

FFA LEADERSHIP: DO ACTIVITIES NAVIGATE TOWARD FULL POTENTIAL?

Association of Leadership Educators
2005 Annual Conference
July 11-14, 2005
Wilmington, NC

Robin L. Peiter, Assistant Professor
University of Kentucky
Lexington, KY 40546
rpeiter@uky.edu

Martha A. Nall, Professor
University of Kentucky
mnall@uky.edu

Roger Rennekamp, Professor
University of Kentucky
rreneka@uky.edu

Presentation Track: Research

This study describes the perceptions rural youth have of leadership activities in FFA. Specifically, these perceptions focused on the role and context of leadership activities as they were described through a series of statements in a survey administered to 1202 Chapter members.

Robin Peiter is an Assistant Professor of Agricultural Education in Department of Community and Leadership Development in the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture. **Martha Nall** is an Extension Professor of Program Staff Development in the Department of Community and Leadership Development at the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture. 6) Paper attached

Abstract

The target population was members of the National FFA organization. A multi-stage cluster sampling technique was used. The responding sample consisted of 36 out of 48 FFA chapters resulting in 1202 participants for a 75% responses rate. Dillman (2000) survey research procedures were followed. The instrument was a researcher-developed 64 item survey. Participants indicated their agreement using a four point Likert-type scale. With regard to role, respondents indicated that during participation in leadership activities they are most frequently treated as resources and partners but also as program recipients and objects. The context of leadership activities is least likely to be community-based. When youth are treated as partners, the partnership focused on developing self. Respondents tended to be white males, high school freshmen with one year in FFA. In addition, few held a chapter office (less than 25% were officers at the local level). Future research should include greater analysis youth's role and context of leadership activities specifically how it relates to educational level and years of experience in FFA.

Introduction

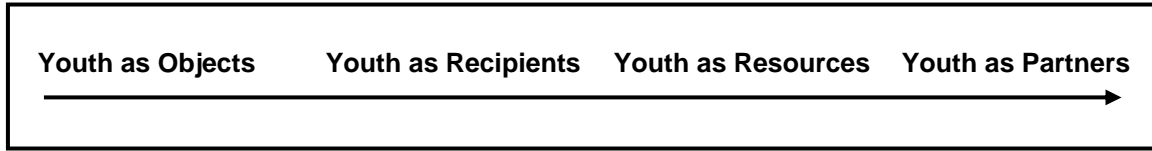
Over the past several decades, a number of studies have attempted to characterize the leadership skills and behaviors of various youth organizations. These studies have tended to examine either the degree to which youth have acquired particular leadership life skills or the level within the organization at which the members have participated in leadership activities. Little attention has been paid to either the conceptual role that the young person plays in the day-to-day functioning of society or the context in which the leadership behaviors are performed. Research has suggested that the most effective leadership develop programs engage young people in meaningful ways as they work as partners with adults in addressing real world situations.

Literature Review

Role of Youth in Society

Lofquist (1989) developed what he termed a "spectrum of attitudes" that adults may hold regarding the role of young people in society. The left side of his continuum (See Figure 1.) represents an attitude where young people are viewed as "objects," being told what to do because the adult "knows what's best" for the youth. As "recipients," young people participate in learning experiences that adults see as "being good for them." However, the real contributions of young people are seen as being deferred until some later date and learning experiences are seen as practice for later life. When youth are viewed as "resources", actions of young people have present value to the community and there is an attitude of respect focusing on building self-esteem and being productive. The Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development (2001) later added a characterization of youth as "partners" to Lofquist's original continuum. As partners, youth share leadership and decision-making roles with adults.

Figure 1. A Spectrum of Adult Attitudes toward Youth



The view that adults take toward young people tends to shape the nature of the leadership programs they design. In some programs, leadership is taught through formal routines that emphasize command and compliance. The leader is “in charge” and followers are objects to be directed. In other programs, youth run club meetings and organize events as practice for more significant roles in the community later in life. In these instances youth are recipients of programs designed by well-meaning adults. When programs involve young people as resources, youth grow, gaining knowledge, skills and building self-esteem from their involvement in service learning activities such as food drives and community clean-up campaigns while performing needed functions within their community. More recently, youth have been engaged as full partners with adults in making decisions and taking actions aimed at producing sustainable and vibrant communities.

Context of Leadership Activity

Ayres (1987) identified four key developmental phases through which individuals engaged in a leadership curriculum should progress. (See Figure 2.) First individuals must develop an expanded knowledge of self, that is, who they are, what they believe, and how they function. Next they move toward mastering skills necessary to work effectively with others. In the next phase, individuals refine their skills working with groups or organizations. The final phase focuses on leadership within the context of communities, systems, and society. As the arena in which leadership is being practiced continues to broaden, individuals must use knowledge and skills learned at previous levels to be effective in the new context.

