

BOUNDARY SPANNING ACTORS IN URBAN 4-H:

AN ACTION RESEARCH

CASE STUDY

by

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(Under the Direction of Lorilee R. Sandmann)

ABSTRACT

This study explored how managers of outlying audiences span the boundaries between sponsoring institutions and the audiences they serve. The three primary research questions guiding this action research multi-case study were: (1) What strategies do urban 4-H youth educators use to navigate resistance from both the urban community and the rural-oriented Cooperative Extension system? (2) What behaviors do urban 4-H youth educators use to span boundaries for the Cooperative Extension system and for working within the system? and (3) What is the impact of action research at the individual, organizational, and national policy levels related to boundary spanning behaviors of community-based, urban 4-H youth educators?

Through action research the principle investigator, along with urban 4-H youth educators from eight states identified as urban programming exemplars, identified boundary spanning behaviors of educators who sustain programs in urban communities. Data were collected through interviews with organization leaders, urban youth educators, and from researcher observations throughout the study. The action research interventions included identifying critical incidents in urban youth education and consulting with policymakers.

Three conclusions were drawn from an analysis of the findings: (1) As a subculture of self-directing urban youth educators, educators use informal learning to manage internal and external resistance; (2) The boundary spanning behaviors of assessing, engaging, reformulating and advocating were categorized in an adaptation of the community-based problem solver quadrant of the Weerts and Sandmann (2010) university-community engagement model. These behaviors link the sponsoring organization and the outlying audience; (3) Identification and acknowledgement of boundary spanning behaviors used by urban 4-H youth educators hold potential for learning at individual, organizational and national policy levels; and (4) Technology, with limitations, can facilitate action research with geographically dispersed participants.

Implications include the following: (1) Knowledge and information gathered by boundary spanners engaging with outlying communities to structure relationships, initiatives, programs and collaborations illuminate the complexity of communication between organizations and external clients; (2) Boundary spanning subcultures model the potential for organized communities of practice; (3) Boundary spanning behaviors can inform policies related to program development, staff development, hiring procedures and performance evaluation procedures; and (4) Action research serves as individual professional development and potential organizational learning.

INDEX WORDS: Boundary Spanning, Urban Youth Programming, 4-H, Organizational Outliers, Organizational Learning, Action Research

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DEDICATION

To

Alonzo Dotson

My father

For your value of education and for reminding me of my capabilities
at every step of my academic journey

and

Harriett McIntosh Dotson

My mother

For your selflessness and support

Thank you for your love and encouragement

and

Eclan Emanuel David, Jr.

My husband and friend

For your love, support, guidance and encouragement

You are the best person I know and I thank you for making me better

and

Eres Olivia David and Eclan “Tripp” David, III

Our children

Thank you for your patience, love and sweet words of encouragement

I love you!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, the growth of multinational companies, telecommuting and contingent workforces, and virtual enterprises has focused increased attention on issues of individual and organizational learning in decentralized, dispersed organizations (Lucus, 2010). Given the prevalence of decentralized organizational structures in mature organizations, managing the flow and exchange of knowledge among multiple ancillary sites presents both opportunities and challenges for structures supporting knowledge generation and information sharing. Recent conceptualizations of decentralized organizations have emphasized exchanges between leadership in the centralized location, operating staff at the ancillary sites, and the external environments serviced. The focus of such exchanges, both internal and external, is boundary spanning behavior and strategy.

Boundary spanning theory has been used to examine a number of organizational roles. Of particular interest is the application of boundary spanning theory, behaviors and strategies used in university-community engagement to explore how campuses can best interact with communities in the context of engagement (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). Attention to factors associated with linking information from the external environment to the sponsoring organization has illuminated the unique skills and attributes boundary-spanning actors use to engage external audiences to advance the mission of the sponsoring organization.

One such organization, and the organizational context for this action research case study, is Cooperative Extension, the largest non-formal institution of adult education in the U.S. (Jarvis,

Peters, & Associates, 1991). With its axis in a state's land-grant university and with ancillary sites located in county offices throughout that state, along with federal, state and local "cooperating" funding sources, Cooperative Extension operates using a formal, decentralized organizational structure. The passage of The Morrill Act of 1862 established the land-grant system to "teach agriculture, military tactics, and the mechanic arts as well as classical studies so that members of the working classes could obtain a liberal, practical education" (Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities [APLU], 2013, p. 1).

The Cooperative Extension education system, as the primary outreach unit of the land-grant university, emerged in 1914 following legislation by the Smith-Lever Act to "aid in diffusing among the people of the United States useful and practical information on subjects relating to agriculture, home economics, and rural energy, and to encourage the application of the same... continued or inaugurated in connection with the college or colleges in each State" (APLU, 2013, p. 20). The purpose of the Act was, "to offer to those belonging to the industrial classes preparation for the 'professions of life'" (APLU, 2013, p. 20); that is, to provide practical educational opportunities to citizens in their own communities, not just on the campus of the land-grant institution.

The federal partner in this cooperative venture is the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Thus with creation of the Cooperative Extension system, various boys' and girls' clubs became involved with agriculture, home economics and related subjects. These activities ultimately became nationalized as a formal 4-H Youth Development organization. Historically, the main mission of the 4-H program was to teach farm youth innovative ways to introduce new farm technology to their parents and other community members, because many of the adults were resistant to the introduction of new technology (National 4-H Council, 2012). Emphasizing

experiential, hands-on, “learn by doing” signature pedagogies premised on research-based information developed by Cooperative Extension, 4-H clubs were formed around the country to educate American youth about the food system broadly and the agricultural industries in their communities specifically (National 4-H Council, 2012).

Today, supported by National 4-H Council, Cooperative Extension youth development arm develops programs that address issues beyond agrarian life and rural families, incorporating programming that also meets the needs of the United States’ growing urban population. National 4-H Council supports national and state 4-H programs with a focus on fundraising, brand management, communications, and legal and fiduciary services. The National Institute of Food and Agriculture’s (NIFA) initiatives at the USDA and the National 4-H Council’s focus on science, engineering and technology education provide numerous non-agricultural programs through 4-H, enabling some states to develop their own unique programs around these subjects (Kerrigan, 2005).

Attending to the rapid changes and population shifts in the country, Cooperative Extension is being challenged in many areas. The Committee on the Future of the Colleges of Agriculture in the Land-Grant University System (1996) warned nearly 20 years ago that the system “is spread too thin both spatially and substantively. . . . many of its program do not have a broad base of support outside of its traditional circle of clientele” (p. 87). This concern highlighted the need to address how Cooperative Extension can best serve urban communities, seen as outliers to the traditional circle of clientele, in order to advance the mission of the organization.

The study began with the identification of state 4-H program stakeholders, one of whom framed the problem statement by asking, “Why do 4-H agents in urban communities receive the

same training as agents across the state, but fail to produce thriving 4-H programs?” After eliciting stakeholder input, the problem statement, purpose and research questions were developed. The project’s conceptual framework aims to examine the barriers to and facilitators of behaviors used to improve practice among urban youth educators.

To collaboratively conduct this examination, this project involved Cooperative Extension youth development or 4-H educators in urban communities from eight cities across the United States. Specifically, this was a multiple case study action research project investigating the behaviors of urban 4-H educators in resistant systems. Because of the decentralized university and community foci of Cooperative Extension, there is a possibility of resistance from two sources—the Cooperative Extension organization itself and the urban community. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, organizational resistance refers to the frequently occurring barriers to change efforts seen in mature organizations with specific traditions, in this case the Cooperative Extension organization. In the context of urban communities, which are outliers to Cooperative Extension’s historical and dominant delivery locales, audiences, and instructional content, community resistance refers to the disinterest and low participation in programs due to lack of awareness of the benefits of 4-H and the perceptions among urban community members that 4-H is a “cows and cooking” youth organization.

The selected youth educators engaged in action research as a means to reflect on practice, identify evidence-based best practices, and recommend policy changes to develop more relevant and sustainable 4-H programs in urban communities. Study participants participated in critical incident interviews and action research group meetings, which were the primary sources of data for the study. Data were collected, transcribed, coded, and categorized to capture emerging themes associated with individual behaviors of urban youth educators in resistant systems, and

the potential for individual and organizational learning related to boundary spanning using the action research framework.

Statement of the Problem

“There are no cows in the city.” “City kids think eggs come from the back of the grocery store.” “4-H is about cows and cookin’.” “The only cows in the city are on the Chick-fil-A[®] billboards.” Such comments are frequently made about Cooperative Extension youth development programming in urban communities. These remarks made by opponents of urban programming are meant to imply that organizational resources should not be “wasted” on urban youth. Ironically, the comments from opponents make the case for the need to include urban youth in the programming circle to advance awareness of the state’s agriculture, agricultural industries and food sources. Despite the organization’s rich history of delivering contemporary programs with significant agricultural, industrial and rural development impact, today’s Cooperative Extension efforts face difficulty providing sustained, quality programming to urban communities, as outliers to their historical and usual efforts. The traditional delivery model of Cooperative Extension and the land-grant system is facing both external and internal pressure to develop targeted programs and delivery modes consistent with population and demographic shifts. Additionally, there are also counter-pressures from constituencies who argue that in a context of declining resources, the organization should remain focused on its core agricultural mission.

Across the U.S., Cooperative Extension youth educators serve as the community-based outreach arm of the land-grant institutions’ agricultural units. This role positions them as boundary spanning actors between Cooperative Extension (sponsoring organization) and the communities they serve. Boundary spanners serve as the “bridge between an organization and its

exchange partners” (Scott, 1998, p. 192). The phrase *boundary spanning* was originally used in business literature to describe the act of linking the internal organization to its external constituencies. For the purposes of this project, boundary spanning refers to the relationship between the urban community and the university-based Cooperative Extension leaders, with the community-located urban Cooperative Extension 4-H educator as the boundary spanner.

In an adaptation from Skolaski (2012), the role of the university-community boundary spanner is represented by:

A Cooperative Extension youth educator who works between the county Cooperative Extension office and the urban community to represent and meet the needs of both parties; connect Cooperative Extension resources with community needs; translate communication between partners, volunteers and organization leaders; and engage the urban community as a representative of the Cooperative Extension arm of the land-grant institution, striving to create mutually beneficial and understanding partnerships by balancing power differentials and opposing perspectives and needs. (p. 4)

Urban youth educators are known primarily for their outreach or one-way delivery of knowledge or service to the public. Yet their roles and responsibilities have evolved to encompass increased two-way communication aimed at developing and delivering relevant programming needed to provide stability to Cooperative Extension youth development programs in urban communities. Sandmann and Weerts’ (2010) model of community engagement and boundary spanning roles at research universities categorizes the role of urban youth educators as community-based problem solvers. The boundary spanning behaviors of these educators fall within three focal areas: site-based problem support, resource acquisition, and partnership development.

As boundary spanners, urban youth educators take on roles and exhibit behaviors that correspond primarily with the functions of the community-based problem solver. However, because of the socio-emotional skills required to adapt traditional interaction with the urban community in ways that would strengthen impacts and outcomes, urban youth educators act at some level in each quadrant of the model, adopting roles that include internal engagement advocate, technical expert and engagement champion. As boundary spanners, urban youth educators import knowledge gained from their experience as community-based problem solvers to the Cooperative Extension organization to advance organizational learning. This knowledge, when integrated into the organization, can be used to help guide professional and program development that fit the needs of urban clients.

A systemic problem occurs when key learning from the direct experiences of urban youth educators is not integrated or used to inform learning to improve practice. This problem occurs when communication between urban youth educators and Cooperative Extension organizational leaders is not supported, valued, or fully integrated into program planning and development efforts for urban communities, creating gaps in needs assessment, program impacts, program outcomes, and organizational learning. De Ciantis (2009) argues that when its organizational leaders fail to heed need-based information, Cooperative Extension is left vulnerable to impending threats that will ultimately lead to organizational failure.

Senge (1990) noted that organizational failure does not stem from specific events, but rather from a slow, gradual process that goes unnoticed by most leaders. Unless Cooperative Extension shifts its orientation to be more inclusive of urban areas, its future could be in jeopardy. Increasing the visibility and impact of 4-H in urban areas requires broadening public awareness of Cooperative Extension's youth development programs and training of urban youth

educators to solve problems that arise in community-based engagement with urban clients and stakeholders (De Ciantis, 2009).

Purpose of the Study

The increasing demand for outreach to address the needs of the ever-growing urban population--as opposed to the shrinking rural population--has forced urban youth educators to become more innovative in their programming approaches in urban areas. Despite a culture deeply rooted in Cooperative Extension's rural orientation, and despite organization leaders who "do not recognize the disadvantages they stack against" urban programming (De Ciantis, 2009, p. 6), educators are integrating programs into urban communities and engaging youth, families and stakeholders. Within the conceptual framework of this study, if we explore the behaviors of expert performing urban youth educators, we can gain an understanding of the boundary spanning behaviors and strategies necessary to navigate resistance from both urban communities and the sponsoring organization. This would aid in identifying and isolating behaviors that are useful for reaching outlying urban clients and communicating experiential knowledge gained at the individual and organization levels within Cooperative Extension; and for informing policy influenced by supports provided by National 4-H Council.

The purpose of this action research study was to explore the behaviors urban youth educators use to navigate resistance from the urban community and the rural-oriented Cooperative Extension education system. To meet this objective, urban 4-H youth educators in eight cities participated in critical reflection through group meetings and in critical incident interviews. The resulting data were used to identify strategies and behaviors to improve the delivery of Cooperative Extension youth development programs to outlying urban communities.

The identification and categorization of these behaviors as best practices can be used to inform learning and learning support structures at individual, organizational and national policy levels.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What strategies do urban 4-H youth educators use to navigate resistance from both the urban community and the rural-oriented Cooperative Extension education system?
2. What behaviors do urban 4-H youth educators use to span boundaries for the Cooperative Extension system and for working within the system?
3. What is the impact of action research at the individual, organizational, and national policy levels related to boundary spanning behaviors of community-based, urban 4-H youth educators?

Significance

Little attention has been given to the role of boundary spanners within higher education. Yet within an open system, boundary spanning behaviors are crucial in maintaining two-way communication between an organization's leaders and its dispersed, ancillary unit personnel, such as contingent faculty and staff at branch campuses, or Cooperative Extension educators working at community-based locations (Skolaski, 2012). Serving as a Cooperative Extension organization representative places a heavy burden on boundary spanning urban youth educators, who must function as ambassadors for the university and as advocates for the needs of the urban community in the university-community partnership. Capturing the experiences and perspectives of urban youth educators, as well as the key learning of the researcher and organizational leaders, contributes new knowledge that has vital implications for policy, theory and practice.

This study yielded a profile of current community engagement boundary spanners, particularly in urban contexts, and an analysis of their characteristics and practices. It identified

boundary spanning strengths and weaknesses within an organization. This information is valuable for informing state and national organizational policy regarding the selection, support and professional development of boundary spanners as community engagement actors. More broadly, it will be useful in leading, institutionalizing, and sustaining engagement. Further, it informs the literature on boundary spanning, agency and innovation and change models and theories in higher education.

In the remaining chapters of this multiple case study action research project, Chapter 2 will present the literature review, which focuses on three broad categories: urban 4-H youth development programs, resistance from both the urban community and mature organizations, and organizational learning and boundary spanning theory and their relationship to program planning and development in urban communities. Chapter 3 will provide a discussion of the methods used in this multiple-case research project, including methods of data collection and data analysis. Chapter 4 will present the story and outcomes of the case. Chapter 5 will present findings related to each research question, and Chapter 6 will present the final summary, conclusions and implications.

Definition of Terms

The primary concepts explored are defined for the context of this study as follows:

Boundary spanning: Boundary spanning refers to “the bridge between an organization and its exchange partners” (Scott, 1998, p. 196). Boundary spanners serve as representatives for their organizations in initiatives for building relationships, identifying threats and opportunities, and embedding insights and knowledge gained into the organization (Ansett, 2005).

