, implementing, and evaluating leadership activities. Replication of this study in other states is also encouraged. Finally, research is needed to determine why only half of the members had a SAEP and few recognized it as a top leadership development activity. How much emphasis is being placed on SAEP in the three states? Is the leadership development potential of SAEP being recognized, tapped, and reinforced by agricultural educators?

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