Figure 2. Context of Leadership Activity



Similarly, Austin (1996) offered a leadership model which focused on developing knowledge and skills first at the individual level, emphasizing that “before we can contribute to a larger effort, it is imperative that we understand ourselves.” (p. 118) However, in this model group development included both the knowledge and skills related to interpersonal communication and interactions, as well as, the ability to participate in and understand group development, working together to achieve goals, and dealing with conflict. The third level in this model of leadership development focuses on community, recognizing that the ultimate goal of individual and group development is to serve the common good beyond the individual or organization.

Purpose and Research Objectives

The overall purpose of this study is to describe and map the leadership activities and adult-youth interactions of rural students who are current members of the National FFA Organization.

Specific objectives of the study include:

- 1) Describe the context in which leadership activities are performed.
- 2) Describe the role of youth in those activities.
- 3) Plot the intersection of role and context.
- 4) Examine demographics of FFA members.

Methods

The target population for this descriptive study was members of the National FFA Organization. Specially, rural youth were identified. For the purposes of this study, “rural schools” was defined as those serving a geographic region containing no city or town larger than ten thousand residents. Multi-stage cluster sampling technique was implemented to draw a representative sample of active FFA members from across the United States. In the first stage, three states were randomly selected from each of the four National FFA regions for a total of twelve states. In the second stage of the sampling procedure, state FFA Advisors randomly selected four schools, each containing a FFA chapter which serves rural areas. Of these 48 schools, a total of 36 FFA chapters (75%) responded, resulting in 1202 FFA members (N=1202) completing surveys.

Development of Instrument

A researcher developed instrument was created for the purpose of collecting data regarding youth participation in leadership activities. The context of youth activities were identified by developing statements which reflect the potential roles FFA members engage in as they develop leadership skills moving from personal development to interpersonal development to organizational and group development to ultimately engaging in community and societal leadership (Ayers, 1987).

Roles of youth in adult-youth relationships through leadership activities were also examined. Questions were developed which reflected the role in which FFA members were engaged through leadership activities which viewed them as objects, recipients, resources, and/or partners (Lofquist, 1989).

Researchers created a matrix integrating the context of leadership development in relationship to the roles of youth in the leadership activities conducted by FFA chapters. Four questions were developed for each cell of the matrix. A total of sixty-four questions were developed in this instrument, corresponding to the sixteen quadrants of the role-context matrix (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Role-Context Matrix Explaining Cell Alignment

Context of Activity	Community	13	14	15	16
	Groups	9	10	11	12
	Others	5	6	7	8
	Self	1	2	3	4
		Objects	Recipients	Resources	Partners
Role of Young People					

Each question began with the statement, “In my FFA Chapter...” and through responses FFA members measured their current state of leadership activities. Responses were measured using a four point Likert-type scale. The points on the scale were: “1” = “Strongly Disagree”, “2” = “Disagree”, “3” = “Agree”, “4” = “Strongly Agree”.

For example, a cell 1 statement representing Self and Objects was “In my FFA Chapter...New members must participate in initiation activities.” In contrast, cell 16 represents Community and Partners. A specific statement in this cell read “In my FFA Chapter...Members work side by side with local citizens in planning, conducting and evaluating meaningful community projects.” Four statements were developed for each cell in the role-context matrix describing FFA leadership activities in the paired levels in the role-context matrix.

Validity and reliability of this instrument was established. Content and face validity of the instrument was established using a panel of experts. These experts were in the field of leadership development, current agricultural education teachers serving on the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE) Board of Directors, Extension staff, agricultural education pre-service teachers, and former FFA members. The instrument was pilot tested with high school FFA members not included in the random sample. Reliability was established using Chronbach’s Alpha and was reported for each construct. Scores included: Objects ($\alpha=.71$), Recipients ($\alpha=.85$), Resources ($\alpha=.88$), Partners ($\alpha=.86$), Self ($\alpha=.72$), Interpersonal ($\alpha=.88$), Groups ($\alpha=.88$), and Community ($\alpha=.88$).

After receiving approval from the Human Subjects Review Board, researchers received a waiver of consent. Permission was granted by the FFA advisor and school administrator for their students to participate in the study. Dillman (2000) research design method was incorporated; therefore 48 FFA chapter advisors were notified of the opportunity to participate prior to the first mailing. Follow-up contacts were made with non-respondent FFA chapters. Ultimately, 36 FFA

chapters agreed to participate in the study, leading to a response rate of 75%. Survey instruments were mailed to the chapter advisors. Each advisor administered the survey instrument to all FFA members in their chapter. Researchers received 1202 completed survey instruments. Research data were analyzed using SPSS 10.0. Descriptive statistics of frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were given for each objective.

