MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY

Welcome to the club : education where the bell never rings
by Kirk Alan Astroth

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
Montana State University
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Abstract:
As the nation's largest nonformal youth development program, 4-H has been challenged to develop life skills in young people to help them become self-directing, productive, and contributing members of society. Professional 4-H faculty have often asserted that participation in the program results in the development of life skills, yet research documenting such impacts is sparse. This descriptive research study used both qualitative and quantitative methods to examine the 4-H experience from participants' perspective. Three counties were randomly selected for study, and all 4-H clubs leaders in these counties were administered an inventory to assess their orientation towards working with youth. Five 4-H clubs' were purposely selected for study based on leadership styles that were either more control-oriented or more autonomy-oriented. Members in clubs led by autonomy-oriented leaders reported that 4-H was. more fun, that they learned more life skills, and were more satisfied with their club experience than members in control-oriented clubs. Characteristics of effective clubs are outlined based on this research.

WELCOME TO THE CLUB: EDUCATION

WHERE THE BELL NEVER RINGS

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Kirk Alan Astroth

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

Doctor of Education

MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY--BOZEMAN
Bozeman, Montana

April 1996

APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Kirk Alan Astroth

This thesis has been read by each member of the
graduate committee and has been found to be satisfactory
regarding content, English usage, format, citations,
bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for
submission to the College of Graduate Studies.
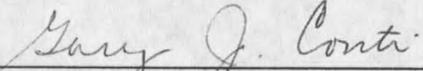
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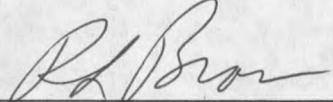Dr. Gary J. Conti   Date
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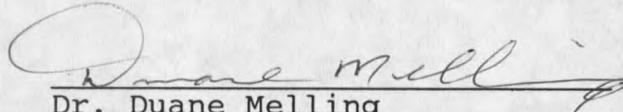
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STATEMENT OF PERMISSION TO USE

Dedicated to my parents
and to 4-H members past, present, and future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study originated several years ago and owes its fruition to a number of people. A special thanks to my graduate committee that gave me valuable guidance and input all along the way: Dr. Gary Conti, Dr. Robert Fellenz, Dr. Doug Herbster, Dr. Oakley Winters, and Elizabeth M. McCoy. Ms. McCoy deserves a special acknowledgement for her support and never-ending encouragement to me while I tried to carry on the responsibilities of my job while working on this project. She also generously made funds available to ensure that I had the resources to carry out this research project. Thanks, Betty. A final thanks to the people of Latvia who see the immense potential of 4-H for the future of their country.

Of course, I would especially like to acknowledge the support of Tana Kappel. Tana has been a source of encouragement and inspiration during my work on this research project all along the way. Without Tana's help and support, this project would not have been possible. In many ways this is her dissertation too.

Finally, I would like to thank all my friends and colleagues who have provided support and inspiration all along the way. What a long, strange trip it's been....

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ABSTRACT

As the nation's largest nonformal youth development program, 4-H has been challenged to develop life skills in young people to help them become self-directing, productive, and contributing members of society. Professional 4-H faculty have often asserted that participation in the program results in the development of life skills, yet research documenting such impacts is sparse. This descriptive research study used both qualitative and quantitative methods to examine the 4-H experience from participants' perspective. Three counties were randomly selected for study, and all 4-H clubs leaders in these counties were administered an inventory to assess their orientation towards working with youth. Five 4-H clubs were purposely selected for study based on leadership styles that were either more control-oriented or more autonomy-oriented. Members in clubs led by autonomy-oriented leaders reported that 4-H was more fun, that they learned more life skills, and were more satisfied with their club experience than members in control-oriented clubs. Characteristics of effective clubs are outlined based on this research.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Pick up almost any newspaper or magazine today, and you will undoubtedly find some expert raising the alarm about today's youth crisis. Researchers, businessmen, human resource professionals, educators, and policy makers alike almost universally bemoan the fate of today's younger generation (Carnegie Corporation, 1988; Casey & Tucker, 1994; Dryfoos, 1990). Whether they be called "youth at risk," children without conscience, punks, "Generation X," or some other moniker, today's authorities generally agree that young people, by and large, are not being equipped to succeed in the present let alone to take on the responsibilities of adulthood in the future (Schorr, 1988). As one well-known youth authority put it, "You don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure out that all is not well on the home front" (Dryfoos, 1995, p. vii).

