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Abstract: *This article reports on a qualitative study to assess Texas Family Consumer Science (FCS) Extension professionals' experiences working with individuals with disabilities and their perceived skills in promoting and delivering inclusive educational programming for this audience. Study results indicate that overall Extension educators viewed inclusive programming for individuals with disabilities as favorable but also reported a number of barriers to successfully implement inclusive programs. Educators' most pressing needs included: professional development in the area of disability, inclusive educational strategies and support funds for necessary accommodations. Implications for promoting and delivering inclusive educational programming for communities are addressed.*

Introduction

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, nearly 50 million Americans, one of every five people ages 5 and older, have a disability. Disability population categories vary across age, ethnicity, gender, race, and socioeconomic status. Children with a disability represent approximately 12% of the population (Erickson, Lee, & von Schrader, 2012) and according to some estimates (Fujiura & Yamaki, 2000; Merrick & Carmeli, 2003; Wiler & Lomax, 2000) are growing. Furthermore, as of March 2010, the percentage of people with disabilities in the labor force was 22.5% (Erickson, Lee, & von Schrader, 2012). Constituting 20% of the U.S. population, those with a disability represent the nation's largest minority group and at-risk population.

Given these statistics it is imperative that Extension improve its outreach to the disability community and provide avenues of access to its educational programs. To accomplish this, it is vital that we understand how well Extension educators are prepared to address the needs of this population and the professional development areas necessary to support its employees in providing inclusive educational programming. With the push for inclusive schools and communities, the question becomes "Are Extension agents equipped to promote and deliver inclusive educational programming for the communities they serve?"

Background

Extension has been successful at recruiting and serving diverse audiences. A literature review of the Journal of Extension (Feature, Research in Brief, Ideas at Work, and Tools of the Trade) from 2000 through 2012 revealed that Extension has made considerable efforts to improve outreach and educational offerings for diverse

audiences. The review revealed 64 articles that focused on diverse audiences. Of these articles, 42 addressed serving ethnic populations, and 14 focused on the need for strategies to address diverse audiences. For example, articles addressed diversity in relationship to public value (Franz, 2011), professional development including cultural diversity (Ingram, 2002; Youmans, 2004), changing organizational frameworks (Ingram, 2005; Ingram & Radhakrishna, 2002; Iverson 2008; Schaubert, 2001a; Schaubert, 2001b; Schaubert & Castania, 2001), recruitment and marketing strategies (Hoorman, 2002), and working with minority populations (Allen, Gudino, Crawford, 2011; Guinn, Chattaraj, & Lytle, 2004).

However, only eight articles address the needs of individuals with disabilities. Of those articles, seven addressed serving youth with disabilities in Extension programs. Boone, Boone, Reed, Woloshuk, and Gartin, (2006) reported that Extension personnel were favorable toward involvement of special needs youth in 4-H programs, while the other articles addressed serving youth with disabilities in programs (Brill 2011; Brady & McKee 2005; Goble & Eyre 2008; Green 2012; Stumpf-Downing, Henderson, Liken, Bialeschki, 2004; Stumpf, Henderson, Luken, Bialeschki & Casey II, 2002). One article addressed the engagement of Extension Agents in serving survivors with Traumatic Brain Injuries (Sellers & Garcia, 2012).

For the purpose of the study reported here, the American's with Disabilities Act definition of disability is used. The Americans with Disabilities Act describes a disability as "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual; a record of such an impairment; or being regarded as having such an impairment. Major life activities include, but are not limited to, caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, standing, lifting, bending, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, concentrating, thinking, communicating, and working" (Cornell, 2008).

Significance

Attracting and providing educational services to marginalized populations such as individuals with disabilities adds public value to Extension as an agency (Allen, Gudino, & Crawford, 2011; Hoorman, 2002; Schaubert & Castania, 2001). Three of the four identified public value areas identified by Kalambokidis (2004) include: 1) narrowing the information gap, 2) ability to reduce costs or increasing benefits for stakeholders, and 3) public good related to the educational and information services. The added public value weight to Extension for providing these needed services to the disability community comes from a larger disability population currently underserved because of fewer available resources and Federal funding losses (NABSCO, 2011). Extension can target, develop inclusive programs, and meaningfully include the disability community in its educational programs with the potential to add significant public value for the agency as a whole.