Mature organization: Mature organizations have reached maturity in the life cycle of organizations making it necessary to acquire sufficient information from the environment to

remain viable. Many have optimized products and services provided for well-developed customer groups (Haberman, 2013).

Thriving: For the purpose of this study, a thriving program is a relevant educational program with sustained momentum toward the organization's mission.

Urban: Urban, as a place-based characteristic, is described as a spatial concentration of people whose lives are organized around non-agricultural activities (Weeks, 2010).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will review the literature of three research areas relevant to the boundary spanning behaviors urban youth educators use to navigate resistant systems. Due to the limited number of empirical studies focused on this topic, closely related works will be explored in an effort to situate the study within the existing literature. The first section reviews literature on leading youth development in urban communities and explores the sources of resistance. The second section reviews boundary spanning literature that undergirds the conceptual framework of the study. The third section explores learning in mature organizations delivering non-formal education.

The University of Georgia Library GALILEO system was accessed to conduct searches of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) and Dissertation Abstracts Online. The keywords used to guide the searches in these databases included boundary spanning, organizational learning, mature organizations, youth development, 4-H educators, Cooperative Extension youth educators, boys and girls clubs, urban programs, urban Extension and urban 4-H educators. Books, journal articles, research studies, doctoral dissertations and other literature were used to provide a foundation for the research, despite limited literature on urban Extension initiatives. Table 1 shows the focus of the study's literature review as related to the conceptual framework.

Table 1

Project Concept and Literature Review Focus

Project Concept	Literature Review Focus
If we explore practice <u>behaviors</u> of expert performing <u>urban 4-H youth educators</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competencies needed for program planning, development and delivery of 4-H in urban communities
in <u>resistant systems</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban communities • Cooperative Extension organization
then we can identify the boundary spanning behaviors used to navigate resistance to produce thriving programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boundary spanning theory • Boundary spanning for community engagement

Urban 4-H Youth Development Programs

The mission of 4-H is to assist youth in acquiring knowledge, developing life skills and forming attitudes that will enable them to become self-directing, productive and contributing members of society (Bellevue 4-H, 2010¹). This mission is accomplished through hands-on learning experiences focused on agricultural and environmental issues, agriculture awareness, leadership, communication skills, foods and nutrition, health, energy conservation and citizenship (Bellevue 4-H, 2010). According to the National 4-H Council, during the late 1800s, researchers at public universities saw that adults in the farming community did not readily accept the new agricultural discoveries being developed on university campuses. However, they found that young people were open to new thinking and would experiment with new ideas and share their experiences and successes with adults. This recognition led to the development of innovative programs that engage rural youth in introducing new agricultural technology to their communities, an objective that remains the foundational orientation of the organization today.

¹ Pseudonym

Since its inception over 100 years ago, 4-H has grown to become the nation's largest non-formal youth development organization (National 4-H Council, 2010). Today, 4-H has an expansive reach, serving youth in rural, urban and suburban communities in every state across the nation. Nevertheless, educators serving in urban communities often find it challenging to develop and sustain programs for urban youth.

Competencies for Delivering Urban Youth Development Programs

Despite Cooperative Extension's expansion into urban communities in the Northeast as early as the 1940s, few empirical studies have explored Cooperative Extension youth development efforts in urban communities (Payne, 2007). A very early study conducted by Boyle and Brown (1964) sought to clarify concerns about the nature and effectiveness of 4-H in urban areas. The authors interviewed county educators, school administrators and local officials to determine areas of adaptation and implications for urban 4-H programming. Information was elicited in two basic areas: (1) the scope and nature of 4-H in urban areas, and (2) the appraisal of the program by professional staff and local citizens. The 59 Cooperative Extension administrators in six states who were interviewed generally expressed favorable attitudes toward serving urban communities with Cooperative Extension youth programs. However, educators also believed resources should not be shifted from rural programs to serve the urban population. Boyle and Brown (1964) concluded:

The greatest handicap to a successful program was identified by educators as the lack of county, state and national staffs trained and committed to work in urban areas. Also, more urban-oriented teaching and publicity materials were considered mandatory. In general, it was felt that the organization must become much more dynamic and adjustable

to the urban environment – that is, that the entire Extension Service must become identified more closely with the urban society. (pp. 32-33)

Urban 4-H youth educators require a specialized skill set that is not readily acknowledged in the Cooperative Extension organization (Payne, 2007). The mission of Cooperative Extension's youth development program is to contribute to recruiting, engaging, motivating and integrating change in youth learners in multiple types of environments, including underserved urban communities. Webster and Ingram (2007) observed that 4-H educators working in urban communities generally have little or no experience working with such communities. They must therefore make dramatic shifts in programming that was once based on "familiarity with the community, longstanding relationships with families, and an understanding of the norms and values that existed in the community" (p. 1).

Ritsos and Miller (1985) sought to determine the professional competencies Cooperative Extension employees in urban counties in Ohio perceived as most necessary. They mailed a two-part survey to 46 Cooperative Extension Employees working in urban areas. Participants in the study identified competency in organizational skills as the highest priority, with program planning and development ranking as the highest subcategory. The authors recommended that organizational skills and urban competencies should be taught in professional development classes, and that Cooperative Extension program developers and policymakers should consider these findings when developing urban programs and policies.

In a study investigating participation in the Boys and Girls Club of America in a large southwestern city, caring adults and positive, nurturing environments were found to be the most important components of the infrastructure that promotes healthy youth development (Carruthers & Busser, 2000). Despite a high demand for youth development activities in the community,

however, it was a challenge to get parents involved in program planning, development and evaluation. Hartmann et al. (2007) reported that the creation of neighborhood youth development committees, designed to involve residents in planning, implementing and decision-making around youth development activities in their neighborhood, was a key to navigating resistance faced in urban communities.

The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), which was the focus of the Hartmann et al. (2007) study, suggested that because parents in communities of YMCA facilities were not traditionally involved in decision-making about youth programming, it was necessary to develop the neighborhood youth development committee to work with youth and other community change efforts to insure sustained success. Many of these programs have developed "service learning" opportunities with cultural relevance to the lives of the youth and families involved as a way to achieve sustainability (Webster & Ward, 2011).

Ahmed and Morse (2010) interviewed regional educators in the Minnesota Cooperative Extension Service system to identify which aspects of a Cooperative Extension educator's job are considered most important in determining program quality. Educators were asked to describe the extent to which increased specialization in urban programming resulted in expanded opportunities in the areas of needs assessment, teamwork, focus, program quality and teaching and scholarship. The report found that educators believe the delivery of quality programs depends primarily on the educator's ability to deal with relevant problems in a timely fashion. Educators reported that specialization gave them more opportunities to learn about new audiences and adjust to changing needs. The area of teamwork, educators reported that specialization led to diminished opportunities to work with colleagues in other areas of specialization because of each team's need to focus on a particular area of expertise and a

specific target audience. Richardson (1994), a supporter of tailored, site-based youth development programs, stated:

Program delivery inputs should be selected with respect for the specific needs of the targeted learners involved. Factors such as the audience's level of formal education, sophistication, age, preferred learning modes, physical mobility, and other personal, professional, or unique characteristics can affect receptiveness to content provided through the educational system. Thus, regardless of the learning system designed and the array of "best" methods used as inputs, generally no single delivery method should be depended upon to achieve a learning objective among all members of a targeted audience. This circumstance dictates the need to use more than one delivery method to achieve adequate program results. (p. 4)

Skuzza (2004) described Richard's position as complicated because it entails designing intentional strategies to engage and retain underserved youth. Staff working in this effort must be trained to identify and address the multifaceted, adaptive challenges of urban programs in underserved communities. Because challenges in urban communities are constantly shifting, there is no one solution to problems that emerge. Thus youth educators must be equipped with skills to handle these challenges with the support of the sponsoring Cooperative Extension organization.

Urban communities encompass an array of cultures, attitudes, norms and beliefs, many of which have become intertwined to create a distinctive culture. Within urban environments, individuals with diverse backgrounds and histories coexist in shared spaces marked by cultural, economic and political convergence and divergence (Webster & Ingram, 2007). Studies of the competencies urban youth educators need to successfully adapt to urban environments focus

primarily on the importance of maintaining two-way communication with the external environment in shaping programming priorities and delivery methods (see Table 2).

Table 2

Urban Youth Development Program Studies

Resource	Method	n	Focus	Findings/Recommendations
Boyle & Brown (1964)	Telephone Interviews	59 county educators, school administrators and local officials	Nature and effectiveness of 4-H in urban areas	Participants generally expressed favorable attitudes toward serving urban communities; however educators believed resources should not be shifted from rural programs to serve the urban population
Ritsos & Miller (1985)	Two-part mailed questionnaire	46 Cooperative Extension Employees working in urban areas	Professional competencies needed by Extension employees in urban counties	Competencies in organizational skills were the highest priority with competencies in communication skills close second; research and evaluation received the lowest priority rating
Richardson (1994)	Program delivery inputs should be selected with respect for the specific needs of the targeted learners involved Audience's level of formal education, sophistication, age, preferred learning modes, physical mobility, and other personal, professional, or unique characteristics can affect receptiveness to content			
Skuzza (2004)	Staff must be trained to identify and address the multifaceted, adaptive challenges of urban programs in underserved communities Challenges constantly shift No one solution to urban programming problems			
Hartmann et al. (2007)	Must establish urban community stakeholder supports Engage community residents in program planning and development			
Webster & Ingram (2007)	Must develop familiarity with the community, longstanding relationships with families, and an understanding of the norms and values that exist in the urban community			
Ahmed & Morse (2010)	Survey	129 Regional Extension Educators	Comparison of county cluster models and regional specialization educator perspective	Specialization was working well 2 years after it was established and participants nearly two-thirds of the participants reported major increases in opportunities related to programming
Webster & Ward (2011)	Extension professionals must develop an deep understanding of how the various dimensions of marginalized community life among inner city populations affect participation in organized civic activities			

Urban Community Resistance

Despite 4-H's extensive history, many in urban communities have no sustained exposure to or knowledge of the program or its benefits. This aligns with Panshin's (1992) assertion that the existence of Cooperative Extension in urban locations has, for the most part, been a "token and fragmented existence" without significant organizational emphasis or attention (p. 1). Why is this? Boyle and Brown (1964) characterized urban society, in contrast to rural society, as distinguished by mass industrialization with bureaucratic forms of organization, in which people are heterogeneous and ecologically separated. The result is greater population density, impersonal and anonymous social relationships and a focus on organizational goal achievement. These characteristics of urban society and the complex factors driving the needs of urban citizens make it difficult to diffuse 4-H into urban centers.

Much of the resistance from urban communities stems from a lack of awareness of programs and program benefits. In his pre-conference capstone address at the 2007 Urban Extension Conference, Jack Payne (2007) stated:

Clearly establishing the need to serve and identify the urban needy clientele is the easiest part of our undertaking. But reaching the urban needy with relevant information has been and continues to be a daunting task. Marketing has surfaced as the new panacea for establishing Extension in urban populations. It is true that many people have no idea what we do. For example, a study authorized by the National 4-H Council found . . . the majority of the respondents overall did not know that 4-H offers after-school programs or programs in workforce preparation, science, engineering and technology, citizenship, and healthy living.

Organizational Resistance

In response to the lack of available mechanisms for overcoming perceived and realized resistance to 4-H programs in urban areas, urban youth educators have utilized self-directed learning to develop strategies and skills to enhance their practice and navigate such resistance. Studies found that mature organizations like Cooperative Extension often lack the ability to integrate and process new information, which presents a barrier to organizational learning. Adhering to tradition or a legacy of perceptions, norms and rules builds up resistance to the absorption of new knowledge that might otherwise stimulate change.

Zaltman and Duncan (1977) define resistance in mature organizations as “any conduct that serves to maintain the status quo in the face of pressure to alter the status quo” (p. 63). In a study examining how to assess staff members’ capacity for organizational learning at the individual, team and organizational levels, Rowe (2010) administered a 43-item survey titled Dimensions of the Learning Organization Questionnaire (DLOQ). The study identified “systems to capture learning” as the area most in need of strengthening. When asked to assess the statement, “My organization maintains an up-to-date database of employee skills,” on a scale of one to six with one being “almost never” and six being “almost always,” nearly 60% of participants responded with a two or lower. According to Rowe (2010, p. 8), this represents “an example of a missed opportunity for acquiring information that would be very valuable to the organization.”

In a study on resistance to organizational change based on psychological factors rather than organizational issues, Bovey and Hede (2001) investigated the roles of adaptive and maladaptive defense mechanisms in resistance. A 20-item, seven-point interval scale instrument was developed and dispersed to 615 employees in nine organizations undergoing change. The

findings indicated that five maladaptive defense mechanisms correlated with behavioral intention to resist change. These mechanisms included protection, acting out, isolation of affect, disassociation and denial. The authors concluded, “it is sometimes necessary to go beyond the outward aspects of an individual’s behavior and address the unconscious motivations so as to achieve a change of attitude” (p. 545). This research suggests the need to consider not only organizational issues, but also the human factors associated with resistance in organizations.

Organizations learn from information gleaned from the learning of individuals within the organization. As seen in the cases of self-directed learning among urban 4-H across the country, individual learning does not guarantee organizational learning, but without it organizational learning is not possible (Senge, 1999). Senge (1999) asserts that creating a vision of the future shared by all within the Cooperative Extension system is the key to fostering innovative developments to overcome challenges facing the organization’s urban programming efforts.

Whether an organization is prepared to adapt to new challenges or whether it persists in efforts to preserve its programming history determines the severity of the challenges it will face. Resistance to learning in organizations is itself a barrier to developing solutions to the problems associated with internal and external organizational environments. Efforts to bridge organization leaders and information gleaned from the urban community in order to improve practice among urban youth educators in Cooperative Extension drives the need to understand the role of boundary spanners.

Boundary Spanning

Boundary spanning behaviors can be identified in many contexts, including community engagement. According to Cross and Parker (2004, p. 74), “boundary spanners provide critical links between two groups of people that are defined by functional affiliation, physical location,

or hierarchical level.” Scott (1998, p. 196) describes boundary spanners as “a bridge between an organization [Cooperative Extension] and their exchange partners, competitors, and regulators [urban community stakeholders].” Spanners thus act as representatives of both the internal and external organizations whose boundaries they span (Friedman & Podolny, 1992).

The systems theory (open systems) concepts of *system input* (the movement of information or matter-energy from the environment into the system) and *output* (the movement of information or matter-energy from the system to the environment) capture the nature of boundary crossing in defined systems (Walonick, 1993). Burke (2008) describes the importance of *autopoiesis* as a characteristic of living systems that allows them to continually change their structures, renewing themselves while preserving their patterns of organization. Capra (1996, as cited in Burke, 2008) observed that living systems are both open and closed – open structurally and closed organizationally. Burke (2008) cites the work of Katz and Kahn (1978), which asserts that open systems is one that “maintain themselves through constant commerce with their environment, that is, a continuous inflow and outflow of energy through permeable boundaries” (p. 22).

Due to their position in the organization, the educators spanning these boundaries are not equipped to manage the health of the total system, nor are they empowered to appraise the needs of the organization or the external environment. It has long been debated whether 4-H, which has its roots in the agricultural community, has a place in urban settings. Many organization members and managers may be indirectly responsible for the erecting barriers to the assignment of resources to develop or sustain the presence of 4-H in urban settings. The culture of Cooperative Extension has traditionally provided uneven support to urban Cooperative Extension programs. According to Burke (2008), a systems culture, not individuals or collective members,

should be the target of organizational change. As Lewin (1944) explains, “As long as group standards go unchanged, the individual will resist change more strongly the further he is expected to depart from group standards. If the group standard itself is changed, the resistance which is due to the relation between individual and group standards is eliminated” (p. 210).

Boundary spanners’ capacity to assist in the transfer of knowledge is key to organizational change. The total system perspective, as described by Burke (2008), suggests that changing parts of the system will affect other parts and perhaps all parts of the system eventually.