Certainly, such concerns for the competencies of American youth are nothing new (Postman & Weingartner, 1969). Similar concerns were heard about high school graduates shortly after World War II (Newsweek, 1954). In

the 1950's the launch of Sputnik seemed to point anew to the
failures of American education, especially in the sciences.
In the 1960's and early 1970's, policy makers blamed
children and their blighted environments for the failure to
develop the requisite skills to keep America competitive.
During the 1970's, public education focused on "back to
basics" and blamed the teachers for low academic achievement
of students. In the 1980's parents were blamed for failing
to support education's goals and to sufficiently monitor
homework assignments (Hamburg, 1990; Hechinger, 1992;
Lerner, 1995). Yet, despite all the efforts at
accountability, the cry we continue to hear is that American
youth are not being prepared socially or academically for
the modern world. Seemingly, the youth crisis has reached
epidemic proportions (Dryfoos, 1990; Lerner, 1995).

Just how bad is the current youth crisis? Of course,
it depends on who is asked. Some authorities maintain that
today all youth are born at high risk and are not developing
the skills to lead capable lives (Glenn & Nelson, 1988;
Schorr, 1988). A recent Carnegie Commission (1988)
estimated that about half of all youth are at risk and would
experience such negative outcomes as school failure, early
teen pregnancy, substance abuse or delinquency. The other
half (about 14 million youth) appear to be growing up
healthy, but "even these young people are not immune to risk
since most of them at the very least lack sufficient

problem-solving skills" (Hechinger, 1992, p. 22). Others (Dryfoos, 1990; Helge, 1990; Lerner, 1995; Palmer, in press) estimate that one-quarter of 10-17 year olds are at high risk, and an additional 25% are at moderate risk. Helge (1990) suggests that rural youth are disproportionately at risk for negative outcomes when compared to urban youth. One authority asserted that if action is not taken soon to restore America's precious human capital, its democratic way of life may be at risk (Brown, 1987).

What concerns many human service and educational professionals is that today's youth are at risk for failing to develop the requisite skills and abilities to live full, productive lives. Specifically, these authorities believe that youth are not developing the leadership skills, self-confidence, social and basic academic skills to succeed in the years ahead. Business leaders have also voiced their concerns about spending millions of dollars on costly remedial education and training programs for individuals who have graduated from high school but who are still ill-equipped to assume positions in the modern workplace (Lacey, 1988). Education is failing to help young people develop the necessary skills to live full, productive lives.

The most recent major wake-up call about the condition of American youth and our educational system was sounded in A Nation At Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). This report came as a result of

then-Secretary of Education T.H. Bell's concern about "the widespread public perception that something is seriously remiss in our educational system" (p. 1). What was required was equivalent to a declaration of war:

> If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves. (p. 5)

A Nation At Risk challenged the U.S. to launch a reform movement of public education lest the future of the nation be in jeopardy. This commission claimed that public schools were failing to prepare young people with the requisite skills to make the successful transition to adulthood and enter the workplace. Yet, this commission's recommendations had more to do with the structure of education than with content: assigning more homework, lengthening the school day, increasing admission standards at colleges, and increasing graduation requirements, and giving more tests. Significantly more time should be given to focusing on what this report called the "New Basics" (p. 29). The national goals proposed by The Nation at Risk report have been criticized by educators as unrealistic and wrong-headed (Kamii, Clark, & Dominick, 1994).

Subsequent reports and commissions have echoed the concerns expressed in A Nation at Risk but have offered different recommendations. Rather than emphasizing a return to basics, others have suggested that education look at ways

to develop lifelong learning skills in youth that will serve them outside the confines of the classroom. "Our conclusion is that these [problem-solving] skills are the foundation of reliable work habits and behaviors that will increasingly be required in the workplaces of the 21st century" (Lacey, 1988, p. 9).

Background to the Problem

While many commissions and reports have placed primary responsibility on public schools for developing America's youth potential, few have recognized the role that nonformal education could play in this goal. Even Postman and Weingartner (1969) in their call for radical changes in public schools believed that schools had the singular responsibility for teaching critical thinking skills: "We believe that schools must serve as the principal medium for developing in youth the attitudes and skills of social, political, and cultural criticism" (p. 2). Non-school organizations were notably absent from their call for an educational revolution.