Findings

The first objective described the context (Self, Others, Groups, Community) in which leadership activities are performed (Table 1). FFA members viewed leadership activities focusing on personal development (self) as the greatest (M=3.01) context in which leadership activities are performed. Members viewed activities resulting in interpersonal (others) development (M=2.92) as the second highest. Leadership activities resulting in skills related to group development (M=2.90) followed. Community/Society Development leadership activities were perceived as area of least involvement (M=2.88).

Table 1

Context in which Leadership Activities are Performed

	M	SD
Self	3.01	.520
Others	2.92	.530
Groups	2.90	.528
Community	2.88	.599

1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly Agree

The second objective described the role of youth (Objects, Recipients, Resources, Partners) in leadership activities (Table 2). FFA members viewed themselves as partners (M=2.99) to a greater degree than any of the other roles. However, following very closely, youth saw their role as resources (M=2.97) in leadership activities. FFA members viewed their role in leadership activities as recipients (M=2.88) and objects (M=2.87) less than they viewed their role as partners and resources.

Table 2

Describe the Role of Youth in Leadership Activities

	M	SD
Objects	2.87	.515
Recipients	2.88	.507
Resources	2.97	.534
Partners	2.99	.548

1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly Agree

The third objective was to analyze the intersection of role and context to the leadership activities. Figure 4 shows how FFA members perceived their role in leadership activities related to the context (Self, Others, Groups, Communities). When members responded to survey statements regarding the role and context of their leadership involvement, they indicated the greatest agreement in the cell relating to involvement as a partner and understanding self as a leader (M=3.07) (Self and Partners role-context). Youth perceived their role and context as resources and self (M=3.03) and recipients and self (M=3.03) equally. This indicates that in the resources and self role-context matrix, members viewed activities which focused on personal development (self) in the context of being resources or recipients. Members responded they had the least agreement with statements indicating their role was objects in the context of group development (M=2.79).

Figure 4. Matrix Showing Intersection of Role and Context

Context of Activity	Community	2.82	2.85	2.95	2.91
	Groups	2.97	2.84	3.01	2.99
	Others	2.93	2.80	2.90	3.01
	Self	2.94	3.03	3.03	3.07
		Objects	Recipients	Resources	Partners
Role of Young People					

1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly Agree

FFA members responded to statements which identified the relationship between the roles of youth in leadership activities within the leadership context (Table 3). Means and standard deviations were expressed for each group of statements in the role-context matrix. The standard deviations showing the greatest variance were all related to the context of leadership in the community (SD=7.12, SD=6.96, SD=6.94). The standard deviations showing the least variance was in the context of groups (SD=5.98). However, the next four cells with the lowest variance was in the context of developing self (SD=6.05, SD=6.11, SD=6.22, SD=6.22). It should be noted this is consistent with the mean scores for self as reported in Figure 4.

Table 3

Means of Role and Context

	M	SD
Objects and Self	2.94	.611
Objects and Others	2.93	.647
Objects and Groups	2.79	.666
Objects and Community	2.82	.694
Recipients and Self	3.03	.622
Recipients and Others	2.80	.679
Recipients and Groups	2.84	.598
Recipients and Community	2.85	.712
Resources and Self	3.03	.622
Resources and Others	2.90	.647
Resources and Groups	3.01	.648
Resources and Community	2.95	.666
Partners and Self	3.07	.605
Partners and Others	3.01	.664
Partners and Groups	2.99	.670
Partners and Community	2.91	.696

1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly Agree

The final objective focused on the personal characteristics of rural FFA members (Table 4). Over half of the respondents were male (53.08%). Of those who reported ethnicity, over two-thirds (78.20%) were white. Almost five percent (4.74%) were black, and the same amount (4.74%) reported their ethnicity as Hispanic. Approximately two percent were Asian (2.25%) and 2.75% of the respondents indicated their ethnicity as other.

In terms of level of education, nearly one-third of FFA members were high school freshman (29.95%). Approximately one-fourth of the respondents were sophomores (24.63%), 18.97% were juniors, 15.64% reported being seniors, and 7.65% of the respondents were in Middle School.

Almost 4 out of 10 members (39.43%) were first year members of FFA, and 21.55% were second year members. Fifteen percent have been members for three years (15.81%), over one-tenth (11.23%) have been members for 4 years, and 3.99% have been FFA members for 5 years. Finally, 4.33% of the respondents reported being an FFA member for six years.

In terms of leadership positions in the FFA, only 23.13% of the respondents reported serving as a chapter officer, while almost three-fourths (74.29%) have not held an office in their FFA chapter.