Often, boundary spanning behavior among educators provides only a short-term solution to challenges experienced by Cooperative Extension leaders, who are faced with the external pressures of a growing urban clientele without much consideration of the systematic dimensions (Strum, 2009). Because urban youth educators have multifaceted interactions with the urban community, “prompted by the demands of problem solving, they have the opportunity to intervene at the level appropriate to contextually determined needs and opportunities” (p. 1128). This knowledge of the cultures of both the urban community and the mature, rural-oriented Cooperative Extension organization enables spanners “to spot patterns, interpret dynamics, and enlist participation of relevant actors” (Strum 2009, p. 1128). Boundary spanning actors, according to Wagner (2000), have the obligation to look for “the possibility of a recurrence or pattern and to take steps to change the structure in order to prevent a similar problem in the future” (p. 100).

For the purposes of this study, a review of the multidisciplinary and multi-contextual literature on boundary spanning resulted in a focus on boundary spanning for the purposes of community outreach and engagement. Specifically, the study examined behaviors used to manage internal and external boundaries for the purpose of developing best practices and

professional expertise among urban youth educators. This boundary spanning concept is referred to by Levina and Vaast (2005) as *boundary spanning in practice*.

The theory undergirding boundary spanning is socio-technical systems theory, which considers the social concerns of systems theory originally proposed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy in 1928. Weerts and Sandmann's (2010) study exploring the roles of boundary spanners in university-community engagement considered actors' level of social concern. The purpose of the study was "to examine how research universities build bridges to university partners, and thus increase institutional capacity" (p. 634). Findings suggest four distinct roles of spanners, resulting in a model that classified boundary spanners in one of the following roles based on their practices: community-based problem solvers, engagement champions, technical experts or internal engagement advocates. Urban 4-H educators fell within the community-based problem solver quadrant of the model.

The highlighted section of Figure 1 depicts the community-based problem solver quadrant, which encompasses the boundary-spanning roles of urban youth educators.

Although the study does not categorize any specific behaviors, the authors describe actors in the community-based problem solver quadrant as "typically focused on problem support, resource acquisition, and overall management and development of the partnership" (p. 643). Weerts and Sandmann's (2010) study does not explore the conditions that shape the focus of actors of this quadrant, nor does it enumerate specific behaviors based on the quadrant description. Identifying and categorizing such behaviors is the focus of the current case study.

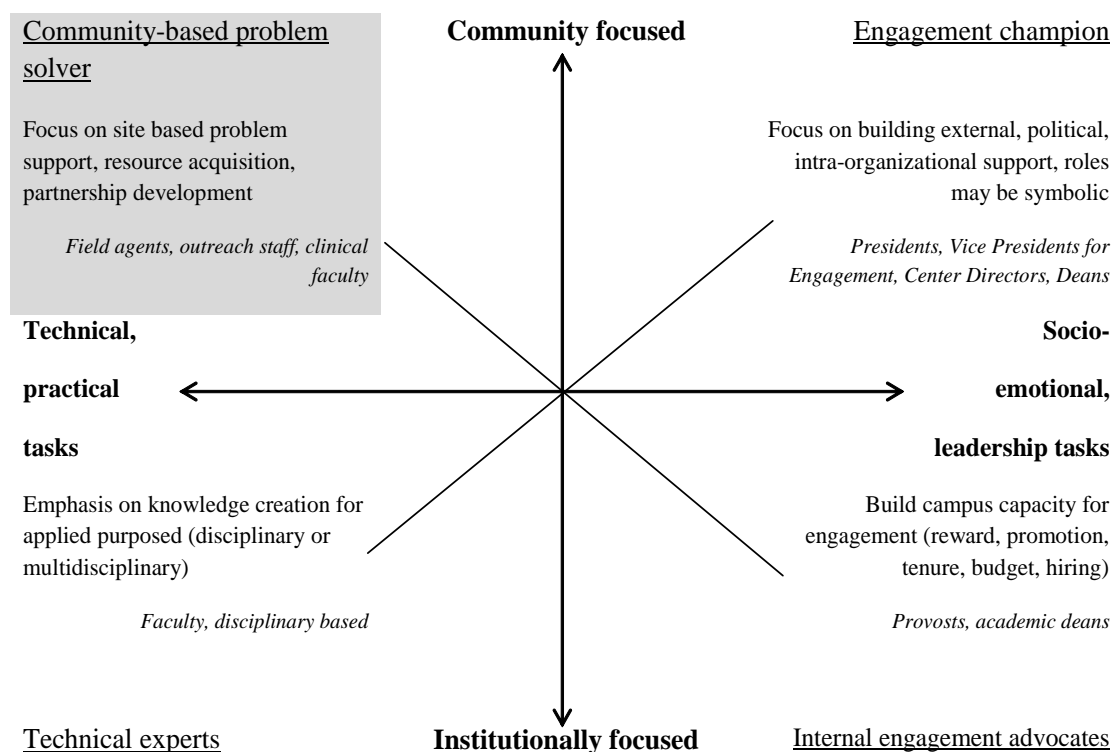


Figure 1. University-community engagement boundary spanning roles at public research universities (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010).

Urban Youth Educators as Boundary Spanners

For the mature Extension organization to survive the challenges imposed by its urban service areas, the system must utilize an exchange of information and resources from the external environment. This can be accomplished by empowering more educators serving in boundary spanning roles to receive information, process it as related to direct action, and use it on behalf of the external environment and the Cooperative Extension organization. Levina and Vaast (2005) suggest these steps as mechanism for individuals within an organization who ultimately provide informal, incidental learning to improve practice. Levina and Vaast (2005) assert that boundary spanning in practice involves two conditions related to developing an ability to span boundaries (behaviors) and one condition related to having an inclination to do so. In their study of how an

organization's competence in boundary spanning emerges, the authors relied on the concepts of boundary spanning and boundary spanning objects. Boundary spanning objects were said to be the resources and skills used when transforming practice to accommodate both the urban community and the sponsoring organization. Using the data from two qualitative field studies, the authors argued that a new joint field of practice must be produced to show how boundary spanners' practice, resources and informal knowledge are used and to create a mechanism for developing a common-identity for behaviors in organizations.

In Cooperative Extension an awareness of, support for and the development of organizational learning and staff training around informal learning in practice may be aligned with Levina and Vaast's (2005) "new joint field." In-practice boundary spanning, as described by Levina and Vaast, requires the two conditions of (1) becoming a legitimate, but possibly peripheral, player in the practices of both environments, and (2) becoming a negotiator on behalf of the field whose interests one represents. The third condition, which could be shaped into a future study, requires an understanding of the inclination to span boundaries, which the study suggested typically stemmed from some perceived advantage to the spanner.

Because boundary spanning educators stand in the gap between the learning organization and the communities they serve, their capacity to accept, process and act on the needs of the internal and external environments is key to producing quality Cooperative Extension youth development programming. In an effort to provide such quality programming, boundary spanning agents search for and retrieve new information from across organizational boundaries – information which is then applied to task knowledge and diffused throughout the organization to enhance programming (Richardson & Lissack, 2001).

Hazy, Tivnan and Schwandt (2003) found that the number of boundary spanning educators served as a predictor of collective survival in changing environments. The 4-H clientele has significantly changed over the past 40 years, due to the external environment acting on Cooperative Extension and 4-H. The challenge of meeting the needs of the urban community also continually shifts. It has long been established that the support for and value of Cooperative Extension programs depends on high quality programming. Hazy et al. (2003) reported that new information gathered by boundary spanners and integrated into organizations resulted in measurable differences in the quality of final products, in this case 4-H and youth development programs. Future studies should not only explore behaviors, but also investigate more deeply the level of acceptance/adaptability—or lack thereof—at the organizational level and its impact on improving practice in urban communities, contributing useful data to the existing knowledge base on organizational learning.

Collaborations and partnerships with other youth-serving organizations have emerged in recent years as one solution to the adaptive challenges of underserved youth development programming in urban communities. Pittman et al. (2001) assert that every neighborhood should be saturated with services, supports and opportunities. No single organization or institution will be able to provide this range of support for young people; instead, it will require a concerted and aligned effort on the part of individuals, organizations, public institutions and other entities.

There is some concern as to whether Cooperative Extension has the resources to develop staff and programs tailored to numerous facets of urban youth development. While Cooperative Extension as a whole still faces challenges in urban programming, many educators working in urban centers have integrated key learning from their daily experiences. This has catapulted the educators into the roles of boundary spanners, engaging in a practice resulting from self-directed,

informal individual learning that is steps ahead of the Cooperative Extension organization as a whole.

The emergence of unique strategies and boundary spanning behaviors among urban youth educators seeking to navigate resistance has significantly advanced our understanding of behaviors and competencies needed to achieve the Cooperative Extension youth development mission in urban communities. Through self-directed learning, educators have made the natural shift themselves, leaving the Cooperative Extension organization trailing on the learning curve in relation to urban community programming. Due to the positionality of the educators, however, despite the proven benefits to program impact and outcomes, power relations create barriers to the integration of this knowledge into Cooperative Extension's deeply held system of beliefs and cultural norms.

While the Cooperative Extension organizations in many cities across the county have begun to shift efforts toward meeting the needs of urban clients, programs are being developed and sustained through the creative strategies and unique behavior of urban 4-H educators without the integration of organizational strategy. Program quality has been identified as the framework on which other issues regarding youth recruitment, participation and retention hang (Lauver & Little, 2005; Ritchie & Resler, 1993). Support for state- and county-funded youth programs is strong in communities where high quality, relevant programs that meet identified needs of the residents are offered. Urban youth educators are meeting the challenges posed by urban communities with unique strategies and boundary spanning behaviors that yield positive and successful outcomes.

Summary

A review of the literature related to urban Cooperative Extension youth development programming, urban community resistance, organizational resistance and boundary spanning found the need for intentional, focused studies to address Cooperative Extension youth development programming in urban communities. The fundamental principles of each of the constructs was covered; however, the literature did not address the fusion of these concepts into a focused study of the behaviors employed by Cooperative Extension urban youth educators to navigate resistance.

According to Astroth (2003), across the nation, more enlightened Cooperative Extension leadership has called upon 4-H to define and articulate appropriate standards for scholarship in the field of youth development. Because of 4-H's diverse expectations, even 4-H professionals within a single state or county often have widely varying job descriptions. Astroth asserts that differences in expectations result in gradients of scholarship, as some 4-H professionals have higher scholarly expectations than others and thus more freedom of action and thought. Some are on tenure and promotion tracks; others are not. Such diversity at the along the gradient of scholarship alongside the advent of today's "youth at risk" crisis provide a unique opportunity for scholarly practice in Cooperative Extension (Rollins, Scholl, & Scanlon, 1992) to specifically address urban programming.

The landscape of urban communities, with its multiple striations of complex community problems and issues, makes programming in these areas unique and frequently challenging for the Cooperative Extension organization. Studies are needed to explore ways to harness the informal and incidental learning that improve urban youth educators' practice. Specifically, the literature is lacking in the area of validating competencies or behaviors necessary to span the

boundaries between the urban community and the Cooperative Extension organization, and in identifying means to facilitate the integration of this information among organization leaders.

Findings from such studies could lead to key learning at the individual and organizational levels in Cooperative Extension and at policy development levels within National 4-H.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology for the action research case study of urban youth educators operating as boundary spanners in mature, non-formal education systems. The research design utilized a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. The following sections detail the study's conceptual framework, design, sample selection, and data collection and analysis methods, including the measures of reliability and validity. The chapter concludes with a statement of the researcher's positionality and subjectivity and a discussion of the study's limitations.

Conceptual Framework

The linear conceptual framework developed for this study is displayed in Figure 2. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), a conceptual framework serves several purposes: (a) to identify who will and will not be included in the study; (b) to describe what relationships may be present based on logic, theory and/or experiential prompts; and (c) to provide the researcher with the opportunity to gather general constructs into intellectual "bins" for examination. Bins derive from "theory and experience and (often) from the general objectives of the study envisioned" (p. 18). Researchers commonly know which bins are likely to apply to the study and what will be contained in them. For this study the constructs are: practice behaviors, urban youth educators, resistant systems and boundary spanning.

Design of the Study

Boundary spanning, as shown in the last bin, is the theoretical approach guiding this study. Behaviors and best practices were used to identify and categorize the boundary spanning behaviors of urban youth educators. A clear conceptual framework focuses the research study, guiding the selection of research questions, the study design, sampling methods and instrumentation. The study design was a qualitative multiple case study approach using action research methodology. The critical incident technique and semi-structured interviews were the primary methods of data collection. The researcher selected a qualitative methodology for this investigation based on the study's purpose.

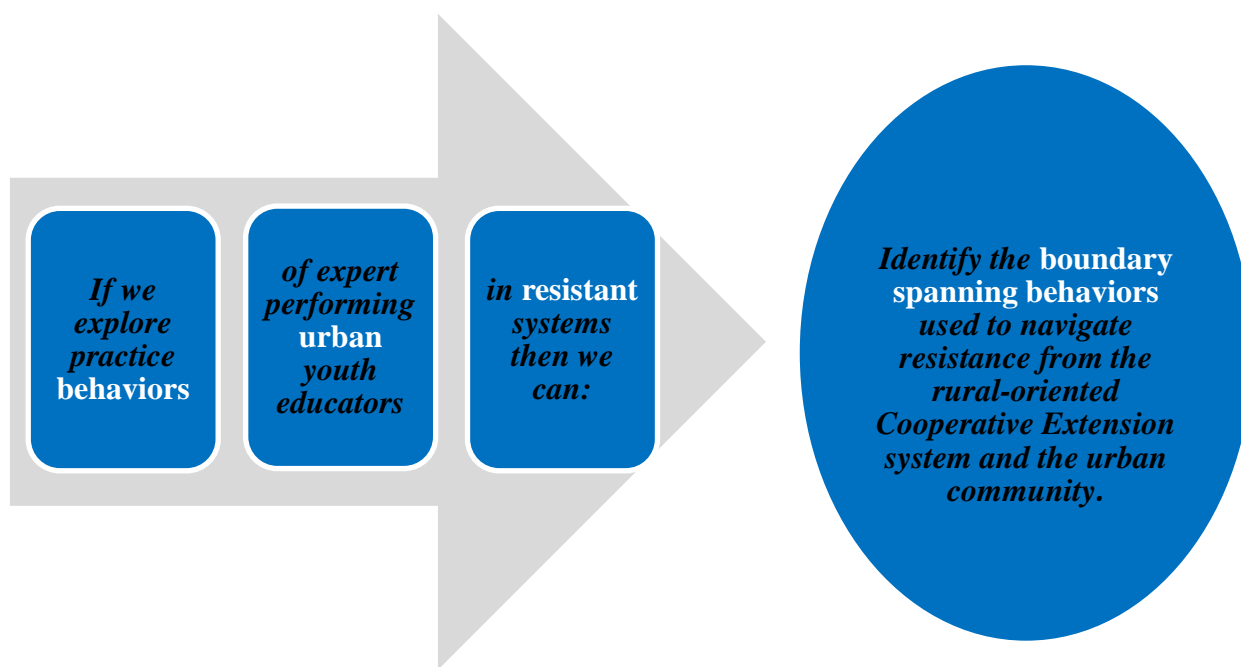


Figure 2. Depiction of the conceptual framework guiding the study, including the study's purpose statement.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research methods are considered to be the most appropriate choice when little knowledge exists about a phenomenon. Researchers conducting a qualitative study should be

interested in (a) how people interpret their experiences, (b) how they construct their worlds, and (c) what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 2009). Researchers as well as participants are involved in the data collection in qualitative research; therefore, a discussion of researcher biases and values is included in the reporting (Creswell, 2003). Because qualitative research examines the whys and hows of experience, proving or disproving a research hypothesis is not its goal. Instead, the researcher looks for patterns and themes emerging from the data. Rather than hypothesis-testing, then, qualitative research is “hypothesis-generating” (Merriam, 1988, p. 3). Examining the lived experiences and stories of the study participants and the researcher helps to illuminate why and how things work in their respective contexts. In this study, examining the behaviors and strategies urban youth educators use to navigate resistance is a mechanism for generating new knowledge aimed at informing professional and program development.