In A Nation At Risk, out-of-school youth programs are never mentioned nor does the report acknowledge the contributions nonformal education could make in turning the nation's youth crisis around (National Commission, 1983). Yet, other studies (Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education, 1979; Kleinfeld & Shinkwin, 1983;

President's Science Advisory Committee, 1974; National Panel

on High Schools, 1976; Shinkwin & Kleinfeld, 1983) have

argued for some time that nonformal youth groups can provide

many experiences that are lacking in formal education.

Specifically, nonformal youth groups provide:

    --Closer contact for youth with adults from the

    community.

    --Opportunities for active, responsible roles

    --Experiences in community service

    --Opportunities to learn practical skills beyond

    academic subjects.

Of all the federal commissions, only the National

Commission for Employment Policy (Lacey, 1988) came close to

recognizing a role for agencies outside of public schools:

"Essential resources through the community must be

mobilized, coordinated, and focused on the needs of at-risk

youngsters" (p. 3). Others have called for greater

cooperation between public and non-school youth

organizations to help accomplish common goals (Palmer, in

press; Sesow & VanCleaf, 1985).

Historically, public education is perceived as

fulfilling a more important role in the development of

critical thinking skills than nonformal education, but

because of the lack of knowledge about the role of nonformal

education it is not known what contributions can be provided

by differing forms of education. In discussion about

educational reform to improve youth development, nonformal
education is rarely considered.

After five decades of failed reforms, perhaps it is
time to look at the complementary contribution nonformal
education can make to national education goals. Many of
those who see the indispensability of nonformal learning
beyond youth do not see the necessity of nonformal learning
environments during youth (Beder, 1989).

Why should there begin to be a consideration of the
role of nonformal education to help youth acquire the
critical skills needed for the future?

> We cannot expect children to accept ready-made
> values and truths all the way through school, and
> then suddenly make choices in adulthood. (Kamii,
> 1991, p. 387)

Schools by themselves may not be able to develop the kinds
of skills in youth that they will need to succeed. Research
on the prevention of anti-social behaviors indicates that
greater emphasis must be put on developing one's self-
concept and on the acquisition of life skills both in formal
and in nonformal education (Palmer, in press; Shrum, 1987).
It is known from research that children who succeed
academically and who also make the successful transitions to
adulthood are those who have participated in a wider array
of opportunities beyond the school and the family. These
community offerings include work experience, 4-H, scouting,
athletics, and a host of others (Heath & McLaughlin, 1987;

Heath & McLaughlin, 1991; Steele, Miller, & Rai, 1993). As

one expert concluded:

> It would seem that the time is right to attempt to
> forge a partnership between formal and non-formal
> education, in which the latter is taken seriously,
> provided with resources, and held accountable for
> the tasks undertaken. (Erickson, 1986, p. 23).

Few people include nonformal education as an important

player in helping youth develop the necessary skills to

succeed in the modern world. Yet, intuition suggests that

experiential nonformal youth programs could be another

important contributor in the movement to help youth develop

such skills. Certainly, families and schools are

fundamental for all youth, but a variety of community-based

programs and organizations can provide youth with access to

adults with a wide range of interests and perspective. Such

nonformal groups can also stimulate children's motivation

for academic learning as well as help them learn skills to

adjust and adapt in a changing world (Heath & McLaughlin,

1987). Tyler (1961) acknowledged the beneficial role that

nonformal education could play and observed that 4-H was an

effective educational organization when compared to school

or extra-curricular activities. Moreover, nearly three-

fourths of 14-15 year olds participate in nonformal youth

organizations every year (Hafner, 1990).

The Cooperative Extension Service, which includes 4-H,

in association with land-grant universities has a long

history of providing educational programs and services to

American youth, families, and communities. During previous national emergencies--such as during the depression and during World War II, Extension played a supportive role in assisting with America's response to these crises (Wessel & Wessel, 1982). However, it is not clear if nonformal educational programs today like 4-H are willing and able to respond to the current youth emergency. To what extent is 4-H willing to play a role in helping youth develop the critical skills needed to make the transition to adulthood? Some suggest that nonformal education <u>must</u> participate in these efforts if our nation is to survive:

> Whatever the solutions may be to the youth crisis, enlightened public policies, community service based on quality research, and dedicated efforts of professional and volunteer workers are all essential ingredients to help youth reach their potential. (Snider & Miller, 1991, p. 4).

The question is what role, if any, can the 4-H youth development program play in helping youth develop the leadership life skills necessary in a changing world? Perhaps nonformal education can supplement and complement other forms of education.

