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Running Successful Extension Camps for Hispanic Children: From Program Planning to Program Delivery for a 1-Week Day Camp

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Running Successful Extension Camps for Hispanic Children: From Program Planning to Program Delivery for a 1-Week Day Camp

Abstract

To address the increasing Hispanic population in Illinois and to follow the mission of the University of Illinois Extension, educators must find ways to reach this population. To serve the Hispanic population with non-bilingual staff, it is necessary to address how to plan and deliver a camp, what support is need for non-bilingual Extension personnel, and whether Extension can meet the needs of this population. An evaluation of a summer camp for Spanish-speaking children was conducted. The results of this evaluation demonstrated that Extension programs could be effectively carried out in Hispanic communities with little modification.

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Introduction

The Hispanic population in both the United States and the state of Illinois is rapidly increasing (US Census Bureau, 2000). To address this demographic change and to follow the mission of the University of Illinois Extension to "provide practical, research-based information and programs to help individuals, families, farms, businesses, and communities in Illinois," Extension must find ways to reach this growing Hispanic population. However, involving Hispanic audiences must become an integral part of Extension philosophy and not be developed as a separate program that depends on external funding (Hobbs, 2001).

University of Illinois Extension is committed to serving Hispanics in Illinois, but the lack of bilingual staff has turned this commitment into a challenge. As of 2004, Extension in Illinois only employed two native Spanish-speakers and very few bilingual professionals. When attempting to serve Latino populations with non-bilingual staff, there are some questions that need to be answered:

- How can Extension plan and deliver Extension programs for the Hispanic population?

- What support do non-bilingual Extension personnel need to deliver programs to Hispanic populations?
- How can Extension work to meet the needs of the Hispanic population?

This article reports on the delivery of an Extension program to the Hispanic population and attempts to answer these questions.

Program Planning

Identifying the Need

In 2002, Will County had a population of 502,266, and the Hispanic population represented 8.7% (US Census Bureau, 2000). This was an increase from 5.6% in the 1990 census (US Census Bureau, 1990). University of Illinois Extension and the Hispanic/Latino Coalition of Will and Grundy Counties (HLC) identified a need for safe summer educational activities for Hispanic children. The coalition and this article use both the terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" to refer to the Spanish-speaking community.

Planning for this activity was not a linear process. However, there were some steps that guided the process. Indeed, one of the first steps was to establish a partnership between Extension and HLC. With this partnership, Extension could begin to develop programs to address the needs of the Hispanic population rather than just one project with a limited audience.

The city of Joliet was chosen as the location for the summer camp for several reasons. First, most members of HLC worked for institutions serving Joliet, so their contacts would help to recruit children. Second, a school with more than 80% Latino children was located in Joliet. Third, transportation wouldn't be provided, so the site had to be within a walking distance. Fourth, a member of the HLC worked for the identified school.

Sator S nchez School in Joliet, where the majority of Hispanic children were enrolled, agreed to host the camp. In 2003, two schools were combined to become the Sator Sanchez School. In 2004, 89.1% of the student enrollment was classified as Hispanic. Of the families represented by students in the school, 95.5% were classified as low income.

Involving Community Representatives in the Program Planning Process

After the Hispanic/Latino Coalition of Will and Grundy Counties (HLC) agreed to co-sponsor a summer camp for Hispanic/Latino children, a planning committee with three representatives from HLC and five from University of Illinois Extension began planning the summer camp. The committee met face-to-face four times to plan the camp activities.

There were several decisions the committee needed to make. For example, the site for the summer camp, dates for the camp, ages of participating children, the content and format of the program, length of the program, support for non-bilingual teachers, how to recruit children and volunteers, how to obtain funding for this camp, evaluation of the camp, etc. Volunteer role descriptions were written to encourage parents and older teens to assist with the camp. A risk management plan was also written for the camp setting.

Selecting Extension Curricula that Addressed the Needs of the Hispanic Children

One purpose of the camp was to expose the target population to University of Illinois Extension 4-H Youth Development programs. University of Illinois Extension had previously developed a summer day-camp program, Camp Clover--Your Summer Fun Adventure, for children ages 8-12 from limited resource environments. This camp, designed as a 4-day, 3-hour per day session, consisted of three curriculum sections: social science, nutrition, and physical science. This program had been offered in multiple locations in the state since its inception in 2000, reaching over 6,000 youth, and included several camps for Hispanic children.