Case Study

As a research method, the case study contributes to the knowledge of “individual, group, organizational, social, political and related phenomena.” It should therefore be considered when (a) the focus of the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions; (b) the researcher cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study; (c) the researcher wants to cover [examine] contextual conditions he/she believes are relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clear (Yin, 2009, p. 4). The multiple case study method enables the researcher to explore differences within and between cases, with the goal of replicating findings across cases. Because comparisons will be made, it is imperative that the cases are chosen carefully so the researcher can predict similar results across cases, or predict contrasting results based on a theory (Yin, 2009). For this study, participants

representing urban communities in multiple sites provided sources of data that were used to develop a single set of cross-case solutions (Yin, 2009).

Action Research Methodology

Using action research methodology allowed the researcher to collaborate with study participants in an effort to transform a social environment in order to bring about institutional change through the process of critical inquiry. According to Stringer (2007), action research is a participatory process that relies on the wisdom of the participants and their knowledge of their own situation to provide a basis for action and suggest solutions to challenges within their operating system. Action research is functionally distinct from traditional research, which provides generalizable explanations that might be applied to situations across contexts.

As a general strategy for institutional change, action research has been practiced since the 1920s. The basic action research routine is described by Stringer (2007, p. 11) as a continual process of observation, reflection and action that engages “subjects” or stakeholders as full and equal participants in the research process. Action research demonstrates the following characteristics:

- It is democratic, enabling the participation of all people.
- It is equitable, acknowledging people’s equality of worth.
- It is liberating, providing freedom from oppressive, debilitation conditions.
- It is life enhancing, enabling the expression of people’s human potentialities.

The role of the researcher in action research is not to direct the participants, but to act as a facilitator for the action research process. As a facilitator the researcher does not adopt a neutral position or the status of an expert, but serves instead as a resource person (Stringer, 2007), facilitating and intervening actively in the process.

Action research consists of four key movements, which are illustrated in Figure 3. The spiral of action research, also described as the core action research cycle, has four phases:

- Constructing (exploring context and purpose)
- Planning Action (describing how to implement the action)
- Taking Action (implementing plans and making interventions); and
- Evaluating Action (examining the outcomes of the action).

Intended and unintended results of cycle 1 may lead the project into cycle 2 for continued inquiry and problem solving steps (Figure 3). In subsequent cycles, activities will be reviewed and reanalyzed to rethink interpretations and revise procedures. Multiple phases of the action research cycle operate concurrently and may represent the project as a whole, a section of the project or other phases needed to contribute to the process. Each phase may have its own timeline while also contributing to the process as a whole. These phases must also be evaluated (thesis phase) to assess how the project itself is progressing and what is being learned (meta-learning) (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010).

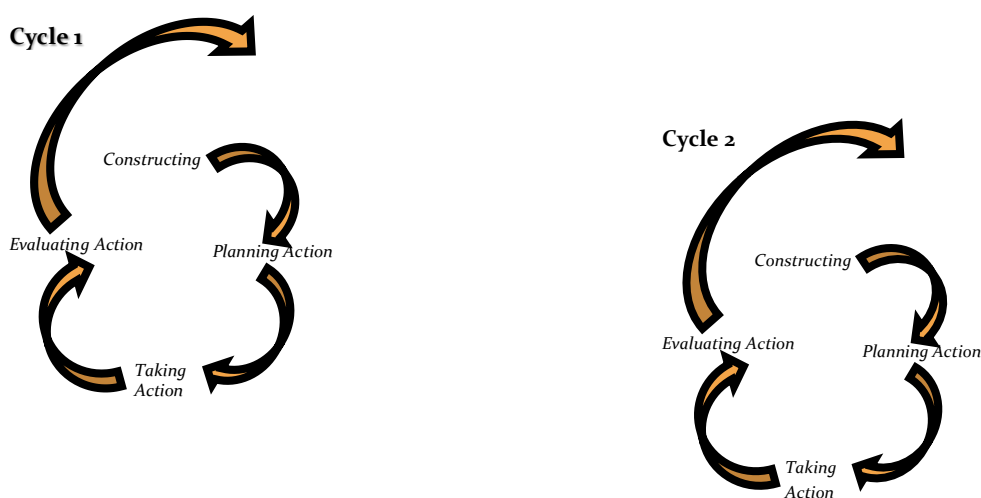


Figure 3. Spiral cycles depicting the phases of action research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010).

In practice, action research can be a complex process, making documentation critical. For the purposes of action research, this action research sought to explore the critical link between the concrete experiences of the urban youth educators, their judgments about these experiences, their resulting actions and the implications for their programs. Participants were asked to identify the challenges they face in their programming efforts and to identify the sources of these challenges. The subsequent interpretation represents the researcher's understanding of the participants' perceptions of the phenomenon of interest (Merriam, 2009).

Role duality is viewed by Holian and Coghlan (2012) as a major factor in insider action research projects. Insider action research depends on the integrity of the researcher. Potential bias "can be related to what the researcher sees and asks, what participants think the researcher wants to hear, and what participants choose to emphasize, include or exclude (p. 411). Critical ethical issues could arise from the researcher holding an ongoing work role that involves power relationships while serving as the action researcher (Holian and Coghlan (2012).

Research Design Rationale

The practice of critical reflection was used to elicit deeper meaning from participant reports of intentional and unintentional outcomes of programming efforts in mature systems. Such reflection revealed behaviors and strategies unique to these educators. A V-diagram (see Appendix A) was created to guide the reasoning from the conceptual frame of the problem through the development of appropriate methods to find a solution to the research problem, as well as to aid in the formulation of the research questions. I selected this research design because I wanted to develop a stronger and more informed understanding of how urban youth educators develop strategies and behaviors to navigate resistance. Specifically, I sought to explore the leadership development of boundary spanning youth educators serving outlying audiences on

behalf of a mature, non-formal, rural-oriented education system. The aim of the study was to identify boundary spanning behaviors urban youth educators use to navigate resistant systems.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What strategies do urban 4-H youth educators use to navigate resistance from both the urban community and the rural-oriented Cooperative Extension education system?
2. What behaviors do urban 4-H youth educators use to span boundaries for the Cooperative Extension system and for working within the system?
3. What is the impact of action research at the individual, organizational, and national policy levels concerning the boundary spanning behaviors of community-based, urban 4-H youth educators?

This study examined 4-H programs to identify conditions that contribute to the challenges urban educators face in their practice. Because study participants relied on the inductive reasoning process to construct meaning (constructionism) of the urban youth educators' day-to-day practices, the qualitative action research approach was deemed appropriate. As Merriam (2009) has noted, "Often qualitative researchers undertake a qualitative study because there is a lack of theory or an existing theory fails to adequately explain a phenomenon" (p. 15). The continuous interaction between constructing, planning action, taking action and evaluating action resulted in collaborative problem solving among the urban youth educators and fostered leadership development for the facilitator. The key practices of the action research model applicable to this study included:

1. involving organizational members in the process (entry and contracting)
2. conducting data gathering
3. joint evaluation and interpretation of the data

4. joint diagnosis of an intervention strategy
5. joint evaluation of outcomes (Anderson, 2010).

Coghlan and Brannick (2010) emphasize that the researcher is not an expert who makes decisions independently, but a contributor engaging in a collaborative venture (p. 9). This study afforded the researcher and all participants in the action research team a space to reflect on experiences that lead to professional growth, while simultaneously addressing genuine needs of the organization (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010).

Sample Selection

Participants in the study were individuals recognized by their peers as exemplary 4-H educators. Study participants were selected using the snowball sampling method. This method began with a participant suitable for the study context identifying other potential participants with the same or similar roles or expertise. Thompson (2002), in Handcock and Gile (2011), describes the process of snowball sampling:

The term “snowball sampling” has been applied to two types of procedures related to network sampling. In one type . . . a few identified members of a rare population are asked to identify other members of the population, those so identified are asked to identify others, and so on, for the purpose of obtaining a nonprobability sample or for constructing a frame from which to sample. In the other type (Goodman, 1961), individuals in the sample are asked to identify other individuals, for a fixed number of stages, for the purpose of estimating the number of “mutual relationships” or “social circles” in the population. (p. 183)

Upon approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), study participants were recruited through email correspondence. An initial email explained the study’s purpose and

asked educators to reply if they had questions or wished to join the study. Those who responded received a second email (see Appendix B) with a link to a web page containing the letter of intent. Ten invitations were extended; eight recipients accepted the invitation and two declined, yielding eight participants. After receiving eight affirmative consent responses, a web poll was sent to participants to schedule the first meeting online via Wimba[®], an online synchronous classroom.

The resulting group, referred to as the National Action Research Team (NART), consisted of members whose experience in the field varied widely, from four to 34 years. The team members worked in Cooperative Extension youth development programs in eight urban cities, each in a program representing the decentralized unit of the mature, rural-oriented land-grant institution. Table 3 presents a list of participants with basic demographic information and years of experience. Pseudonyms are used to identify participants in accordance with confidentiality agreements.

Table 3

National Action Research Team (NART) Profiles

Member	U.S. Region	County Population	Race and Gender	Years of 4-H Experience
Kevin²	West	10 million	Black Male	19
Brenda	West	2 million	White Female	3
Paul	South Central	4 million	Black Male	6
Jackie	Central	500,000	Black Female	6
Sia	Central	650,000	Black Female	34
Elise	Southeast	700,000	Black Female	7
Jasmine	Northeast	1.5 million	Black Female	12
Louise	Northeast	1.6 million	Black Female	24

² All names in table are pseudonyms.

Data Collection

Ruona (2005) describes qualitative data as a representation of participants' perceptions "*through and in their own words*" (p. 234). Yin (2009) lists six major sources of data in qualitative studies: physical artifacts, archival records, interviews, documentation, direct observation and participant-observation. Yin notes that a "major strength of case study data collection is the opportunity to use many different sources of evidence" (p. 114).

Reliability and Validity

Stringer (2007) indicates that demonstrating the integrity of processes in action research is fundamental to establishing study validity. To ensure reliability and validity, strategies to establish trustworthiness were incorporated into the processes of data collection and analysis throughout the study. For example, the study drew on multiple sources of evidence--including interviews transcripts, group meeting transcripts, documents and reflective memos--to provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon (Yin, 2009). Table 4 presents the research plan of the study and the multiple sources of evidence collected for each research question to ensure triangulation, a factor contributing to the study's internal validity or credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To mitigate any possible validity threats, several additional trustworthiness tactics were used, including:

1. Personal disclosure statement – to examine personal assumptions and biases as related to the research study
2. Memoing – to aid in illuminating assumptions and biases and help reconstruct and understand the research process, enhancing the reporting of findings

3. Member checks – to test the accuracy and plausibility of themes that emerged from participant data
4. Audit trail – notes taken to document the data collection process, the categorization of data and the decision making process. (Ruona, 2005)

Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified four attributes used to establish that the outcomes of research are trustworthy: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. According to Stringer (2007), action research outcomes are applicable only to the particular people and places involved in the study. However, transferability may be achieved when close attention is paid to the description of study context and processes.

Dependability was achieved by creating and following a research plan; developing and sharing process and meta-learning updates with the study advisor via email, face-to-face meetings and document reviews; and chronicling the action research process throughout the study.

Table 4

The Research Plan

Research Question	Data Collected	Analysis Approach
1. What strategies do urban 4-H youth educators use to navigate resistance from the urban community and the rural-oriented Cooperative Extension system?	NART Group Meetings Critical Incident Interviews Literature Field notes	Recursive analysis Thematic coding Constant comparative analysis
2. What behaviors do urban youth educators use to span boundaries for the rural-oriented Cooperative Extension system and for working within the system?	NART Group Meetings Critical Incident Interviews Literature	Recursive analysis Thematic coding Constant comparative analysis
3. What is the impact of action research on learning at the individual, organizational and national policy levels relating to the boundary spanning behaviors of urban 4-H youth educators?	Field notes Researcher process memos Final interviews with NART members	Meta-Analysis of the action research process

Finally, confirmability was achieved using the audit trail recommended by Ruona (2005), which included researcher notes, field notes, interview transcripts, group meeting transcripts and document reviews. Stringer (2007) notes:

Rigor in action research is based on checks to ensure that the outcomes of research are trustworthy—that they do not merely reflect the particular perspectives, biases, or worldview of the researcher and that they are not based solely on superficial or simplistic analyses of issues investigated. (p. 57)

Critical Incident Interviews

The critical incident technique was selected as the primary method of research for the study. The critical incident technique is described by its creator, John Flannigan (1954), as a set of procedures for collecting direct observations of human behavior in such a way as to facilitate their potential usefulness in solving practical problems and developing broad psychological principles. The critical incident technique outlines procedures for collecting observed incidents having special significance and for meeting systematically defined criteria. Critical incident interview questions used in this study are shown in Table 5. The technique is a proven qualitative research method that offers a practical, step-by-step approach to collecting information about human activities and analyzing their significance to the people involved (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004). The semi-structured approach included additional how, why and who was involved questions to generate rich data from the interview participants. At the end of the critical incident interviews, participants were asked (a) What conditions at the organization level would need to change for urban 4-H programs to thrive? and (b) How would the results of this change appear in your practice? Critical incident interview data were collected, transcribed and coded. Data analysis is discussed later in the chapter.

Table 5

Critical Incident Interview Questions

Critical Incident Technique Questions for Urban Cooperative Extension Youth Educators	
<p>1. What is the most significant positive experience you have had in your role as an urban Cooperative Extension youth educator? Please describe the incident in detail, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What led up to it? • What was your role? • What happened? What actions did you take? • What were your thoughts and feelings? • How did it turn out? • Why was it significant? What were the implications for your urban 4-H program? 	<p>2. What is the most significant negative experience you have had in your role as an urban Cooperative Extension youth educator? Please describe the incident in detail, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What led up to it? • What was your role? • What happened? What actions did you take? • What were your thoughts and feelings? • How did it turn out? • Why was it significant? What were the implications for your urban 4-H program?

Group Meetings

The initial group meeting of the NART was structured to make introductions and establish group expectations, as well as to gather demographic data and information on participants' interest, participants' expectations and participants' perspectives of the study's purpose. Subsequent group meetings involved reviewing emerging themes from the data, completing member checks of initial findings, providing input on the presentation delivered at the 2013 National Urban Extension Conference and planning and developing the study's action research intervention. These meetings were typically one hour long, with over half of the group attending each meeting, on average. Prior to each meeting, a reminder email was sent with a tentative meeting agenda. All correspondence included the study's purpose statement at the bottom to remind each participant of our study goal.

If a document review was scheduled for the meeting, the relevant document was distributed via email prior to each meeting. Documents were also made available during meetings if needed. Because the NART members were geographically dispersed across the United States, I needed to develop a plan for convening the NART, so I consulted with University of Bellevue's³ technology support group regarding the virtual group meetings after experiencing success using virtual technology to connect group members across the state. It was decided that the most effective method for geographically dispersed teams would be Wimba[®] classroom technology.

Wimba[®] classroom is a live, virtual classroom environment with robust features that includes audio, video, application sharing and content display. Its pedagogical design and ease-of-use supports group engagement. Advanced features such as polling, whiteboarding, presenter on-the-fly, resizable chat areas and participant lists, usage analytics tools, and MP3 and MP4 downloads support interaction between groups and facilitators (Wimba.com, 2013). NART group and individual meeting audio data were recorded via Wimba[®], downloaded to an MP3 file and professionally transcribed. Data were analyzed using the methods described in the "Data Analysis" section below.

Documents

Documents and field notes gathered during the course of the study were used to accentuate the meaning-making process during the study. Documents included field notes, journal entries, emails and organizational correspondence related to the study.