Extension educators are in favor of programs that are inclusive for individuals with disabilities (Boone et al., 2006; Brill, 2011) and are aware that during the development phase of Extension programs, agents need to consistently consider the nuances of this population for the program to be fully inclusive. Fully inclusive accessible settings are those that are collaborative, supportive, nurturing and are focused on giving all learners the services and accommodations they need (Jackson, Ryndak, & Billingsley, 2000). However, despite the perceived advantages of providing inclusive programs, the barriers to including individuals with disabilities often remains unresolved. The practical implementation of inclusion places considerable pressure on the program planner and on those who facilitate that process (Florien, 1998) in this case the Extension agent. Additionally, providing educational programs to diverse audiences requires a good understanding of the identified population's needs and cultural values (Hoorman, 2002).

Problem Statement

In light of this identified need, little is known about Extension professionals' experiences working with individuals with disabilities and their perceived skills in promoting and delivering inclusive educational programming for individuals and families with disabilities. How does Extension serve this population and ensure that extension programs are inclusive and fully accessible?

Research Goals and Design

Based on the absence of existing literature, the purpose of the descriptive research study reported here was to analyze the perceptions of Texas Extension personnel regarding individuals with disabilities' participation in Extension-related activities/programs and identify ways that Extension might better connect and serve individuals with disabilities and their families. To accomplish this purpose, the following research goals were addressed:

Assess Texas FCS Extension agents'

- Experience with delivering educational programs that included persons with disabilities,
- Prior educational and professional training opportunities that targeted how to effectively plan inclusive educational programs,
- Knowledge/availability of agency/community supports on disability related issues,
- Perceived barriers to providing inclusive educational programs, and
- Proposed solutions to increase participation of this population.

Participants

Forty (FCS, 4-H, Expanded Nutrition, Regional Program Director) Extension educators representing urban, suburban, and rural counties in Texas participated in the focus group study. In Texas, Family Consumer Science Agents also at times are the designated 4-H program representative for their county and the agency. Detailed demographics are reported in Table 1 below.

Table 1.
Demographic Characteristics

Demographics		Frequency
Gender	Females	38
	Males	2
	African American	2

Ethnicity	Anglo	29
	Hispanic	9
Education	Bachelor's	13
	Masters	22
	Ph.D./Ed.D.	4
Years of Experience	0.5-10 yrs	21
	10-20 yrs	10
	20-30 yrs	7
	30-40 yrs	1
Specialty Area	FCS	35
	FCS/4-H	2
	4-H	1
	Expanded Nutrition Program	1
	Regional Program Director	1

Instrumentation

Discussion Probes

The focus group's discussion probes addressed three broad areas, namely experience, resources and program availability. The specific questions asked were:

- What is your experience with disability?
- What resources in your county/counties assist persons with disabilities?
- What Extension education programs are available for families and which of these programs would be beneficial to individuals w/disabilities and their families?

A series of clarification points were developed under each of the three broad categories to further determine and capture developing themes.

Data Collection

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in conjunction with the Texas A&M Center for Disability and Development (CDD) conducted a series of focus groups at seven locations around the state with county agents. Focus group locations were selected to gain input from rural and urban agents. A focus group format with a structured interview protocol was used. Discussion probes were used to guide conversations. The sessions lasted approximately 60 minutes. Focus groups were audio recorded and later transcribed. Focus group procedures, including the discussion guide, were approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Texas A&M University System.

Data Analysis

Transcripts were entered into the QSR NVivo 7 (Richards & Richards, 2006), a qualitative coding software program, to facilitate data analysis. Data were analyzed using an iterative content analysis process of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification as recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994). The data from each focus group were coded by a team of three coders. To ensure credibility and reliability, a coding-check procedure (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was utilized whereby each transcript was coded by a primary and a secondary coder. When a consensus on how to code a particular response could not be reached by the first two coders a third coder was used to help reach a decision (Resche et al., 2010).

A multilayered coding process for analyzing the data was implemented wherein the researchers developed an initial list of codes (primary codes) that were structured based on the discussion probes as well as relevant literature. The initial codes were subsequently categorized into superordinate (or second level) codes through an intentional process of data reduction (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The second level codes allowed for the examination of broad thematic constructs of interest that emerged through the coding process (Resche et al., 2010). A theme is commonly defined as a "statement of meaning that runs through all or most of the pertinent data" (Ely, 1991, p. 150).

Results

Probe #1: Texas FCS Agent Experiences with Disability

Education/Professional Development on Disabilities

In general, participants reported limited direct educational experience or opportunities to gain knowledge on disability or inclusive programming strategies. Additionally, the agents present reported that the majority of their education on the subject had been gained through a prior career.

Agent "We've had professional development trainings on cultural diversities and include a little bit on disabilities, but most often it's the ethnicity."

Agent "interestingly enough my master's degree in resource development, research management for special needs populations, which were the elderly."