Statement of the Problem

In the 1970's Cooperative Extension national report called <u>4-H in Century III</u>, 4-H was challenged with the goal of helping young people develop "life skills" that would enable them to become self-directing, productive, and

contributing members of society (United States Department of
Agriculture [USDA], 1976). In order to meet the needs of a
changing society, the 4-H program should help youth develop
inquiring minds, learn how to apply science and technology
to their everyday lives, strengthen abilities to make
intelligent decisions, improve communication skills, develop
effective interpersonal relationships, and "acquire positive
attitudes toward self and a feeling of self-worth" (p. 3).
These skills are the broad, generic problem-solving and
leadership skills that should help youth assume leadership
roles in the future.

Since then, professional 4-H staff have often asserted
that a wide variety of experiences in the 4-H program result
in the development of these kinds of skills, yet research
documenting such impacts is sparse. In fact, for an
organization that prides itself on the delivery of research-
based programs, the paucity of supporting evidence of the
positive impacts on personal development skills is curious.
Little research has been conducted in the United States on
the effects of participation in nonformal youth groups like
4-H.

Although largely unknown prior to the 1960's, nonformal
education has begun to receive attention from the academic
community. Several researchers have emphasized the
importance of structured out-of-school programs
(Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Cremin, 1976) and have suggested that

it is "now a likely subject for inquiry" (LaBelle, 1981,
p. 313).

While there are numerous studies of student achievement
in public schools, few studies have investigated participant
outcomes in nonformal youth programs. For example, there
are only a handful of studies on the benefits of
participating in Girl Scouts (Cole, 1984; Edwards, 1994;
Kleinfeld & Shinkwin, 1983; Ragoff et al., 1995). Only
slightly more studies of Boys and Girls Clubs, Big
Brothers/Big Sisters, YMCA or YWCA can be found (Braverman &
d'Onofrio, 1986; Erickson, 1986; Frecknall & Luks, 1992;
Hamburg, 1990; Hines, 1988).

There is somewhat more research on Boy Scouts
(Kleinfeld and Shinkwin, 1983, 1984; Shinkwin & Kleinfeld,
1983). Unfortunately, though, much of the research on Boy
Scouts has dismissed the organization as an extremely rigid
institution aimed at keeping boys occupied in trivial
activities, or the research has explored covert sexual
themes in all-male scouting or has investigated the social
class ideology of scouting (Gillis, 1981; Hantover, 1978;
Hollingshead, 1975; Kett, 1977; Mechling, 1978; 1980; 1981).
Kleinfeld & Shinkwin (1984) undertook one of the few
detailed studies of the Boy Scout experience from an
ethnological point of view. Yet, these researchers
hesitated to draw any conclusions about the effectiveness of
leadership styles on member outcomes.

Possibly because 4-H is sponsored by the Cooperative Extension Service in affiliation with land grant universities, the 4-H program has been the subject of significantly more research studies (Abbott, Sutton, Jackson & Logan, 1976; Banning, 1979; Boyd, 1991; Boyd, Herring, & Briers, 1992; Brown, 1987; Ellis, 1990; Erickson, 1983; Gottlieb & Lewis, 1974; Hall, 1991; Hanna, 1988; Heinsohn & Cantrell, 1986; Kappa Systems, 1979; Kleinfeld & Shinkwin, 1983; Ladewig & Thomas, 1987; Mueller, 1989; Risdon & Swain, 1990; Sawer, 1987; Schlutt, 1987; Steele & Everson, 1978; Steele & Rossing, 1981; Suso, 1984; Williams, 1983). Only a few of these studies have tried to learn more about the nature of the club experience from participants' points of view (Baker, 1991; Banning, 1979; Boyd, 1991; Cook, 1991; Jeffiers, 1989). Few have studied the youth participants in a holistic way focusing on the club as a learning environment (Fetsch et al., 1993; Kleinfeld & Shinkwin, 1983; Waguespack, 1988).

Limitations of Previous Research

There is some question about whether participation in nonformal youth programs provides significant benefits to participants. Research on participants in the Big Brothers program, for example, showed that the big brothers' self-esteem improved significantly but there was no improvement in self-esteem for the little brothers (Hines, 1988). In

other cases, participation in nonformal youth programs has increased one's likelihood of engaging in risk behaviors. For instance, participants in nonformal youth organizations are more likely to use cigarettes than their non-participating peers (Braverman & d'Onofrio, 1986; Dewalt, 1992). In many instances, the claims of benefits for participating in nonformal youth groups are often more conjecture than substantiated (Cole, 1984; Erickson, 1983; Ragoff et al., 1995).