Promotion and Enrollment

Promotional materials were distributed by mail using the school's address list. A total of 581 announcements were sent. Promotional materials in both English and Spanish included a flyer promoting Fun, Food, and Friends Summer Day Camp, parent letter, registration form, parental informed consent form, and health form. Flyers were also created and distributed through the HLC.

Twenty-two parents came directly to the Extension office to enroll their children in camp. Seventy-three inquiries were made by phone. Of the phone calls received, 59 required a Spanish interpreter to assist the parent. There was capacity for 100 youth at the camp, and 88 campers were enrolled by the deadline.

Funding

Two grants, one from University of Illinois Extension and one from Joliet Township, plus registration

fees of five dollars per camper, covered the approximately \$4,200 cost of the camp. Expenses for the camp included educational materials, sports equipment, office supplies, lunch for bilingual aides and adult volunteers, camper snacks, stipend for bilingual aides, and insurance. Lunch for the children was provided by the United States Department of Agriculture Federal Summer Lunch Program. Sports equipment, which will be used in future programming, was purchased at a cost of \$650. In-kind contributions consisting of Extension staff time, community volunteers, facility use, and Summer Lunch Program helped to reduce costs.

Program Delivery

Camp Description

The summer camp for Hispanic children, Fun, Food, and Friends Summer Camp, was a 5-day camp from 9:00 a.m.-2:30 p.m. based on Camp Clover curriculum. The morning session, Monday through Thursday, was devoted to three specific curricula from the Camp Clover program: Que Rico-Latino Cultural Arts, Food Guide Pyramid Revisited, and Aerospace Adventures. Also, each day the 4-H pledge was recited in English and Spanish, and other 4-H symbols and traditions were shared. The afternoon program consisted of a variety of physical fitness activities, including soccer, volleyball, basketball, judo, and jump rope. The activities for Friday included a morning session of hands-on science and physical activities, with recognition and concluding ceremonies in the afternoon.

Camp Staff

Seven Extension professionals from county, regional, and state staff were identified to provide the educational content of the camp. Two paraprofessional staff from the Extension Family Nutrition Program (FNP) taught nutrition and coordinated food supplies and lunch for campers and staff. One additional paraprofessional from Will County coordinated the promotion, registration, collection of teaching materials, and evaluation for the camp. Three bilingual teacher's aides were paid a stipend to assist the non-bilingual Extension staff. In addition, several volunteers from the coalition assisted with the program throughout the week (Joliet Police Department, Mt Carmel Catholic Church, Joliet Junior College, Spanish Center of Joliet, and Joliet City Department of Human Services). Staff prepared for the camp with an all-day training session, including a tour of the facility, meeting with the school staff, and hands-on practice with the educational content.

The Camp Clover curricula were reviewed with respect to the Hispanic campers. The only change made was to the Food Guide Pyramid Revisited curriculum. Pita bread was substituted for tortillas because the children preferred heated tortillas, which was a logistical problem. Three counties in Illinois had previously used the Camp Clover program with Hispanic children as a half-day program. They, too, included the change made to the curriculum of the use of pita bread rather than tortillas (Seibold, personal communication, October 10, 2004). They also found interpreters to be helpful.

Program Evaluation

An evaluation of the program was conducted to determine if the program was addressing the target audience's needs. Both quantitative survey and focus group methods were used to evaluate the program.

Focus Groups

Parents were randomly selected to participate in a focus group that took place Thursday afternoon during camp. A total of 15 Hispanic parents participated in the group, 14 females and one male. All participants were Spanish speakers of Mexican origin. The length of time they had been in the U.S. varied from a few months to more than 13 years. The focus group was conducted in Spanish. The conversation was recorded and transcribed by a native Spanish-speaking graduate student.