³ Pseudonym

Reflective Memos

An accumulation of mind maps, concepts, relationship inquiries and random ideas were recorded as reflective memos for the study. Memos on the action research group's process, initial study findings and the theoretical framework for the study were compiled and shared with the researcher's dissertation committee for review. Reflective memos were important for recalling details and the meanings made from those details throughout the study.

Data Analysis

Typical of action research, data analysis began at the onset of the study and informed the subsequent iterative cycles of the action research process (Stringer, 2007). Initial findings from a survey conducted to gather baseline data at the local level aided in the problem clarification phase (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Ruona, 2005). These findings were used in the constructing phase of the action research process (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010) to develop research questions. The research design included collecting multiple data sets in order to use triangulation to support reliable data analysis (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). The data were collected from urban youth educators utilizing the critical incident technique, which elicited deeply meaningful personal reflections on positive and negative experiences related to program planning, development and delivery to outlying audiences.

Merriam (2009) notes the value of data provided in narratives, such as the cases in this study, in helping us understand the world around us. In this case study, the knowledge generated from the cases provides insight into leadership behaviors and strategies employed by urban youth educators to navigate resistance. To address the study's research questions, an inductive, first-level coding schema was used to extract key phrases and themes describing the behaviors of urban youth educators (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Ruona, 2005). A master list of codes and sub-

codes was developed. These codes and sub-codes were assigned as references to supportive data found in each transcript.

The voluminous data gathered through the action research process included audio recordings, emails, transcriptions, journal entries, field notes and related documents. Ruona's (2005) method of qualitative data analysis, which utilizes the widely available Microsoft Office® Word 2007, was chosen for the study. Ruona's method provided clear steps for data analysis, including data preparation, familiarization, coding, meaning making and triangulation.

Data Preparation

In the first step of data analysis, data preparation, audio recordings of critical incident interviews were professionally transcribed, edited and formatted to ensure "clean" files. To protect the study participants' identities, each case was assigned a code number and any material that might lead to identifying participants was removed from the transcripts. A filing system was established using both printed and electronic files. Electronic files were maintained and backed up routinely throughout the process.

Data Familiarization

The second step of data analysis, data familiarization, required deep immersion in the data. To accomplish this, I routinely listened to transcribed audio recordings to double check the accuracy of each case transcript. During this step, I made notes referencing areas that needed clarification and comments that would require reconnecting with the interviewee to gain a deeper understanding of the response. This step also provided the opportunity to reflect on the data and record any insights that emerged as I "tuned in" to the participant data (Ruona, 2005, p. 241).

Data Coding

Merriam (2009) asserted that “the analysis of data involves identifying recurring patterns that characterize data” (p. 23). I began the process of data coding following the familiarization step by reading the first two NART members’ critical incident interview following transcription. Using open coding, I color coded broad, recurring themes and concepts in each critical incident interview. The color yellow was used to highlight broad categories of the data from each of the two interviews in response to research question #1 – “What strategies do urban 4-H youth educators use to navigate resistance from both the urban community and the rural-oriented Cooperative Extension system?” and #2 – “What behaviors do urban 4-H youth educators use to span boundaries for the Cooperative Extension system and for working within the system?”

Continuing the open coding process, broad categories were assigned to the highlighted text of each case. Some data were assigned multiple categories. For example, all data associated with community engagement was highlighted and engagement was written in the column next to the data. All data associated with advocating was highlighted and the advocacy was written in the column next to the data. A master list of categories and subcategories were identified and used to create the initial coding scheme.

The initial coding scheme was used to create a job aide used to train NART members on collaborative coding. The coding session was conducted via Wimba© where Power Point slides of the data from the first two critical incident interviews were displayed via the whiteboard. A copy of the job aide used during the training session was emailed prior to the session. The document included the study purpose, research question, definition of boundary spanning, coding scheme, explanation of each theme and the related code number. Space was provided for notes and for adding additional themes or categories. During the session the initial coding scheme was

“checked” and consensus decision making on the meaning validated and substantiated each code; and categories were consolidated. Five new subcategories were suggested by NART members and added to the coding scheme development. After consolidation, the master list of 10 major themes was reduced to four major categories and nine subcategories (Appendix C).

The initial job aide was updated following the group coding session and a second coding job aide was created that listed the categories and subcategories used for the subsequent collaborative coding sessions with the NART members. The subsequent sessions included a member check of each NART members’ coded interview (Merriam, 2009) prior to the collaborative coding session. The sessions averaged 20 – 30 minutes in length. This process allowed NART members to validate whether appropriate meanings were captured from the data collected from their critical incident interview. NART members provided feedback on the plausibility and accuracy of the emerging themes (Merriam, 2009) to ensure reliability and data trustworthiness. Each participant was asked to share their interpretation of the themes involving resistance encountered during practice or as a behavior used to effectively span boundaries. This allowed each member participating in collaborative coding to be immersed in the data, reflect on the data and engage in capturing the “qualitative richness of the phenomenon” under review (Ruona, 2005, p. 241). Notes were taken during the data analysis process and compiled in process memos. Researcher reflections were captured in the researcher journal.

Generating Meaning

Simultaneous and recursive analysis continued throughout the collection of the critical incident data and the ongoing meta-analysis of the action research project to determine the effectiveness of the action research process. According to Ruona (2005), “this simultaneous process of data collection and analysis ensures that you are critically reflecting and continually

learning throughout the data analysis process and that learning is being used to conduct better research” (p. 237). The process was also used to gauge whether rich data was being collected and whether research goals were being met.

At the conclusion of the study, data were collected to aid in the meta-analysis of the action research process. During the final NART group meeting, study participants were asked to reflect on their experiences as members of the NART by answering the following exit interview questions:

1. What are your thoughts about the use of the action research process?
2. What did you find most useful about the action research process?
3. How do you envision incorporating action inquiry for problem solving in your practice?
4. What has been your key learning about your role as an urban youth educator?
5. How can this process contribute to key learning for leaders in your organization?
6. How can the knowledge gained be used to improve your work?

Final one-on-one interviews were scheduled for the NART members not in attendance for the final group meeting and interview. Data from the meeting and interviews were transcribed and open coded for analysis.

Coghlan and Brannick (2010) describe the development of reflective skill through journaling by noting, “[Y]ou can keep track of your experience, the questions which arise out of the experience, the insights you receive, how you weigh evidence in order to verify your understanding and how you make decisions and what actions you take” (p. 28). Journals kept by the researcher aided in the meta-analysis of the action research process and in the researcher’s own learning. Coghlan and Brannick observe that developing skills of awareness [reflective

skills] forces one to challenge the use of theory and learn to apply theory to practice, as “you learn to experience learning as a continuous life task as you apply your learning to future situations” (p. 28). Reflective action was thus a key feature of the study’s objectives for both the researcher and the participants.

Researcher Position

Qualitative research demands consideration of the researcher’s subjectivity or “lens”; it is vital to understand how a researcher’s theories, beliefs and perceptions affect the conduct and conclusions of a study to avoid negative consequences (Maxwell, 2005). Because I worked as an urban youth educator during the study, I experienced personally the resistance to the diffusion of 4-H in the urban community. I attributed the resistance to a lack of knowledge in urban environments about this traditionally rural program. As a new educator, I hoped to raise awareness of the program’s benefits among urban stakeholders, students and parents. Because I started the position with very little knowledge of the program’s history or traditions, I believed it was only a matter of recruiting students and convincing stakeholders to adopt the programs in their respective locations. This was the first level of resistance I met.

I met a second level of resistance when I assumed the Cooperative Extension organization had a plan for tackling low enrollment in urban communities. Efforts did exist, including the urban initiative that spurred this study, but many met with little success. After identifying a potential relationship between organizational resistance to alternative delivery methods and low program participation among urban youth, I began to look more closely at program development to get an understanding of the gaps between the desired state of programming and the current state of programming. As a result of this examination, I decided to develop a study to improve practice among urban educators who encountered similar forms of

resistance. However, I quickly learned that there were political, positional and historical factors at play in the organization's inability to integrate the unique strategies and boundary spanning behaviors that would guide the organization and urban youth educators practice toward a new future.

Exploring how urban educators "make it work" despite these barriers became my focus. What were those who were getting it right doing? I found that I had to suspend my preconceptions in order to elicit information that would educate organization leaders and move them toward incorporating the incidental learning of field educators into their program development.

Limitations of the Study

Each research method is a different way of collecting and analyzing empirical data, and each has its own advantages and disadvantages (Yin, 2009). One limitation of this study was the sample selection process. This case relied on snowball sampling and yielded eight participants. Future studies should consider methods for generating a larger participant pool to aid in efficient transferability of study findings. Role-duality and associated bias was another limitation of the study. Leading action research within one's own organization could lead to ethical, power and political threats to the researcher and participants. Close attention must be paid to researcher positionality, pre-conceptions relating to the study and biases arising from the social closeness to study participants and the organization.

CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDY REPORT

Bridges are widely known as structures that serve as a link from one place to another. By providing linkages, bridges enable functions between people. A bridge between people enables the passage of ideas, it connects people who are in different places, it provides support, it opens up the opportunity for people to be helped, it reduces isolation, and it increases the range of options available (Building Bridges, 2013). The process of constructing a bridge, and the resulting support and connection to new places, is analogous to the process action research and the resulting new, actionable knowledge it generates. The process of constructing a bridge details the action research teams' process of exploring strategies and behaviors urban 4-H educators use to span boundaries between the Cooperative Extension organization and the urban community. The process ultimately lead the team to answers relative to navigating resistance and generated knowledge useful at individual, organizational, and national policy levels.

The purpose of this study was to explore the boundary spanning behaviors used by urban 4-H educators to navigate resistant systems. For the purposes of this study, *resistant systems* were designated as both urbanized communities and the mature non-formal Cooperative Extension education system. This multiple-case study focused on urban youth educators as expert-performing educators who acted as boundary spanners in navigating the resistance they faced in creating thriving urban 4-H programs. The specific focus was on the urban youth educators' experiences of creating and delivering programs for reaching non-traditional "outlying" audiences without relevant training for servicing these audiences.

This chapter details origins of the research problem and the action research process developed to address it. The action research phases of study construction, planning action, taking action and evaluating action will be discussed, utilizing Stringer's (2007) simple core steps of look, think and act. The core steps serve as the lens through which action research may be linked to the actions taken, clarifying the interactions for the study. This chapter tells the story of the researcher and the urban youth educators working collaboratively, in the richness of the real-life context of the case, to identify behaviors used to solve work place problems (Yin, 2003).

Situating the Study

In the state of Bellevue⁴, Bellevue Cooperative Extension was formed in 1914 with the passage of the Smith-Lever Act at the University of Bellevue, the state's flagship land-grant institution. Its purpose was to provide practical education opportunities to Bellevue citizens. Cooperative Extension's mission is carried out through outreach education led by county-based educators, with curricula and programming developed by specialists in the University of Bellevue's Agriculture College and selected University of Bellevue's collaborators from other colleges and departments. An extensive network of over 300 county Cooperative Extension educators housed in each Bellevue county is the primary vehicle for program delivery.

The state of Bellevue is comprised of over 100 counties. I worked in the Ray county Cooperative Extension offices as a 4-H agent for five years. The county is the state's largest county. It is one of a group of counties that make up the state's largest cluster of urbanized counties, the Shelby metroplex. This group of counties, federally defined as a metro area, contains a core urban area with 50,000 or more people, together with any adjacent counties that have a high degree of social and economic integration (as measured by commuting to work) with

⁴ All names in this section are pseudonyms

the urban core (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). After suffering severe budget cuts over the years, University of Bellevue Cooperative Extension restructured the way it delivers county programs and services to fit within the new funding limitations. With 4-H reductions in staff and resources, it became difficult to maintain the same level of service and visibility in all of Bellevue's counties.

As the oldest and largest publicly funded youth development organization in the United States, 4-H has sought to broaden its traditional program, developed for children in rural communities, to expand programming into urban counties (National 4-H Council, 2012). The mission of Bellevue 4-H is to provide opportunities for youth to acquire knowledge, develop life skills, form attitudes and practice behaviors that will enable them to become self-directing, productive and contributing members of society (Bellevue 4-H, 2011). Bellevue 4-H's base programs include in-school club meetings, district project achievement (public speaking and demonstration competitions), residential summer camp and State 4-H Council (officers' training). Enrollment and participation in these programs are reported to the Bellevue 4-H accounting system and used to create impact reports for accountability for state and federal funding of Cooperative Extension programs in Bellevue.

Project Origins

The catalyst for this multiple-case action research was the 2010 urban programming initiative held at Camp Focus, a now-defunct camping center once used as one of the state's multiple 4-H centers. Many of the meeting attendees had attended the camp previously as a camper, camp counselor or Cooperative Extension worker. Today, only a shell of the former facility remains, as the site has become a physical manifestation of the concerns that brought us

to Camp Focus on that hot August day in 2010 to discuss urbanization and its impact on Cooperative Extension efforts in the Shelby metroplex.

Those present at the meeting were involved in Cooperative Extension's "urban initiative," developed in response to the growing need to reach more urban residents. Our focus was to address challenges faced as a result of the state becoming increasingly urbanized and racially and ethnically diverse. The primary purpose of the meeting was to identify strategies to address the gap separating the current and desired state of programming in Bellevue's major urban cluster. Specifically, University of Bellevue Cooperative Extension leaders wanted to explore ways to increase the visibility of the Cooperative Extension programs in the Shelby metroplex.

The group meeting in which these urban programming issues were discussed drew on the expertise of organization leaders for direction toward solutions. At the conclusion of the discussion among educators from the metroplex counties and organization leaders, the leaders determined that cross-county marketing of signature multi-county programs would be the most effective strategy to increase the visibility, impact and outcomes of Shelby metroplex programs.

The decision to address this problem collaboratively as educators with direct experience in the Shelby metroplex as an urban initiative was met with skepticism by many of the participants at the planning meeting. One county leader stated, "This has been tried several times before in the past and still nothing has changed." Looking more deeply at why "nothing has changed" presents the opportunity for key individual and organizational learning, as assumptions, traditions and inflexibility often present barriers to learning in mature organizations that cannot move beyond past actions and results.

This process of inquiry piqued my interest in finding a solution to low participation rates and lack of buy-in from students, parents and community stakeholders to the urban 4-H program I was currently managing in Ray County. To help find solutions for my organization, I decided to undertake a study that would help identify barriers to creating thriving 4-H programs in urban Cooperative Extension and develop a collaborative solution with the 4-H educators of the Shelby metroplex counties. This marked the start of the “constructing” phase of the study shown below in Table 6, a timeline of the action research study’s critical events.

Cycle 1: Constructing the Bridge: Laying the Foundation

According to Stringer (2007), action research is a participatory process that relies on people’s collective knowledge of their own situation to provide a basis for action and to discover solutions to challenges within their operating system. The author further describes action research as a constant process of observation, reflection and action that engages “subjects” or stakeholders as full and equal participants in the research process.