Since a greater number of studies on 4-H have been conducted and since these studies are usually more rigorous by research standards, it seems appropriate to focus on the 4-H program as a basis for investigating the impact of participation in nonformal youth programs. 4-H members typically belong to a large community club which meets once a month. Monthly club meetings serve as a social gathering for club members and their families and to teach skills in conducting meetings, voting democratically, and doing public presentations. In addition, members of 4-H clubs join one or more small project groups that meet several times throughout the year. These project groups focus on subjects like raising swine, learning photography, woodworking, electricity, or learning about foods and nutrition. Project leaders are usually parents of club members who have an interest or expertise in a particular area. Sometimes, parents serve as leaders for several projects. The skills

that are taught in project meetings are typically skills
that are not commonly thought to be learned in school or at
home. The goal of project meetings is to teach specific
skills. For example, in a foods project members learn among
other things how to cook nutritious foods. Through such
experiences, members are also believed to gain confidence,
develop an interest in inquiry, learn how to make wise
decisions, develop empathy, and get along with others
(Kleinfeld & Shinkwin, 1983; Suso, 1984; Scriven, 1980;
Tyler, 1961; USDA, 1976; Waguespack, 1988; Williams, 1983).

Over the years, efforts to assess the effectiveness of
the 4-H program have been rather limited and have reported
mixed results. In fact, many evaluation efforts (e.g.
Bakker, 1994; Ellis, 1990; Erickson, 1983; Forest, 1989;
Gottlieb & Lewis, 1974; Jones, 1969; Kappa Systems, 1979;
Krietlow, Pierce & Middleton, 1961) have focused on such
concerns as the program's ability to reach increasing
numbers of participants without addressing the impact of 4-H
programs on its participants. Evidence is needed concerning
who benefits, by how much, and what difference, if any, 4-H
makes for individuals who participate.

Whether membership in 4-H is beneficial has been
examined in several studies. So far, previous studies of
the impacts of 4-H membership have shown only weak results
or mixed results. Generally, these studies can be divided
into three categories: (a) those that indicate that 4-H may

make a positive difference; (b) those that indicate that 4-H
membership may not make any difference; and (c) those which
exhibit methodological weaknesses so one cannot tell whether
4-H membership makes a difference or not.

Studies Indicating Positive Results

In the first category of research studies, the most
comprehensive study of those involved in informal
educational programs was the 4-H alumni study conducted by
Ladewig and Thomas (1987). This nationally-supported study
looked at 4-H alumni, alumni of other youth organizations,
and adults who did not participate in any organizations as a
youth. After surveying a weighted random sample of more
than 16,000 participants, this study concluded that, in
general, membership in youth development programs did make a
difference for the participants. Specifically, adults who
had participated in any variety of youth programs
benefitted, and former 4-H members reported greater benefits
than alumni of other youth groups or adults who were never
members of any youth group. The most useful experiences to
develop life skills were social contacts with other people
in the organization. Interestingly, 4-H alumni were less
satisfied than other youth group alumni with their
opportunities for leadership, and 4-H alumni indicated that
other organizations contributed more to their personal
leadership development and a sense of responsibility.

Length of membership and age of entry into the program were the most important variables in assessing life skill development in 4-H participants.

In their study of 4-H, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, Kleinfeld & Shinkwin (1983) found that 4-H "created the most extensive network of relationships between young people and adults" (p. 5). In Girl Scouts, youth developed relationships primarily with their own leaders. Boy Scouts specifically taught members to work with adults they did not know. In contrast, 4-H helped develop a broader social network between youth and adults. 4-H also taught the greatest diversity of skills compared to other youth programs. 4-H was also found to emphasize skill development more than scouting and "the skills had less ideological overlay" (p. 9).

Other research has examined the impact of special, short-term 4-H programs aimed at a particular audience. Special 4-H programs targeted to at-risk youth could result in the development of positive skills, attitudes, and knowledge that also carried over into regular classroom work. 4-H programs had a positive influence on community service, leadership roles, task completion, self-esteem, and a number of other parameters (Valentine, 1990). Participation in 4-H also instilled a sense of responsibility for task completion in young people (Rollins, Scholl & Scanlon, 1992; Scott, Clark, & Reagan, 1990).