Table 5

Personal Characteristics of Rural FFA Members

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Gender		
Male	638	53.08
Female	525	43.68
Ethnicity		
White, Non-Hispanic	940	78.20
Black, Non-Hispanic	57	4.74
Hispanic	57	4.74
Asian	27	2.25
Other	33	2.75
Grade in School		
Middle School	92	7.65
Freshman	360	29.95
Sophomore	296	24.63
Junior	228	18.97
Senior	188	15.64
Years in FFA		
1	474	39.43
2	259	21.55
3	190	15.81
4	135	11.23
5	48	3.99
6	52	4.33
Chapter Officer		
Yes	278	23.13
No	893	74.29

Conclusions/Recommendations/Implications**Conclusions**

Respondents indicate that through their leadership activities they are able to move through various leadership roles. These roles ranged from leadership as objects (participating because it is good for them) to being resources and partners in leadership roles which help them develop as individuals (self). FFA members believe that in all roles, objects, recipients, resources and partners, they have the least experience as it relates to community.

When examining the role of youth through leadership activities, respondents indicated the strongest agreement in being treated as partners. However, their partnership focused on developing self. As we looked at developing leadership knowledge and skills moving from self to interpersonal development (others) to group development and ultimately to community/society development, the means decreased at each level. This indicates less opportunity for involvement in leadership activities focusing on developing skills at a higher level.

Respondents tended to be white males, high school freshmen with one year in FFA. In addition, few held a chapter office (less than 25% were officers at the local level).

Implications

There was not a strong agreement with any statement describing the roles and context of leadership activities. Thus, this lack of agreement implies there is a great variance in the way respondents viewed their chapter leadership activities.

Participants in FFA chapters recognize the focus on their own personal development in leadership activities. However results from this study imply these youth have not been given the opportunity for community and group development. Because of the educational level and years of experience in FFA indicated by the demographic data, researchers can not conclude chapters are not developing the higher level of leadership skills in context of groups and community.

Recommendations

It is recommended FFA chapters continue to organize activities around the conceptual framework identified in this study. Ultimately, FFA chapters should design activities to engage youth as objects, recipients, resources, and partners in an age-appropriate manner. Similarly leadership development activities should help young people gain skills that help them better understand self, interact with others, function effectively in groups, and provide leadership within the community. Currently, FFA is less likely to teach leadership in real community contexts.

However, the benefits of engaging young people as partners in addressing real community issues and concerns are increasingly well documented. When young people exercise leadership in real community contexts, their activities have more meaning and young people feel a stronger bond to the community in which they live. Furthermore, when leadership development activities have real consequences, they are not seen as just practice for future community roles. Community-based leadership experiences include service learning, action research, youth organizing, and serving on community boards.

Further study should examine the role and context of leadership development through FFA activities with upper classmen and experienced FFA leaders. Further analysis of data should compare years in FFA and leadership experiences in FFA by geographic regions.

Future plans include replication of this study including focus group interviews with chapter leaders to further define and clarify the degree of involvement in their roles and the context of

the activities. This will provide qualitative data to further explore implications to this study. In future studies, scenarios which describe leadership situations comparing the context and roles will be incorporated. Ranking of these scenarios will provide additional validation to the FFA member's leadership activities at the chapter level as they relate to role and context.

References

- Ayers, J. (1987). *The Leadership Development Continuum*. Department of Agricultural Economics, West Lafayette, IN, Journal Paper 11, 813.
- Bell, J. (1996). *A Key to Developing Positive Youth-Adult Relationships*. Humanics. Spring.
- Calvert, M., Zeldin, S., and Weisenbach, A. (2002.) *Youth Involvement for Community, Organizational, and Youth Development: Directions for Research, Evaluation, and Practice*. Takoma Park, MD: Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development.
- Camino, L. (2001) CO-SAMM: A Tool to Assess Youth Leadership. *CYD (Community Youth Development) Journal*, 3(1).
- Dillman, D. A. (2000). *Mail and internet surveys: The tailored design method (2nd ed.)*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development (2001). *Building Community*. Takoma Park, MD: Author.
- Irby, M., et. al (2001). *Youth Action: Youth Contributing to Communities, Communities Supporting Youth*. Community and Youth Development Series, Vol. 6. Takoma Park, MD: The Forum for Youth Investment, International Youth Foundation.
- Kurth-Schai, R. (1994). *Young People as Resources: The Challenge of Transforming Dreams into Reality*. New Designs for Youth Development. Fall.
- Lofquist, W. (1989). *The Technology of Prevention*. Tucson, AZ: Associates for Youth Development.
- Zeldin, S., McDaniel, A., Topitzes, D. & Calvert, M. (2000). *Youth in Decision-Making: A Study on the Impacts of Youth on Adults and Organizations*. Chevy Chase, MD: Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, a Division of National 4-H Council.