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Creative Approach to Evaluating: The Tri-Fold Display Example

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Abstract: One benefit in working for Extension is the educator's ability to be "creative." However, creativity and evaluation typically are not two words an Extension educator uses in the same sentence. This article highlights one creative evaluation strategy used at a youth wildlife camp. The evaluation strategy utilizes a tri-fold display allowing participants the ability to "showcase" what they learned. From their "showcase," the Extension educator can use simple evaluation techniques to determine the most significant item learned. An extra bonus is that these participants use these tri-folds in communities to tell others about their experiences building critical life skills.

Introduction

Warren Bennis once said, "There are two ways of being creative. One can sing and dance. Or one can create an environment in which singers and dancers flourish" (Baker & Campbell (2003), p. 236). As Extension educators, it is our responsibility to ensure we are providing a creative environment for our audiences to learn. In Extension, creativeness is often discussed when outlining teaching methodology or marketing of programs. However, could creativity be used when discussing evaluation?

It is no secret that Extension has entered the age of accountability. In order to measure program effectiveness, all Extension employees are strongly encouraged to evaluate their programs. These evaluations typically address outputs (satisfaction), outcomes (knowledge, skills, behaviors), and economics (monetary benefits or money saved).

This article introduces a creative approach to measuring a behavioral outcome. Most of this journal's readers are familiar with pre-test/post-test, retrospective posttests, interviews, and focus groups. There are numerous articles in the *Journal of Extension* as well as other Extension publications that reveal impact using these types of methodologies. However, what else is available? How can we measure program impact from participants (especially youth) using new or creative means?

One innovative approach to determine what participants considered to be the most significant item they learned during a youth educational program is a tri-fold display. This product is developed by participants and then taken home with them after the program, where it is used to teach others about their educational program experience. This is an interesting methodology to utilize because the educators are actually evaluating impact without the participant even realizing that they are being evaluated.

Methodology & Materials Needed

At the end of a program (camp, lab, or conference), each participant is asked to develop a display board that addresses the most meaningful item they learned during the program. They are then given a time frame to complete the project (usually 2 - 4 hours). Their assignment is to develop a theme and then use pictures, markers, computer documents, etc., to create their tri-fold outlining their most meaningful learning item. The specific materials needed are:

- Cardboard tri-fold tabletop display (36 x 48")

- Computer/printer/paper

- Markers

- Construction paper

- Scissors

- Glue/adhesive

- Magazines with pictures

- Newspapers

- Other periodicals

Figure 1 reveals a common tri-fold display. However, it is worth pointing out that participants can be as creative as they want when building their display.

Figure 1.
Schematic of a Tri-Fold Display

<p><i>Support Resources and additional teaching points</i></p> <p><i>(including pictures, graphs)</i></p>	<p>TITLE OF TRI-FOLD (Theme) <i>Main Idea</i></p> <p><i>Why it is important.....</i></p> <p><i>Support pictures, graphs, images, etc</i></p> <p><i>Teaching point(s)</i></p>	<p><i>Conclusions</i></p> <p><i>including pictures, graphs</i></p> <p><i>Program / Camp Name, Organizational Contact Info, Youth Contact Info</i></p>
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Note: This just an example. Participants are strongly encouraged to be creative when developing their tri-fold display.

Measuring Impact

There are at least two pivotal outcomes that are generated from the tri-fold display. The first is an answer to the question, "what is the most significant item learned?" The evaluators developed a list of themes by directly observing participants as they developed their tri-fold displays. After the list was developed, they then followed procedures outlined by Dooley and Murphy (2001) to categorize and rank themes from participants.

This program was a wildlife youth camp, The South Texas Buckskin Brigade. The results of the tri-fold display direct observation were (n = 30):

- Aging - 8
- Habitat - 6
- Gun Safety - 4
- Nutrition - 3
- Rattling - 1
- Scoring - 1
- Catch and Release Deer - 1

- Camp - 1

- GPS-Brush Management - 1

- Predators - 1

- Game Wardens - 1

- Urban Interface - 1

- Anatomy -1

The second outcome is sharing the subject matter participants learned when they return to their community. Using these tri-fold displays, participants provided educational programs to local civic clubs, schools, churches, 4-H clubs, and other group meetings based on the information in the display. In addition, they discuss the objectives of the camp and encourage other youth to apply if they are interested.

Conclusions

As mentioned in the introduction, evaluation and accountability are critical to the future success of Extension. As Extension educators become more accustomed to implementing evaluation strategies to measure program impacts, they should also consider unique, creative evaluation approaches. This is simply a different approach that determines the most significant item learned by participants. It is especially beneficial when working with youth because it provides them with a chance to reveal their creative side while providing Extension educators with that very important outcome.

Equally as important, these tri-fold displays provide a vehicle for the participants to share their experiences with others. Ultimately, this provides them with much-needed practice in the life skill development areas of organizational skills, self-confidence, and public speaking.

References

Baker, S., & Campbell, G. M. (2003). *The complete idiot's guide to project management*. Alpha Books: New York, NY.

Dooley, K. E., & Murphy, T. H. (2001). College of Agriculture faculty perception of electronic technologies in teaching. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, Volume 42, pp. 1-10.

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