Agent "Prior to working for extension in 2000, ...I was a teacher and we had in-services on educating students with special needs and uh, also my classroom was an inclusion classroom,.."

Experiences with Persons with Disabilities in Their Programs

On the whole, agents reported limited participation of adults and youth with disabilities in their educational programs. In addition, agents reported very little

participation in county needs' assessments or advisory boards by members of the disability community.

Agent "I haven't had much experience with parents or children with disabilities."

Agent "I just couldn't tell you if any of our 4H-ers had any, any disabilities that were visible."

Agent "The last time we did the long range extension program planning progress ... we brought in citizens from all over the county as diverse as possible ... one of the gentlemen who participated...he had some condition, I'm thinking it was epilepsy...:"

Availability of Inclusion Materials

Agents reported having limited materials geared toward marketing and including individuals with disabilities in their programs.

Agent "Well the only one I've ever really seen is the one where you, what's that little pamphlet on how to make your home more...you know, accessible."

Agent "I've been contacted here recently to do a parenting program just for parents who have children with special needs and that's autism...I don't have that curriculum; I don't have something that's just for children with special needs or for those parents."

Probe #2: Identified Factors Supporting or Inhibiting Inclusionary Texas FCS programming

Inclusion issues/barriers. Agents reported issues and barriers related to inclusive programming including: a) lack of knowledge and understanding of disability and disability issues, b) insufficient training on inclusion of persons with disabilities available for the volunteers running Extension programs, c) limited appropriate educational materials, d) lack of available marketing materials, e) insufficient funding resources and f) lack of available transportation resources.

Agent "I think it starts with us, we just need to understand disability."

Agent: "I think the first step, ...you would need to educate us, before we can go out and help others, we are going to have to know what we are dealing with as a whole... programs have to have a real impact or real answers for them..."

Probe #3: Identified needs by Texas FCS Agents related to serving the disability population in their communities

Identified Needs

Identified needs of Extension agents for introducing and implementing inclusive programming included: 1) professional development and training in the areas of disability and inclusive educational strategies, 2) educational materials, 3) better marketing strategies to address this population, 4) support funds for necessary accommodations such as interpreters and instructional materials in Braille, and 5) a resource directory of community resources for this population.

Agent "I definitely feel like I need more knowledge on not disabilities in general, but specific disabilities, maybe more common ones, definitely the ones found in children like autism, and some of those other disabilities that are coming up and I don't know how to address..."

Agent "Having some more education on specific disabilities and specific ways to address audiences or to reach that person, what's their best way of learning and things like that."

The table below displays the number and frequency of agent responses connected to probes number 1, 2, and 3. Agents' responses to participation by the disability community in their educational programs were equated to a three-point scale. The levels of participation by individuals with disabilities in FCS educational programs by category were ranked from "No awareness" to "Robust Participation Observed" on a three-point scale, with the first level equated to the FCS agent experiencing none of their educational program activities accessed by individuals with disabilities, level 2 equated to FCS agents experiencing two to three of their educational program activities accessed by individuals with disabilities, and level 3 equated to FCS agents experiencing four or more of their educational program activities accessed by individuals with disabilities. Levels of professional development provided by Extension or through another program were equated to a three-point scale ranked from "No Professional Training" to "Significant Amount of Professional Training" establishing the level of agents' professional knowledge in the identified categories.

Table 2.
Texas Family Consumer Science Agents' Experiences with Disability

Code Description	Code Definition	Experience Level	Frequency
Family participation in educational programs	Participated in AgriLife Extension educational programs/activities and agents' experiences with disability community	No Awareness of Participation	2
		Minimal Participation Levels Recognized	23
		Robust Participation Observed	13
Family participation in needs assessment	Participated in AgriLife Extension needs assessments and agents' experiences	No Awareness of Participation	26
		Minimal Participation Levels Recognized	6
		Robust Participation Observed	7
Contact by Families	Disability community utilizing AgriLife Extension as a resource	No Awareness of Participation	2
		Minimal Participation	12

		Levels Recognized	
		Robust Participation Observed	11
Office information on disabilities	Indication of utilization of AgriLife Extension as an educational resources for disability community	No Awareness of Participation	22
		Minimal Participation Levels Recognized	8
		Robust Participation Observed	6
Formal training on disabilities	Indication of AgriLife Extension agents' professional training on disabilities	No Professional Training	20
		Minimal Professional Training	8
		Significant amount of Professional Training	12

Discussion

Barriers to participation in Extension programs often influence the means of program delivery and approaches to developing educational programs. While inclusive program planning and delivery for individuals with disabilities is viewed favorably by Extension agents (Boone et al. 2006), research demonstrates that such programming requires education, guidance, and knowledge of specific strategies to be successful (Dromgoole & Boleman, 2006; Lakai, Jayaratne, Moore, & Kistler, 2012; Rodgers, Hillaker, Haas, & Peters, 2012). Research in the field of integration and inclusion has identified some of the causes leading to the absence of inclusion of individuals with disabilities in community programs (Florien, 1998). While some professionals tout prejudices as reasons for the exclusion of this population, Center and Ward (1987) proposed that often the resistance of community programs to inclusive efforts is based on a lack of confidence the professionals feel toward providing accommodations and modifications of the curriculum and the environment. This theory is supported by the study reported here.