Table 6

Action Research Study Critical Events Timeline

Cycle/ Phase	Date	Activities/ Intervention	Considerations	Outcome
1 Constructing	Feb 17, 2011	Entry and Contracting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting with the Organization Leader 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial contact with client system
	April 4, 2011	S. Fulton Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevance of programming • validation of presenting problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared findings with primary and secondary stakeholder • Aided in formulation of problem statement

Cycle/ Phase	Date	Activities/ Intervention	Considerations	Outcome
	May 17, 2011	Informal conversation with Shelby Metroplex educators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternative perspectives of problems Use of Shelby Metroplex educators action research team 	Researcher: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experienced the importance of facilitation of group discussion skills Experienced and learned from resistance Experienced political treats to insider action research
	April 2011	Entry and Contracting	Submittal of Action research proposal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Action research proposal approved by Organizational Leader 1
	July 25, 2011	Meeting with secondary stakeholder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting included midlevel manager of quadrant 2 4-H 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-construction of problem statement with client system
	Nov 2011	Informal Conversation with National Expert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subjectivity statement Knowledge base gap/direction of research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identification of academic interests of practitioner engaged in successful programming
2 Planning Action	Dec 2011	Initiation of snowball sampling for participant pool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educators identified as exemplars 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ten recommended and 8 consented to participate in the study
	March 5, 2012	Formation of NART/1 st Informational Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team formation Team Purpose Team Charter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 participants present Team charter created Timeline shared Expectations shared
	April – June 2012 July – Sept 2012	Critical incident interviews (each participant)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore positive and negative experiences in practice and what lead to them Opportunity to engage in critical reflection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial interviews did not reveal in-depth data, follow-up interviews were conducted following a training session on critical incident interview with research committee member
3 Taking Action	Sept 2012	Open coding completed NART coding training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NART collaborative coding “check” session 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members established a coding scheme Final job aide created for coding sessions

Cycle/ Phase	Date	Activities/ Intervention	Considerations	Outcome
	Nov 2012 - Jan 2013	Member Checking Diagnosis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Validity step • co-construct a rich definition of problem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members ranked emerging challenges • Members choose a challenge to address as NART
	Feb 2013	Data Preparation –Familiarization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immersion in the data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection on data and process
	April 9, 2013	NART Group Meeting	Findings review and reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial findings were shared and dissemination planned
	May 2013	National Urban Extension Conference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Session participants ranked findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Session participants reflected and participated in action process
	June 2013	Group meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion of dissemination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration of National 4-H Council connection
	August 2013	Presentation to Nation 4-H Council Member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National policy influencer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invitation for study participants to respond to RFA for urban programming support
Evaluating Action	Sept 2013	Final NART interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closing of study and next steps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection on the AR process and key learning

The first cycle in the thesis phase, constructing (see Figure 4), is described by Coghlan & Brannick (2010) as “dialogic activity in which the stakeholders of the project engage in constructing which action will be planned and taken” (p. 9). The authors stress the importance of collaborative action that engages others with relevant perspectives. Stringer (2007) identified the purpose of the core steps of look, think and act as “gathering relevant information” (p. 8), “producing meaningful descriptions and interpretations” (p. 96) and planning and implementing solutions.

Look: Securing Client System Stakeholders

The formal stakeholders during this phase of the study were a Bellevue Cooperative Extension Organization Leader 1 and a Bellevue Cooperative Extension Organization Leader 2.

The Organization Leader 1 serves as the director of all Cooperative Extension programs in counties located within a quadrant of the state and is the formal stakeholder for this project. The Organization Leader 2 is a mid-level manager of 4-H program development and delivery for the same quadrant of the state, and served as a secondary stakeholder for the study. A third, informal stakeholder, a National 4-H policy influencer, emerged in later phases of the action research study.

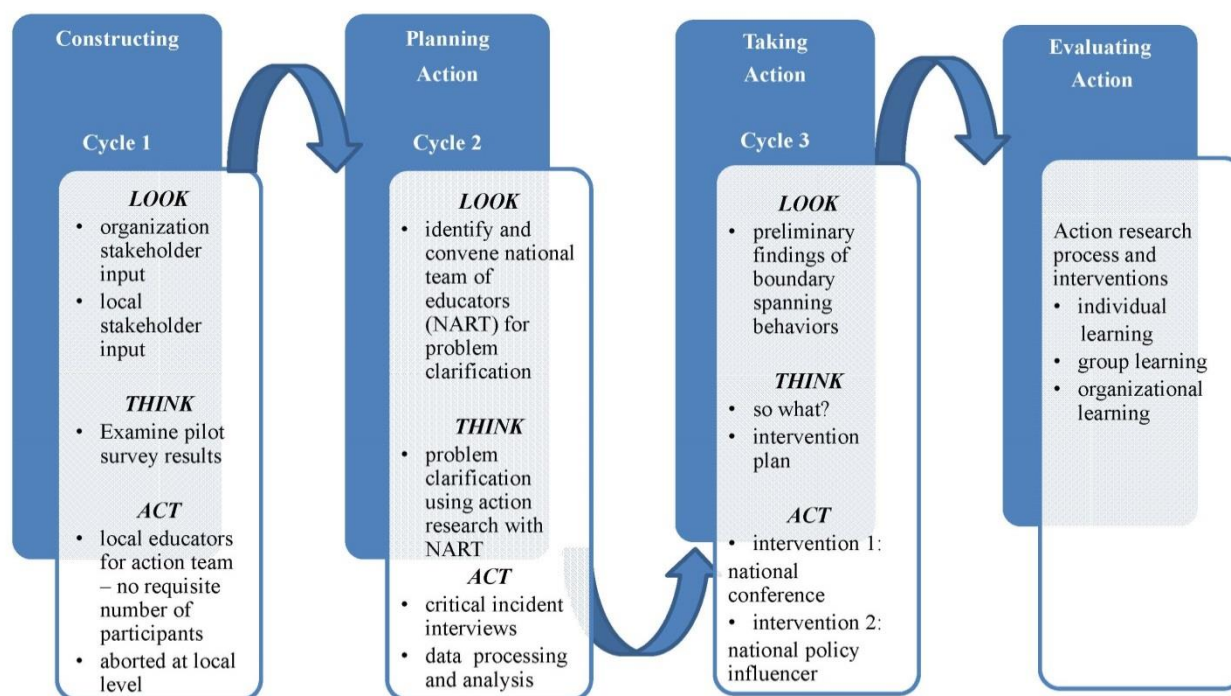


Figure 4. Cycle of the action research project with core steps.

Before meeting with formal stakeholders, I developed a plan to conduct action research within Area 2 that was informed by a literature review encompassing studies on informal

learning, organizational change and the process of action research. At this phase of the research, my study focus had not been determined and reflective journal entries revealed that the questions I discussed with my research chair were:

How have other youth serving organizations adapted to meet the needs of the community it serves (external demands)? How are the external demands on Cooperative Extension (system) assessed? How does the system respond to these external influences? Is the system closed to external demands? How are internal resources (logic model inputs and outputs) translated to satisfy the needs of the external environment (outcomes for the urban community)?

February 11, 2011, I met with the Organization Leader 1 to present the action research study proposal outlining the study timeline and the various phases of the study. To prepare for this meeting, I reviewed Anderson's (2010) three tips for successful interviews which include: (a) listening without interrupting, (b) avoiding indicating agreement or disagreement, and (c) taking notes sparingly. I did not record the session; therefore, I was not able to completely adhere to the latter tip of taking notes sparingly.

Expectations of both the organization and the researcher were discussed during the review of the research proposal. It was important to establish an agreement on expectations. The Organization Leader 1 stated expectation of me would include: (a) maintaining a balanced program at work, (b) identifying opportunities to merge my research with my job, and (c) presenting findings to the administrative cabinet of Cooperative Extension and State 4-H leaders. When asked if there are specific additions to the research proposal to develop tools to improve programming and make the process successful, the leader reminded me that usually "no one listens to the researcher" and that "going outside the box can be political, but necessary". Before

concluding the entry interview the leader also noted that we should be upfront about progress and that he would “contact me if he felt things aren’t progressing”.

After the study proposal was approved, in a follow-up meeting the Organization Leader 1 invited the Organization Leader 2 to discuss the action research project and the construction of the problem statement. It was decided during the discussion with the stakeholders that surveying community stakeholders in Ray County would provide needed information to shape the direction of the study. With input from the study stakeholders, I developed and distributed the survey.

Think: Toward a Desired State of Programming

Bellevue 4-H depends heavily on volunteers, parents and teachers to deliver youth development programs in Ray County. After reviewing notes from the entry and contracting discussions with both organizational stakeholders that provided a snapshot of the current state of 4-H programming in Ray County, I identified themes related to program relevance and program quality. To assess barriers to recruitment, retention and quality programming, I created a survey for adults working directly with youth in Ray County as a means of assessing and clarifying the concerns of these stakeholders. As suggested by Stringer (2007), the survey was shared with the secondary stakeholder and with my research mentor, who provided recommendations to ensure the reliability of the survey instrument.

A web-based survey was developed based on the literature review and the information provided by the Organization Leader 1, Organization Leader 2 and research mentor. Fifty-two participants were selected to receive the 10-item survey via Survey Monkey[®]. Participants were selected using purposeful random sampling. The participant pool consisted of teachers, Ray County employees, parents, volunteers, members of the 4-H advisory board, community leaders and Ray County Cooperative Extension staff. Each participant received an email containing a

statement of the survey's purpose, a request for confidential participation and the Survey Monkey[®] link to the survey. The survey was available for a period of two weeks. Of those invited to complete the survey, 30 individuals (50%) responded. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from the survey.

Preliminary findings. Among survey respondents, six were from youth and family organizations, two were from churches, two were from Ray County government, four were parents, nine were from schools, two were social service providers, two were volunteers and three were other. Figure 5 shows a graph of the survey respondent profile.

Barriers to participation. Respondents were asked to identify barriers to youth participation in 4-H programs in Ray County (see Figure 6). The themes that emerged were parent buy-in (37%), transportation (20.8%), budget cuts (16.6%) and uninterested youth (12.5%). These results suggest a need for direct parental marketing that addresses the benefits of participation in 4-H programs. Transportation, ranking second, was directly related to parent buy-in, in that parents are unlikely to arrange transportation to a program they don't understand or view as a priority. Issues of budget cuts (19%) and youth disinterest (14%) suggest a need for more staff, resources and marketing efforts to recruit youth into the program.

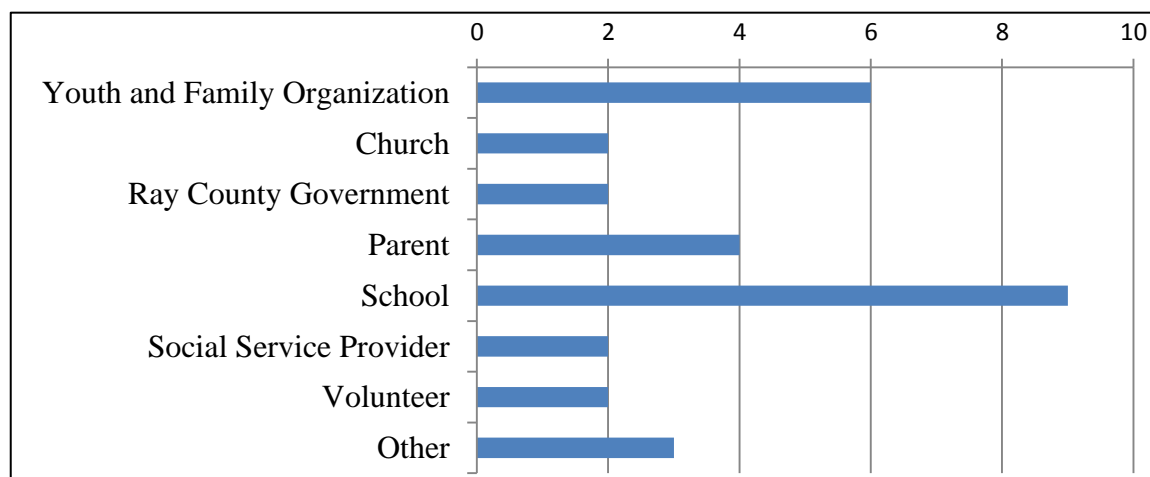


Figure 5. Respondents to Ray County program evaluation survey.

Marketing in urban communities. When asked how best to reach youth in the Ray County community to deliver the 4-H and youth development programs, 33% of respondents suggested in-school programs, 16% suggested mentoring programs, 13.5% offered no suggestion and 12.5% suggested the following: church, sports and social media. This supports the Bellevue 4-H (state model) in-school delivery approach. The mentoring program can be interpreted to suggest after-school programs. Social media was also as a way to reach students in Ray County. These results strengthen the argument that 4-H educators should not be removed from schools, even in cases where limited staff inhibits the number of schools visited.

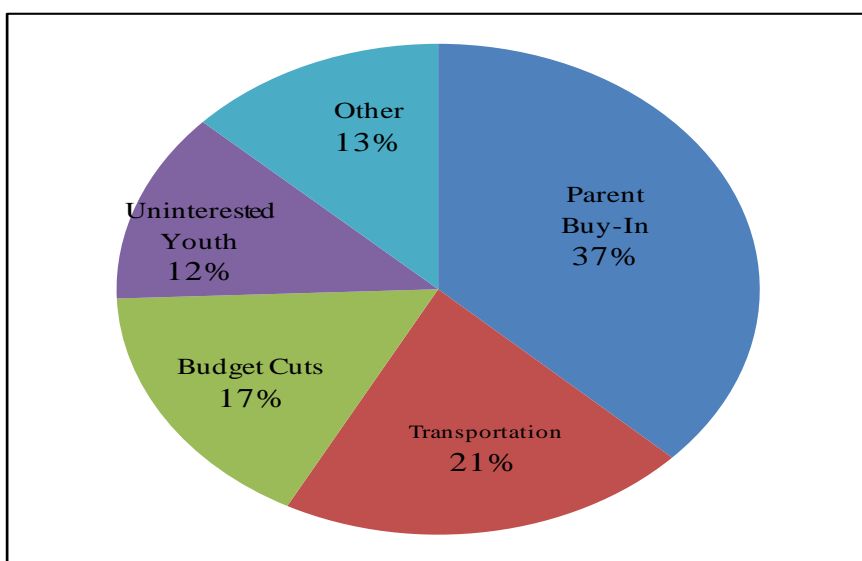


Figure 6. Barriers to youth participation in 4-H programs in Ray County.

Relevance of 4-H and youth development programs in Ray County. Because the roots of 4-H lie in agriculture education and home economics in rural communities, opponents of urban Cooperative Extension programming have argued that there is no place for 4-H programming in urban communities. However, when asked whether 4-H is relevant to urban youth, 91.7% of survey respondents responded Yes, citing its science programs and exposure to science and math enrichment as beneficial to youth in urban communities. One respondent added, “Yes, because

the lessons taught coincide with the Bellevue Performance Standards.” Such recognition is significant in the assessment of relevance. Other respondents identified the development of community awareness, self-discipline and a sense of pride, along with facilitating youth interaction and exposing students to agriscience, as evidence for the relevance of 4-H.

Target audience. Survey respondents identified elementary school students (72%) as the primary audience for 4-H programming, along with youth in programs provided by other youth and family service organizations (66.7%) and youth in recreation centers (61.1%). Beyond the work taking place in schools, these results suggest a need for collaboration with other programs to reach and retain students in the 4-H program in the Ray County community.

Special programs and activities. Bellevue 4-H offers special programs and activities including livestock judging (poultry, horse, cow and hog); consumer judging (food, clothing and textiles); land judging (forestry and wildlife); summer camps; public speaking and demonstration competitions; and activities to promote leadership (service learning, community service and citizenship projects). Respondents were asked to rank the degree to which each activity would successfully attract and retain students in the 4-H program. The summer camp program was ranked most attractive (60%), followed by leadership activities (52%) and public speaking (40%). Consumer judging, land judging and livestock judging, all associated with rural programming, were ranked lowest.

When asked to identify the factors that make 4-H unique in comparison to other youth development programs, 40% of respondents cited the programs offered as the most unique factor of 4-H. One respondent noted, “4-H offers more variety in its programming.” Other respondents identified the environmental programs, the affiliation with the University of Bellevue and the

fact that the 4-H program is free as distinctive features. These responses provide key information that may be used to promote the program and to enhance marketing and recruitment efforts.

Recommendations to increase visibility and participation in the 4-H program in Ray County. Participants provided helpful suggestions in response to a question asking how to increase the visibility of and increase enrollment in the 4-H program. The most common themes that emerged included:

- Pursuing a partnership with the board of education
- Presenting the program at PTA meetings
- Connecting with youth through social media
- Increasing publicity at schools, recreation centers and libraries
- Recruiting volunteer leaders to deliver and promote the program

These recommendations provide a foundation to develop an intervention that will identify and reduce barriers to participation, increase program visibility and enhance the program's relevance to its target audience.