Significant differences between 4-H and non-4-H members were found in terms of life skills development (Boyd, 1991; Boyd et al., 1992). This study revealed that 4-H members' perceptions of their development of life skills were significantly higher than the perceptions of non-4-H youth for all measurement scales. A Pennsylvania study of 4-H members revealed that youth perceived themselves as having developed "good" levels of leadership, communication, and personal development skills (Heinsohn & Cantrell, 1986).

4-H members participating in animal projects have been a special focus of some research projects looking at the impact of 4-H membership. Because of their participation in 4-H, members reported that life skills were among the highest rated skills learned by them, and the single most important skill was responsibility (Baker, 1991; Sawer, 1987). In fact, life skills were mentioned as often as knowledge-based skills (Sawer, 1987). Other highly rated skills were making new friends, getting along with other people, and helping others. Less than half of these respondents reported developing communication or leadership skills (Sawer, 1987). Similar studies in three other states have come to similar conclusions about life skills development among 4-H members (Drake & Baumgardner, 1978; Steele & Everson, 1978; Williams, 1983).

Studies Indicating No Differences

In the second category of research studies, a preliminary global analysis of nearly 1,000 4-H members and non-members found no evidence that participation in 4-H programs increased self-competence levels more so than non-participation (Fetsch et al., 1993). Similarly, Miller (1991) was unable to find significant differences in the life skills values of 4-H members as compared to other youth who had never participated in 4-H. Even the use of multiple regression was unable to explain very much of the variance in life skills values of the two groups.

A four-year study in Kansas in which participants were categorized as 4-H and non-4-H members found similar non-significant results from 4-H membership when compared to non-members (Hanna, 1988). This study involved 1,516 students in grades 5-11 and found that 4-H membership had only a slightly positive effect in 23 of 30 indicators of life skill development. At best, findings were mixed and yielded no strong correlation. In some cases, 4-H members reported lower levels of self-concept than youth who had never participated in 4-H. Hanna reported that the low reliability estimates of the research instruments may have contributed to these confounding results.

Using data collected by the U.S. Office of Education NELS:88 Study, researchers at the University of Wisconsin were able to make some generalizations about 4-H

participation among eighth graders nationally. For example, about one out of every six eighth graders has participated in 4-H at some time during their lives, and these 4-H members are like average kids in many respects. 4-H does not just work with the "cream of the crop" and includes youth of varying abilities and backgrounds. Yet, this study too was unable to document that taking part in 4-H programs resulted in measurable advantages in such areas as grades, self-concept, or future plans (Steele et al., 1993).

Studies with Methodological Flaws

In the third category of research studies, Collins (1984, 1986) found that 4-H members self-reported developing valuable life skills through 4-H programs and also reported that parents and 4-H volunteer leaders were the most influential in the development of these skills. However, the validity and generalizability of her study suffers from a number of methodological flaws. For instance, her study used a systematic sample and included only a 4-point Likert-type scale for responses with no category for "don't know" or "not sure". Her sample size was also much less than 10% of the 4-H membership in the state usually expected for statistical validity (Gay, 1987). Finally, this study did not include non-4-H members as a comparison group (Collins, 1986).

In a similar way, Bakker's (1994) study of 4-H ambassadors failed to use a reliable and valid instrument. The study did not include a comparison group, and he relied upon a convenient sample.

Implications of Previous Research

Formal educational programs are able to document impacts on their students in a number of arenas. For example, schools can readily point to student achievements on standardized tests as evidence that their students are excelling in relevant areas, or they can point to graduation rates or scores on the ACT or SAT. Nonformal educational programs like 4-H, however, have been less successful in documenting impacts on their members. Standardized tests do not exist. Thus, it would be useful to know what factors influence the development of life skills in 4-H members and whether membership in out-of-school programs like 4-H contributes in significant ways to the development of life skills.

A review of the previous studies of the 4-H program raises several concerns. First, each of these studies relied exclusively on quantitative data collection. None involved interviews or field observations of 4-H members as they participated in their club environment. Naturalistic techniques were never utilized in these studies. Perhaps a mixed design using both quantitative and qualitative methods

would be more useful to fully understand the dynamics and impacts of nonformal education in an ecological perspective.

Second, most of these studies failed to examine the influence of the leadership style of the adult volunteer on the experiences and development of life skills in 4-H members. All of these studies lack a holistic view of 4-H as a social environment. Some studies simply survey 4-H members, devoid of the context of the learning environment in which adult volunteers play a critical role and have great influence. Other studies (e.g. Jeffiers, 1989) have asked the adults what they perceive members are learning without asking the members themselves. Few studies have included both leaders and members in their analysis.