Quantitative Survey

The educators conducting the camp developed the survey. A native Spanish-speaking graduate student translated and reviewed the questions. An Extension Specialist, also native speaking, made a final review for question content and translation. Suggested modifications were incorporated. Each family received a questionnaire in Spanish or English to complete and return the last day of camp.

Results

A total of 90 children were initially enrolled in the camp. Two children who were pre-registered did not attend the camp. Six children came who were not pre-registered. Of the students attending the first day, 80% completed the entire camp. Of the children attending any day of camp, 56% were female and 44% male. The ages of the children were divided as follows: 8yrs-24.5%, 9 yrs-30.2%, 10yrs-18.9%, 11yrs-17%, and 12 yrs 9.4%.

There were 75 families represented at the camp, and 40 (53%) returned completed questionnaires. The questions and results of the parent's survey concerning benefit to their children and location of the camp are presented in Table 1. The questions allowed for multiple responses. For the

location of the camp, the school was the number one choice for 63% of the parents. The survey also included questions regarding the parents' previous awareness of 4-H and other Extension programs. The results are included in Table 2.

Table 1.
Parents' Responses to Benefits and Location of Camp

	Percent Response
Why did you send your child to this camp?	
It is a good activity for my child	98%
His/Her friends were attending	35%
I want my child to learn new things	95%
The sports activities are important for my child	93%
The educational activities are important for my child	90%
How has your child benefited from this program?	
Learned how to work with other children	85%
Learned new skills	95%
Had the opportunity for organized sports activities	93%
Received a good lunch	68%
Why would you choose the place as your first choice?	
I think it is a secure place	85%
It is in a walking distance	48%
I know the place	63%
I know the people who work there	43%
My child likes to go there	80%

Table 2.
Parents' Knowledge of 4-H and Extension Programs

	Yes	No

Aware of 4-H program	8%	90%
Allow child to join 4-H club if available	93%	5%
Aware of U of I Extension program	5%	95%
Ever attended Extension program	8%	93%
Would you attend Extension programs	85%	15%

The focus group responses verified the findings of the written surveys. The parents participating said they were very interested in their children learning new things, developing their creativity, and learning how to interact with other children.

Also, the parents wanted a safe place for their children to participate in activities. The parents did not like their children to play outside of the home because they did not know other children in the area and they were afraid their children would be exposed to an unsafe environment.

The school was the preferred choice because parents felt it was safe and close to their homes. A recreation center would be acceptable if it were in their neighborhood. Some parents felt the school would be safer than the recreation center. They also said their children liked coming to the camp at the school.

When asked if their children shared with them their daily activities, parents said yes. They said their children liked the camp very much, especially the sports. The children had not talked to them as much about the activity on cultural backgrounds, but some said that their families did not emphasize their Mexican traditions that much, either.

The parents also said that one of the reasons they could send their children to the camp was the reasonable cost (\$5 per child). Parents thought that the camp was very good. The only complaint the parents expressed was that they wished it lasted more than a week, because both parents and children were enjoying it. Some parents said they thought more children would participate in the camp if they knew about it.

In both the survey and the focus group data, parents indicated they were not aware of the 4-H program, nor that it was linked to this camp. During the focus group discussion when it was explained that this camp was developed by University of Illinois Extension 4-H, parents said they would like their children to participate in a 4-H club.

The data also indicated that parents did not know about University of Illinois Extension before this project. Now that they were aware of Extension they said that they or a family member would attend other programs.

Discussion

The planning and delivery of the Fun, Food, and Friends Summer Camp Program for children in the Hispanic population revealed unique challenges to Extension programming. Indeed, to identify the need it was necessary to first partner with an established local group that was working in the area. With the help of this group, relevant needs and an appropriate location were selected. The program planning process involving community representatives, who not only expressed their ideas but also made decisions, was an approach that truly empowered community leaders and enhanced the potential for sustainability of the Fun, Food, and Friends Summer Camp Program. Sustainability is a challenge that Extension professionals must take into consideration when implementing programs.