Act: Laying the Framework

Engagement with the study's stakeholders, coupled with my interest in improving program delivery to "outlying," non-traditional urban communities, enhanced my understanding of the problem from multiple perspectives. Findings from the Ray County survey helped produce meaningful interpretations of the data, while subsequent meetings with stakeholders helped shape the final problem statement.

After compiling the results of the survey on the Ray County 4-H program, I shared the results with Organization Leader 1 and Organization Leader 2. During a discussion of the results, Organization Leader 1 asked, "Why do urban 4-H educators in the state of Bellevue receive the

same training as other educators in the state, but fail to produce thriving programs?” The Bellevue Organization leader’s implicit assumption was that the urban educators themselves were responsible for the failure of their programs to thrive, rather than asking whether the training they received prepared them to successfully bridge the gap between the organization and the urban community. Because of the decentralized structure of the 4-H organization, it was clear that the next phase of investigating the insider-outlier management within the urban community must be to test the assumptions of client system stakeholders by eliciting the perspectives of other Bellevue urban 4-H educators.

Problem clarification. The core phase of the action research plan involved engaging urban educators in the Shelby metroplex to form an action team, which reviewed the problems arising in urban programming from their perspective in the “real life context in which action occurs” (Yin, 2003, p. 20). The action research team would have drawn on the concerns and assumptions of client system stakeholders to generate actionable knowledge and develop an intervention appropriate for the client system. The goal of forming an action research team was to develop a solution to the identified problem by providing key organizational learning needed to support community-based educators working with outlying communities.

The initial plan to engage the Shelby metroplex youth development educators was not successful. The process of identifying a working group initially appeared to be simple, as I assumed the 4-H educators in Area 2 would serve on the change team. As a novice insider action researcher, however, I failed to attend to several factors associated with shaping the vision and requesting participation. First, I was inexperienced in facilitating collegial inquiry and change dialogue with a group that had no concept of the process. Second, the presence of the project’s secondary stakeholder during the discussion introduced political risk to potential participants,

who may have been hesitant to share their perceptions of organizational leadership and support in this context. As a result, I was unable to garner interest and buy-in from urban youth educators in the Shelby metroplex. This led to my decision to abort the local plan and instead explore the creation of a National Action Research Change Team (NART).

Moving the action research study from the local Cooperative Extension system to the national system also shifted the major stakeholders for the study. Although findings from this study would be beneficial to local leaders in the state of Bellevue, the focus became the National 4-H system with stakeholders whose efforts to secure funding for program development and staff development in urban areas, influence policy regarding urban program support. The initial study stakeholders' question, "Why do urban 4-H educators receive the same training as other educators across the state, but fail to produce thriving programs?" was maintained as the study problem statement.

Cycle 2: Linking the Bridge Segments

After exploring the basis and context of the problem, the next action research phase is planning action. This phase stresses the importance of collaboration to determine whether plans are consistent with the construction of the problem (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010). Forming the NART proved appropriate, as a review of the research literature suggested that the urban youth educators closest to the problem are most likely to discover solutions to the problem.

Look: Problem Clarification

Eight community-based urban youth educators from various state Cooperative Extension systems throughout the national land-grant institution system were convened to form a NART. The members, who possessed a broad array of knowledge and experiences in 4-H, worked collectively to explore solutions "in action" while engaging in action research. To populate the

participant pool of NART members for the study I reached out to colleagues I had met at various conferences, trainings and Cooperative Extension events across the country. I employed the snowball sampling method, asking colleagues to identify urban youth educators suitable for the study context, then asking those individuals to identify other potential participants with the same or similar roles or expertise. I contacted the nominated urban 4-H educators, explained the purpose of the study and invited them to join the NART. The resulting eight-member team ranged widely in their length of experience, from a low of three years to a high of 34 years leading youth development in urban communities. A list of participants, basic and demographic information is presented in Table 3 in Chapter 3.

Think: NART Profiles and Perspectives: What's Missing?

The NART met for an informational focus group meeting via Wimba[®] for the first time in early March 2012. The purpose of this meeting was to generate a sense of shared responsibility in group decision making (Kaner et al., 2007) and to facilitate group cohesion, while building a learning community that supports the “action-reflection” and dialogue (Watkins & Marsick, 1993) needed for continuous learning opportunities. Wimba[®] virtual learning access was provided by the Office of Information Technology in the University of Bellevue’s College of Agriculture. Interviews and group meetings, recorded via audio recorder and Wimba[®], were the primary data collection methods for this study. All eight of the selected participants were present for the initial meeting and contributed to the formation of the learning community. To aid in the meeting, I posted a presentation that guided the group through initial introductions and presented the overview, purpose and timeline for the study.

For the initial NART informational meeting, I drew on recommendations from Bens (2005) to develop the meeting structure. Once all participants successfully entered the Wimba[®]

room, I welcomed the group and thanked them for joining the NART. I reminded the group of the expected meeting duration, one hour, and I included a brief overview of the research project in the welcome, which was followed by participant check-ins. Each participant was asked to respond to the following questions:

- What is your state/county/city?
- Roughly how many urban youth does your program reach?
- What is your organizational role/position?
- How many years have you worked in 4-H?
- Did you study youth development? If not, what was your field of study?
- What prompted you to join this study?

During introductions, participants shared reasons for their interest in joining the study. The most experienced member of the group, who started working in 4-H 34 years ago, said, “I have listened and I think you’ve done an excellent job of preparing this study and so I’m looking forward to being on this committee with everyone”. After introductions, while discussing the expectations and development this process would foster, one member stated:

Being around for as long as I have, it’s very difficult at times when you take professional development sessions to talk about our work [and] urban youth aren’t necessarily the focus although at times you can attend a session or two and hear about some things going on -- it’s good to be in a situation where we can actually discuss and talk about some of the situations to these issues in a more thorough context.

Another member added:

I am excited about this group and I am excited and looking forward to us meeting together because urban Extension is different and I think that it’s really time and it’s been

time that we address issues and let our voice be heard. And not in a way that we're always complaining or bickering, but let's get some really good research going and say look this is how we need to address the youth that we serve.

A slide in the presentation listed challenges faced by urban youth educators, gleaned from the literature. The slide, entitled "Extension's 21st Century Challenges," listed as current challenges a reduction in farm and agricultural families, urban expansion, a lack of relevant programming for non-rural clientele, the need for greater marketing and diffusion of 4-H in urban communities, and the inability to identify urban champions and stakeholders with program awareness. After discussing the listed challenges in the presentation, I asked the participants what they would add to this list based on their own experiences. This question was intended to begin shaping the action research learning community, creating a space in which to explore and develop actionable knowledge aimed at improving practice in our respective cities.

Kevin. Kevin is a black male urban youth educator with 19 years of experience serving youth in a county with over 10 million people. Kevin shared that he and his staff serve 7000-10,000 youth in the southeast part of the largest city in the county, an area comprised predominantly of single families [single parents] living in poverty. Kevin has a background in education and sociology, and holds a terminal degree in education. He indicated that the institutional culture of 4-H should be added to the list of challenges, noting:

I believe the institutional culture of 4-H, with its own traditions and rituals, at times can be a challenge for folks that are either not familiar with 4-H or are not open to exploring those rituals, those customs, those traditions – and what parts of them might be appealing. So I think about, for example, 4-H club meetings. We invite a new family to participate and they're lost, and sometimes those club leaders or youth members don't take the time

to welcome and introduce young people to the 4-H experience. So it takes time, honestly speaking, it takes a long time for them to get up to speed with what the 4-H experience is about.

Kevin continued, “I think some of those institutional cultures, rituals, traditions and norms can be a bit off-putting for someone new, particularly if you don’t live in a rural or suburban community.”

Louise. Louise is a 24-year veteran of youth development, with experience working with incarcerated youth in one of the largest urban centers in northeastern United States. Louise emphasized the need to adapt innovations in Cooperative Extension programming in rural areas to fit the needs of the diverse clientele in urban areas. When asked what challenges should be added to the slide, Louise responded:

[A]dd something about diversity and cultural ethics. Often, you know, I’m bringing students to events and trying to work – the face of [my city] is very different than the face of the rest of [my state]. You got the urban, but the rest of the state is very rural. And then just looking at 4-H when we get to national events, the face of [my city] is very different from the face of the [kids] at these national events. And I’m not just talking about young people; I’m talking about staffing at the different levels. So the idea is to involve [an understanding] of the different audiences and being ready to accept, to work with the young people that we bring. So there needs to be something in there about diversity: dealing with cultures, dealing with women, dealing with just gender issues.

As a result of her professional experiences and many years of service, Louise contended that 4-H needs to “adapt.” She asserted, “there is a lot [we] have to do with diversity and cultural awareness, and how to work with different populations.” In her introduction she noted:

4-H is the only entity that floats throughout [other youth-serving organizations]. There are a lot of different organizations that have buildings in settings where people can identify with those buildings: the police athletic leagues, the Y, etc. 4-H is the one entity that floats within each and every one of those organizations. Whether it be our materials, our leadership development, etc. So where there are times where we are seen as unsung heroes, they're using our stuff, and we kinda don't get the credit, so I would like to see some of that in this discussion.

Paul. Paul, who serves in the largest county in his state with nearly 4 million people, has a background in human services and has worked with Cooperative Extension youth for over six years. Paul observed that “we have our traditional 4-H and our non-traditional.” He explained that students who are not doing the “traditional” things can still “participate and have some of the base [experiences] like the foundation [of 4-H], as far as the 4-H [public] speaking and learning by doing.

Jackie. Jackie is a young 4-H professional. Having received recognition from her peers at the national level for her programming with at-risk youth, she is quite accomplished despite joining Cooperative Extension only six years ago. Jackie agreed with the challenges shown on the slide and reported that her interest in participating in the study arose from a desire to learn more strategies for reaching the large population of urban youth in her county who are not being reached, saying “I'm just trying to get them more involved in the program”.

Jasmine. Jasmine is a 4-H educator in a county in a northeastern state with a population of just over 1.5 million people. Having served in Cooperative Extension for 12 years as a leader of youth development programs, Jasmine identified “volunteer recruitment” as the dominant challenge in her county. She explained:

Traditionally 4-H is a volunteer-run program that is all about people who have had past experiences with volunteers and [are] continuing through the 4-H program – and that is really not the case and it has been a challenge here as far as getting people to say they have time to run programs, especially when a lot of them weren't familiar with 4-H.

Working more with community centers that have day staff and let[ting] them provide 4-H programs, [but] regardless of what they were doing as a club, a lot of our more traditional clubs did not see them as a club because they had paid staff. So I would definitely say volunteering or having volunteer-run clubs [should be added] as a challenge.

Sia. Having served youth and families in Cooperative Extension for 34 years, Sia is the NART's most experienced urban youth development educator. She began her career in Cooperative Extension as a home economics educator, and during her years in youth development she has seen and experienced firsthand a myriad of Cooperative Extension challenges. While she had nothing to add to the slide at the time, later during a discussion on how to address challenges to urban programming by the team, she stated:

If we can help each other with some of our own ideas and come up with a standard practice that we can say this is what we're going to do to address this problem-- and this is the one thing that we've come up with. Now there are tons of other things but this is the thing, the path that we're going to follow to see if we make a dent into this problem.

Brenda. As a leader of youth development programming in a county in a western state with 2 million residents, Brenda serves youth in traditional clubs, community centers, libraries and public and private schools. Brenda agreed with Sia's assertion that keeping volunteers "once we get them" is a challenge. She continued, "In my city there [are] a lot of transients here and we

lose people.” Because of the large population of shift workers, “they are not always available at the times when the children would be available, so I think our biggest challenge is with volunteers as well.”

Elise. Elise is an urban 4-H educator who serves over 2000 youth per month in a large county just outside one of the South’s largest metropolitan areas. She holds a bachelor’s degree in family and consumer sciences and a master’s degree in elementary education. She declared, “I would like to add our leadership . . . the leaders of Cooperative Extension just acknowledging urban programming because it does look different than the traditional programming. We’ve all had to become very creative in our programming to our target audience. So I would like to see more of the Extension leaders acknowledging the urban program and the creativity of the urban [educators] in urban cities.”

Facilitating action research requires an ability to “support everyone to do their best thinking” (Kaner et al., 2007, p. 32). To create a learning environment where participants would feel engaged, I followed Bens’ (2005) recommendations to provide a clear agenda, set expectations for the group interactions and ask the group what they expect of me as the facilitator. One expectation of me was to adhere to the meeting time. To meet this expectation of the NART members generously giving their time to participate in the study, I promised the NART that our meetings would last only one hour. I periodically checked the “pace” of the meeting and asked if there were any clarifying questions. To establish a safe place for the exchange of ideas, I encouraged the group to interrupt and ask questions when needed during the process. Before concluding the meeting, I summarized next steps and task dates. I displayed a tentative study schedule for the NART and reminded the team that the emergent nature of the process could shift some of the dates and tasks. I also thanked the members and encouraged

ongoing participation in the study. At the conclusion of the meeting, the NART members all thanked me for the project overview, and at check-out they all noted that they looked forward to participating on the team.

The NART continued meeting via Wimba[®] group meetings and one-on-one for a year and a half concerning group tasks and data analysis (collaborative coding sessions) to triangulate data collected. Table 7 shows the research schedule of critical events, group meetings, individual coding sessions and final interviews. Wimba[®] meetings scheduled for one hour periods were recorded using the software's internal recording technology, and were saved and transcribed for data analysis.

Establishing solidarity and trust among team members is often seen as a challenge for online work groups. Anderson (2010) suggests using consistent messaging and trust-building opportunities to unify an action research team. During a meeting on study developments with Dr. Watkins, a member of my research committee, she suggested that the purpose statement for the NART research study be shared at the beginning of every meeting and appear on all team correspondence. Adopting these practices proved valuable for developing and maintaining mutual understanding among the group.

Act: Getting Their Stories Across

Action research characterizes experiential, presentational, propositional and practical as four ways of knowing, or how individuals act and interact within the world (Reason & Torbert, 2001). The focus of the NART team's action was to elicit knowledge arising from "the realities around us" to uncover *practical knowing*. The knowledge that arises from our encounters with the world is referred to as *experiential knowing* (Reason & Torbert, 2001). Coghlan and Brannick (2010) suggest that "understanding actions in the everyday requires inquiry into the

constructions of meaning that individuals make about themselves, their situation and the world, and how their actions may be driven by assumptions and compulsions as well as by values” (p. 36). Applying Tuckman’s (1965) team dynamics model, which describes a team’s stages of “forming, storming, norming and performing,” in the context of a virtual team environment yielded insights into the groups’ engagement and performance.

Forming. With NART team members representing Cooperative Extension units across the United States, in multiple cities spanning multiple time zones, using technology to facilitate action research, while creative, had its limitations and resulting impacts to team dynamics. Holding synchronous meetings across time zones provided an intriguing lens through which to examine how teams function. In the “forming” stage of the team process, study participants attended the scheduled Wimba© meeting and expressed enthusiasm about the process. According to Tuckman (1965), members at this stage are typically polite, positive and excited; and depend on the facilitator to provide direction. Response to emails and the meeting scheduling link occurred within days for the initial meeting during forming. Team members’ responses in the initial meeting reflected these positive, engaged characteristics as well. One member reported, “I am more than happy to share my experiences and challenges” with the group, while another enthused, “I’m glad to be on the call!” Another member offering a final comment before the conclusion of the first meeting stated, “I enjoyed the first session, everything looks pretty good and promising. I’m just looking forward to working with everyone”.

Storming. Because the group met virtually and never face-to-face, interactions that would constitute “storming” were never overtly evidenced. According to Gannon-Leary and Fontainha (2007), meeting virtually restricts the capture of the richness of face-to-face interaction, and information may be misinterpreted or not shared in the absences of cues and

feedback. This could have been a factor in the failure to identify a concrete storming phase. Face-to-face interaction and socializing consolidates group members. In the absence of this interaction, members are present, but their full personalities may not be conveyed. This may cause individual members not to fully engage.