A consistent feature of all these studies is that researchers try to study 4-H members devoid of their club context. Yet, individual 4-H clubs are different and provide a different experience to members and adult leadership is part of that difference. In the previous studies cited, all 4-H members were pooled together for data analysis purposes without regard for the differences in the kinds of clubs in which they participated. Thus, it is difficult to differentiate between those members who participated in learning environments that treated them as resources and those who participated in learning environments that treated them as objects or recipients. Data analysis tends to eliminate the extremes and moves

everyone to the average. For such studies, discriminate analysis would be more appropriate for learning what different club environments mean for 4-H members.

Hence, 4-H participants should be studied in context of the club experience. Researchers should examine clubs as total learning environments in which leaders, parents, and members all interact under a common set of assumptions and rules. Without this kind of complete picture, it is little wonder that previous studies have not been able to uncover significant differences between participants and nonparticipants in nonformal youth programs.

Third, all of these studies were relatively short-term research projects--one time studies using pencil and paper tests to measure impacts. What is needed is a project which covers a significant period of time using several milestones to chart changes. Moreover, an approach which triangulates various sources of data would be useful to uncovering the significance, if any, of the 4-H experience (Lerner, 1995).

Finally, none of these studies have been able to determine the influence of the county agent's attitude or characteristics on the kind of 4-H program offered to young people. While this influence may be small, it has never been adequately assessed (Baker, 1991; Schlutt, 1987). One research study suggested that 4-H members interacting with a county Extension agent will develop coping skills, but the strength of this influence is unclear (Schlutt, 1987).

Others have questioned how much influence a county agent can have on individual members, particularly younger members who have few occasions to participate in county level activities (Miller, 1991). Does the leadership orientation of the county agent impact the quality of the program and/or the kind of adult leadership that is delivered at the club level?

4-H is a large program which has had nearly a century of work with both youth and adults, but the research base on the impacts of participation are deficient. What meanings do the members attach to their experiences? How are their experiences different from those they might have in other settings? What are the benefits of 4-H participation? How does the 4-H club socialize young people to live in a modern society?

A new approach to research on 4-H is needed. Professional educators have defined what youth and adults should be learning and gaining through their participation in the 4-H program. Professionals have framed the meaning of such experiences in terms of "life skills." In some cases, professionals have enumerated what skills are valuable and should be developed as a result of 4-H participation. For example, many state programs have identified specific life skills such as decision-making, communications, contributory or helping skills, developing an inquisitive approach to issues, problem solving or

others. Yet, there appears to be no firm connection between the goals of the 4-H program and mechanisms or procedures to develop such specific skills. The connection is merely assumed: by being involved in "good" 4-H programs, youth will develop lifelong skills in a variety of areas.

Few studies have been able to demonstrate that such skill development is occurring or that 4-H members differ significantly in such skills from other youth who do not participate in 4-H programs (Evaluation of Economic and Social Consequences, 1980; Hanna, 1988; Miller, 1991; Steele et al., 1993). Perhaps, with their over-emphasis on quantitative methods, researchers have been taking the wrong approach. Perhaps, too, researchers have been asking the wrong questions.

What is missing from the research literature is a description of what experiences youth actually have in these kinds of nonformal educational organizations and what young people find important about belonging to such groups. LaBelle (1981) perhaps summarized the gaps which still exist in research in his overview of nonformal youth groups:

> We know very little, for example, about the kinds
> of things that we take for granted when we talk
> about school, like who are the actors, what is the
> scope of their relationship and on what does the
> nonformal education process focus. We also know
> little about how nonformal education contributes
> to child development, its relationship to family
> socialization, or its effects on values, literacy
> and numeracy, or on a youngster's problem solving
> skills. Furthermore, we know little about what
> adults and youngsters who live in different size

communities or regions seek from nonformal
participation and whether it has agreed upon
impact. (p. 323)

The Role of Leaders

An important and little-investigated feature of the 4-H
program is the adult volunteer leadership. 4-H is an
organization which relies on adult volunteer leaders to
carry out the program. Without these volunteer adults,
there would be no 4-H program since the number of salaried
staff in the nation is actually quite small. Thus, leaders
play several important roles in 4-H. Indeed, the three
major reasons for the failure of youth organizations are
absence of a leader, lack of commitment, and need for leader
support (Erickson, 1983; Stephen, 1983). Some studies have
suggested that to be effective, adult volunteers need
competence in effectively using incentives and recognition
when working with youth (Treat, 1975). One study indicated
that the quality of adult leaders can be quite influential
on whether members complete their 4-H projects (Scott et
al., 1990).