The selection of the school as the location of choice was not what might be expected from the Hispanic population. Studies have shown that many Hispanic Americans regard the educational institution as one in which they can have no influence (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Inger, 1992). However, the staff of Sator S nchez School has worked in the neighborhood to be part of the community and help the parents feel comfortable with the school. In fact, focus group participants had a favorable opinion of the school as safe and a place they and their children would choose to participate in programs. From the 2004 Illinois School Report Card information, the parental contact at this school is 96%. This is comparable to the district at 96.1% and the state at 96.3% (Illinois State Board of Education, 2004).

One of the challenges in presenting educational material to the Hispanic population is language. The educators noted that 10-15% of the students did not understand English. This level of children who were non-English-speaking represented a higher portion than reported in the 2000 census for

Will County. The level was reported at 3.2% of Spanish-speaking people who spoke English less than very well (US Census Bureau, 2000).

This language barrier was addressed in two ways. One way this barrier was addressed was informally with bilingual children helping to interpret for children lacking language skills. Formally, bilingual aides were recruited to help with the classes. Although for this program teaching teams worked very effectively, the recruitment and training of bilingual teaching aides may be an issue, especially in communities with smaller Hispanic populations. The ideal solution would be to have Spanish-speaking educators; however, availability of bilingual Extension personnel is limited at this time. Programming for the Hispanic population should not be curtailed due to this limitation.

The second strategy used was to present written materials in Spanish and English. Extension had already prepared materials in Spanish, and little modification was needed for presentation to the children attending camp.

To fulfill the mission of the University of Illinois Extension, meeting the needs of the Hispanic population is an important element. The lack of previous knowledge of 4-H and other Extension programs revealed by the focus groups and the surveys demonstrated the need for further outreach by Extension. The positive experience with the Fun, Food, and Friends Summer Camp opened up the opportunity for this outreach in Will County to the Hispanic population. Extension in this area is now positioned to have an impact on not only youth but also other groups in the Hispanic community.

This camp has demonstrated that Extension programs can be effectively carried out in Hispanic communities. It also revealed that existing Extension programs need little or no adaptations when offered to Hispanic children. And finally, the Fun, Food, and Friends Summer Camp is just an example of the kind of 4-H programs that would be welcomed by the Hispanic community.

Limitations

The parents may have been anxious to please the facilitators of the camp and give positive responses to the questions concerning future participation in an effort to ensure more programs would be available to their children. Although 53% of the surveys were returned, this might indicate a bias of parents satisfied with the camp returning the questionnaires. Parents whose children did not enjoy the camp may not have returned the surveys.

Conclusion

The Fun, Food, and Friends Summer Camp has helped answer the three questions posed for this study: How can Extension plan and deliver Extension programs for the Hispanic population? What support do non-bilingual Extension personnel need to deliver programs to Hispanic populations? How can Extension work to meet the needs of the Hispanic population?

First, to plan and deliver Extension programs for Hispanic population, Extension must establish partnerships with local agencies working in the target community to gain the trust of the target families and show its commitment to better serve the needs of Hispanic families. Findings in this study suggested that lack of participation of Hispanics in Extension programs and/or lack of enrollment in 4-H clubs was due to the unavailability of Extension programming in the target community. However, once Hispanic families were exposed to Extension programs, they found them beneficial to their children and parents would allow their children to participate in 4-H clubs or attend Extension programs.

Second, non-bilingual Extension personnel were supported formally and informally to overcome the language barrier. Informally, bilingual students in each group helped their low-English proficiency peers. Formally, bilingual aides were hired to assist non-bilingual staff, bilingual volunteers from partnering organizations were recruited, and teaching materials were available in English and Spanish.

Third, to meet the needs of the Hispanic population, Extension must first understand how to approach the target audience and implement actions to facilitate the interaction. Extension needs to hire more Spanish-speaking professionals to conduct educational programming. Continued professional development opportunities need to be offered to help non-Spanish-speaking staff feel more comfortable with the Hispanic audience and to build a commitment for on-going programming in the area. Taking the time to establish relationships with Hispanic partners and to build trust with Hispanic families will be crucial to the future success of Extension programming.

With the rising Hispanic population in many states, local and state government officials will become increasingly interested in seeing the results of Extension programming that address the needs of this audience. Reporting impact of programs such as the Fun, Food, and Friends Summer Camp will be very important for funding and accountability purposes.

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