Integration of individuals with disabilities places additional demands on the professionals who might feel inadequately prepared. In general, research indicates a very limited amount of coursework dedicated to the subject unless the post-secondary educational programs are geared toward the education of children with disabilities (Chang, Early, Winton, 2005; Hourigan, 2007; Pugach, 2005). The study supports that finding. Many Extension educators received their formal educational training in areas where inclusion of individuals with special needs was not a prioritized educational objective; consequently, these professionals probably feel inadequately prepared to provide inclusive programs.

Additionally, as indicated by agents' responses, Extension programs were not often accessed by individuals with disabilities. The participating FCS agents identified several programmatic barriers in serving this population that included the lack of:

1. Marketing materials highlighting the benefit of its programs for this population;
2. General or specific disability knowledge; and
3. Resources such as financial means to pay for interpreters.

The participants hypothesized that the lack of marketing materials including this population as a target audience might inadvertently send a message to the disability community that Extension's programs are not meant for them.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Acknowledged across numerous federal and state agencies is the fact that public service organizations will need a new set of skills to better meet the needs of an ever growing disability population (Brault, 2008; Brill, 2011; Erickson, Lee, & von Schrader, 2012; Ingram, 1999; Merrick & Carmeli, 2003; Schaubert & Castania, 2001). Therefore, the documented current growth and rapid projected growth of the disability population should be an indicator for the necessity of organizational proactive strategies to meet the needs of Extension professionals in serving this population. As noted earlier, Extension has long been successful at recruiting and serving diverse audiences, yet to do so effectively, Extension professionals must know the nuances of this population and gain a strong understanding of the culture in order to build relationships and meet the needs of individuals with disabilities in communities. Specific and strategic marketing strategies must be implemented to attract this audience, which also requires extensive knowledge of the population (Allen, Gudino, & Crawford, 2011; Nehiley, 2001; Stumpf-Downing, Henderson, Luken, & Bialeschki, 2004).

Extension as an organization has proven strategies to meet the needs of diverse audiences; however, based on the literature search and responses from the study reported here, disability populations are often not considered or thought of when using the term "Diversity." Disability is a form of diversity, and members of this population have specific cultural norms. For example: Person First Language is a must when delivering educational programs that include this population. Anyone not following this protocol when delivering programs could very well ostracize themselves with this group totally unaware that saying something like "special needs youth," "the handicapped individual," or "the physically impaired individual" is terribly offensive and demeaning to this population (American Psychological Association, 2010; Back, 2010).

The results of the focus group study highlight several challenges surrounding providing truly inclusive Family Consumer Science (FCS) Extension programs for individuals with disabilities in Texas. Additionally, the study highlights the need for a proactive strategy addressing professional training in this area for Extension professionals. The Texas FCS Extension agents involved in the study indicated that supplementary supports would be very helpful and necessary in order to include individuals with disabilities routinely in their educational programs.

Recommendations supported by the study reported here and by other Extension scholars published in the *Journal of Extension* (Allen, Gudino, & Crawford, 2011; Boone

et al., 2006; Goble, & Eyre, 2008; Green, 2012; Guin, Chattaraj, & Lytle, 2004; Hoorman, 2002; Ingram, 2005; Lakai, & Jayaratne, 2012; Nehiley, 2001; Schaubert, 2001a) are:

1. Provide professional development on general disability awareness;
2. Provide specific professional development on the strategies for implementing inclusive programs;
3. Provide extension personnel with an up-to-date resource directory outlining available resources for this population; and
4. Provide personnel with funding sources to pay for additional supports such as interpreters, etc.

Recommendations resulting from the study of particular interest and significance to U.S. Extension professionals in connection with the communities it serves include:

1. Engage in a marketing campaign targeting Extension program benefits for this population (Ingram, Dorsey, & Smith, 2004);
2. Establish an inclusive programming structure which embraces universal design teaching strategies; and
3. Implement a universal program plan (Schauber, & Castania, 2001; Franz, 2011) that intentionally engages the disability community.

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