Despite limited evidence that the kinds of adult
leaders influence the quality of a youth's experience, the
influence and impact of adult leaders and parents in non-
formal youth programs has not been extensively researched.
In most of the preceding research studies, members were
studied but not as a part of a particular club environment.

Recent trends in research would argue for a more holistic approach which would study the club as a learning environment.

Such an ecological approach is rare. Even in 4-H studies, there is a dearth of research-based information about how adult leaders influence the organizational culture and values of youth groups. One exception to this situation is a case study of two Scout troops in Alaska conducted over a seven month period (Shinkwin & Kleinfeld, 1983). While the researchers declined to draw any evaluative conclusions from their research, there are some clear patterns which emerged from their data. First, a controlling style of leadership was beneficial to boys in a downtown troop and gave them a sense of responsibility and structure. Second, participation of adults in youth meetings can have a great influence on perpetuating a group's dominant culture and inculcating the preferred ideology. Third, the troop in which leadership roles were diffuse among all troop members was more effective in developing leadership abilities in members.

As this study suggests, the orientation of 4-H leaders may greatly influence the kind of experiences young people have in the program. If leaders are autonomy-oriented in their approach to working with young people, treating them with dignity and respect, and helping them to assume some responsibility, young people could be expected to develop

critical life skills and report a greater satisfaction with the 4-H experience. On the other hand, young people who have leaders who are heteronomy-oriented, controlling and disempowering, and who take responsibility away from youth may report less satisfaction with the youth group and might report less skill development than youth with other kinds of leaders. As Lofquist (1983) has explained, adult leaders tend to exhibit three basic orientations towards working with young people: as objects, as recipients of adult wisdom or as resources or partners. Which style results in greater youth outcomes? The research on this question is not extensive.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between the leadership style of 4-H adult club leaders and 4-H member's experiences in these clubs. This relationship was described from a multivariant perspective. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected to triangulate observations and develop a holistic view of the club experience as influenced by the adult's leadership style.

Frequency counts and percentages were used to describe demographic data collected for the study. Qualitative analysis was used to interpret extensive field notes, interview transcripts, and artifacts collected during the

study. Finally, statistical procedures were used to explore relationships between adult leadership styles and member development of life skills and club satisfaction.

Research Questions

This study examined the 4-H club environment as revealed through the behavior of leaders, parents and members and as revealed through the researcher's nonparticipatory observations of clubs. The following research questions were formulated for this study:

1. Why are youth attracted to join the 4-H program?

2. What are the factors that keep youth involved in 4-H clubs?

3. What is the effect of different adult leadership styles on member satisfaction with the club environment?

4. What skills do youth develop as a result of their participation in 4-H?

5. What difference, if any, does the adult leader's style have on the skill development of youth? Are autonomy-oriented leaders more effective in helping youth develop these skills than control-oriented leaders?

6. Is there a relationship between the county agent's leadership style and the leadership style of adult 4-H club leaders in the same county?

7. What are the characteristics of effective 4-H clubs?

Definition of Terms

Adult Education: "The process whereby persons whose major social roles are characteristic of adult status

undertake systematic and sustained learning activities
for the purpose of bringing about changes in knowledge,
attitudes, values, or skills" (Darkenwald & Merriam,
1982, p. 9).

Autonomy: "The ability of a person to be self-governing;
the ability to think for oneself and to decide between
right and wrong in the moral realm and between truth
and untruth in the intellectual realm by taking all
relevant factors into account" (Kamii, Clark &
Dominick, 1994, p. 673).

Club: Five or more youth and at least one caring adult who
serves as the organizational leader in 4-H.

Controlling Environment: "Events that pressure people
toward specific outcomes, thereby denying them the
experience of choice" (Deci, Spiegel, Ryan, Koestner &
Kauffman, 1982, p. 852).

Education: "The deliberate, systematic, and sustained
effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge,
attitudes, values or skills" (Darkenwald & Merriam,
1982, p. 2).

Experiential Learning: Participatory, hands-on engagement
in tasks and activities by learners outside the
classroom (Rose, 1989).

Facilitators: Those who assist rather than direct learners.
Resource persons, helpers who are accepting of
learners, have a high regard for learners' self-