In journal notes, I recorded my thoughts about the initial meeting of the NART members. Because the technology used to record the meetings was unique to the University of Bellevue and technology supports were not available to the study participants in their respective states, some members had some difficulty connecting to the call. NART members experiencing difficulty sent an email during the session informing me of the connection problem. Fortunately, Wimba[®] provides a conferencing option that allows those with difficulty to call in and join the meeting via conference call. Five participants were logged into Wimba[®] and three used the conference call feature. This allowed comments by those logged in and those calling in to be captured and recorded via the audio recording feature of Wimba[®] classroom. The limitation was the inability of callers to see the slides displayed on the whiteboard. Information appearing on the whiteboard was read aloud for those with technical connections.

Another journal entry captured my concern about connecting the group members for meaningful engagement when time and attention was directed toward to technical difficulties. The entry suggested, “maybe there was a bit of checking out” of the members during the meeting. The researcher stressed appropriateness of commenting at any point during the presentation to prompt organic conversation. The entry continued by noting, “tips for virtual facilitation may involve check-ins here and there to make sure the group is comfortable and engaged.” This entry reminded me to include member check-ins and aided in guiding

subsequent meetings of the NART with attention to fostering a comfortable, interactive environment.

Virtual engagement may significantly impact team dynamics, particularly storming. Anderson (2010) noted that conflicts may arise concerning group roles and goals; and rules are often broken. Instances when participants could not agree on a meeting date and time even when scheduling links were provided indicate instances of storming. These instances required extra guidance by engaging in individual encouragement to maintain connection to the group and group tasks. Because the team was task-oriented, needs were made clear via email before the team convened. As the facilitator of the process, I began to make decisions on dates when there was no consensus, provided missed information to unavailable team members via email and encouraged continued contribution to the team.

Norming. “Norming” was evidenced when team members who could not access their computers during scheduled virtual meetings made themselves available using alternative modes of interacting. Using the conference call feature in situations of technical difficulty with the computer system speaks to the members’ level of commitment to the team, which had a significant impact on the team’s ability to advance toward established goals. Two members of the NART became completely unresponsive following critical incident interviews. One participated in collaborative coding and the other ended all interaction prior to collaborative coding training. Moreover, despite losing two members of the group at different points in the study, group cohesion was evidenced by the team’s willingness to participate in data analysis and subsequent group meetings to discuss and implement interventions for the study facilitating group performing.

Performing. Due to the complexity of virtual action research group formation and meetings, the team's structural issues were never fully resolved, but were managed by the research facilitator. Anderson's (2010) assertion that group members "find synergy and begin to find repeated and successful ways of interacting to achieve group goals" (p. 226) evidenced the creativity and the commitment of the research facilitator and team members. Evidence of commitment during the "performing" phase was discussed at one of the final group meetings, when the group reflected alternatives for findings dissemination. One member made a suggestion for the team that was discussed and ultimately carried out. He suggested:

It might be interesting to maybe present findings or at least some thoughts at one of our national conferences. Whether it's the [National] Urban Extension conference or the National Association of 4-H Agents or something like that, or others that may not relate to Cooperative Extension or 4-H. But to share some of this thinking and some of the ideas that have come up, the things that emerge during this process that might be a benefit to folks looking to attract more urban youth to either 4-H or other youth-serving programs.

While discussing initial apprehension about the use of technology to bring together the NART for this study during the final group meeting, one NART member stated, "there is no reason we should not be able to coordinate collaborations across time zones with all the technology we have these days. It is hard for sure, but it's worth it because you get a better overall perspective of what the needs really are." Her opinion that the process is hard suggests the need for attention to the barriers to virtual meetings for the facilitator and the participants; and the need to plan for and attend to those challenges as they arise. She continued, "the whole concept of collaborating and coming together to work together as a team is really important."

Using Wimba[®] to connect virtually was seen as important for the members' self-development and for the development of their practice. Because of the complexity involved in facilitating the virtual meetings, the pitfall of "group think" was avoided and each member made contributions that led toward the development of interventions using new knowledge gained and generated from the process.

Cycle 3: Crossing the Bridge: Community-Based Urban Youth Educators as Boundary Spanners

The aim of the study is to help resolve organizational issues by working "together with those who experience these issues directly" (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010, p. 37). Data collected from critical incident interviews was used to categorize and assign meaning to the behaviors employed by urban youth educators to navigate between the Cooperative Extension organization and the urban community related to the study's second research question -- *What behaviors do urban youth educators use to span boundaries for the Cooperative Extension system and for working within the system?*--the process drew on Merriam's (2009) assertion that "the analysis of data involves identifying recurring patterns that characterize data. Findings are these recurring patterns or themes supported by the data from which they are derived" (p. 23). These emergent themes were compiled and shared with study participants during the member checking phase. Six of the eight participants participated in data analysis, evaluating and interpreting study themes, and ranking them order of their significance to the challenges they face in practice.

Think: Developing the Foundation for the Intervention

The critical incident technique provided an appropriate method for data collection because it elicited themes that were coded for "making sense" of participants' everyday practices. Data analysis was performed following each interview, recursively, as recommended

by Ruona (2005). Codes and themes were consolidated. Interpretations were made and used to compare themes across participants, which resulted in the identification of central themes. This constant comparative method, suggested by Merriam (2009), was used to analyze themes identified by each participant during each phase of the study. The author stated:

It is my position that all qualitative data analysis is primarily inductive and comparative. I thus draw heavily from the constant comparative method of Glaser and Strauss (1967) as the means for developing grounded theory. However, constant comparative method is inductive and comparative and so has been widely used throughout qualitative research without building a grounded theory. (p. 175)

Following this inductive process, NART members drew on the results, which identified practical suggestions regarding educator roles and urban programming strategies, to discuss and design interventions. One member stated:

Hopefully when we start to analyze this together as a group we can pick out something that's within our control, you know 'cause there are so many things that are outside of our control. If we come to a consensus on what it could be, and then we just start there and let that be our best effort.

Act: Intervening on Behalf of the Client System

After identifying and validating the problems experienced by urban educators in eight U.S. cities, the “action” in this action research process was developed and implemented in two cycles. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) emphasize the significance of interventions, noting, “It is important to know that acts which are intended to collect data are themselves interventions” (p. 74). The authors explain that asking questions or observing a person in action generates learning for both the “researcher and the individual concerned.” (p. 74) Understanding that each phase of

the action research process generates learning, two distinct actions comprise the focus of intervention for the study. The first was disseminating the preliminary findings of behaviors to other urban educators at a national conference. The second was presenting the study findings to a 4-H policy influencer at the organization's national level.

Intervention one: National dissemination. During NART group meetings regarding and intervention using our study findings, the idea was raised by a NART member to “present findings at either the National Association of 4-H Agents conference or the National Urban Cooperative Extension conference” that many of the NART members usually attended. Because the deadline for proposals for the National Association of 4-H Agents conference had passed, the group agreed that we should apply to present our findings in a session at the National Urban Extension conference. Because the NART team members were also study participants, an amendment to the original IRB application was submitted to allow participants to participate in any study presentations that would reveal their identity, with consent.

During the 2013 National Urban Extension conference I conducted a session entitled, “Organizational Facilitators and Barriers to Urban Youth Programs: Perspectives of Youth Educators - an Action Research Process” that revealed the study's preliminary findings. One NART member attended the presentation, but elected not to participate in the presentation.

Participants in the session were provided a handout that listed the preliminary findings in each category. At this phase, the focus was to reduce the number of themes to primary themes and gather information on suggested professional development for urban youth educators related to each theme. Based on the first research question, participants were asked to rank the theme from one to 10 with one being most important and 10 being least important. The participants were also encouraged to fill in the blank next to their top five ranking behaviors and propose

professional development for an urban educator relating to the respective behavior. Finally, they were also asked which themes could be combined and why. Information was gathered and used to finalize the study themes.

Session participants appeared excited about the study, with one session participant sharing, “I work in horticulture for Extension, but I see the same boundary spanning roles as necessary to create awareness about my programs in urban areas.” This comment prompted rich conversation that provided data on the lived experiences of others, offering a secondary level of validation for the study problem statement. An executive director of Extension from a Midwestern state who attended the presentation emailed me afterwards to request a copy of the slide illustrating the problem statement, which depicted the support needed in the Cooperative Extension organization to address these issues (see Figure 7). In both the equality and equity frames of the depiction, the tallest kid represents traditional 4-H because of its long history and legacy in the rural community, the shortest kid represents urban 4-H and its limited existence and impact in the urban community and the kid in the middle represents the suburban 4-H a medium. As shown in the equity frame, if some resources (the box) is taken away from the tallest kid who represents traditional 4-H, the kid can still see into the game. This resonated with the executive director and he stated that he planned to share the information with leaders in his state’s Cooperative Extension organization. As an executive, his interest in sharing key learning and understanding also serves the goal of dissemination and represented an impact of our action research efforts -- an unplanned, unintended intervention.

Intervention two: National policy influencer. During a meeting to plan the NART study’s intervention, the team discussed several options for the final intervention based on the study findings. One suggestion was to create a job aid that would share boundary spanning

behaviors and best practices for increasing participation in and awareness of urban 4-H programs to established urban youth educator communities of practice such as the Nation Urban Task Force members of the National Association of 4-H Agents or a related community of practice within eXtension.

Equality does not always yield the same results

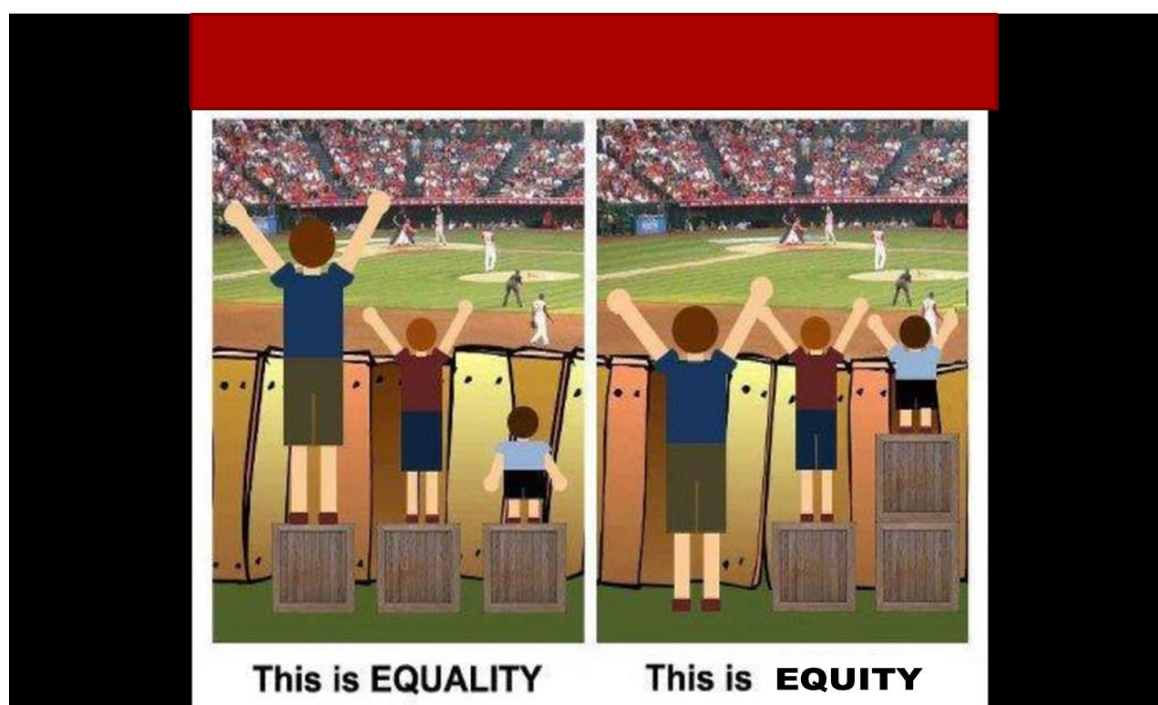


Figure 7: Putting all children in the game: Equality vs. equity. Adaptation of “Equality vs. Justice,” 2013.

Another idea was to draft and share a report of the study’s findings with the respective state’s 4-H Cooperative Extension leaders. A final suggestion was to share the study’s findings with a 4-H policymaker at the federal level responsible for setting mandates for the National 4-H organization. The idea from the NART member was to have leaders at National 4-H Council invite the NART to the National 4-H headquarters in Chevy Chase, MD to serve as a focus group

for the organization with the goal of sharing our findings and creating a shift in policy around supports in urban 4-H programs.

A version of the final option was chosen and the NART presented initial findings from the study to three National 4-H Council representatives, one of whom was working on a white paper for potential funders. I met this policy influencer at the 2013 National Urban Extension conference where she served as the representative from National 4-H Council. The representative's access to large audiences, influence on fund development for urban programming that drives supports for urban educator support and professional development prompted my interest in sharing the finding from the NART's research.

A meeting was arranged with the National policy influencer to discuss presenting study findings. It was agreed that there would be an interest in a presentation and the study's findings presentation was conducted via Wimba[®] August, 2013. The National 4-H Council representative declared that the NART's findings were "on target" and would validate the need for funding to support "training for educators working with at-risk audiences in after school programs." As a result, according to a National 4-H Council representative, the organization should develop program mechanisms for the "implementation of ways to reach culturally-sensitive [outlying] and culturally-related audiences" (National 4-H Council representative, personal communication, August 16, 2013). She was excited about the findings and stated that the findings could prove useful for the effort to raise funds to support programs in urban communities.

The Bridge to Learning

According to Coghlan & Brannick (2010), central to the development of actionable knowledge is the evaluation of both “intended and unintended” outcomes of the action, for the purpose of determining:

- whether the original constructing fit
- whether the actions taken matched the constructing
- whether the actions were taken in the appropriate manner
- what feeds into the next cycles of constructing, planning and action (p. 10)

Evaluating Action

Although the interventions and exit interviews marked the final steps in the action research process, the ongoing impact of this study has become evident. One NART member, Brenda, reported that she and her staff have begun using action research to structure planning meetings addressing the challenges they face in their programming efforts, as they find this approach informs group learning. This project and its action research process have supported both intentional and incidental learning at the individual and group levels, empowering those involved to “see” together and consider the perspectives of others in decision making around challenges.

All 4-H educators serve as boundary spanners in some respects. Scott (1998) defines a boundary spanner as a person who acts as a bridge between internal (Cooperative Extension) and external (outlying, urban community) environments. Urban 4-H educators may be considered community-based, problem solving boundary spanners because they help the community outline their needs and “translate findings from technical experts [program development staff] to the community and help them develop appropriate solutions” (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010, p. 646).

The ultimate aim of this study is to identify ways to integrate knowledge gained from the action research process and findings into the organizational culture. As the facilitator of the NART's action research process, I have gained invaluable leadership skills guiding the identification and characterization of boundary spanning behaviors and best management practices used by urban youth educators not addressed by basic Cooperative Extension training. Managing outliers, or the non-traditional clients of the sponsoring organization, requires unique skill sets and behaviors possessed by the expert performing educators in this process. Uncovering these behaviors to inform not only boundary spanning theory, but also organizational practice and policy, would aid in developing mechanisms for feeding experiential knowledge from urban youth educators back into the organization to inform change.

Going National: Navigating Resistance in the Non-formal Cooperative Extension System

Upholding the edict that “No one is a prophet in their own land,” there was resistance to the study in general within the local unit of the organization. My goals were to advance organizational learning and help to develop best practices for urban youth educators, using the boundary spanning behaviors identified by the study as a foundation for professional development within the organization. In light of the ongoing challenges presented by urban environments and the demand to meet their needs, this study was conceptualized as a tool to assist urban youth educators in preparing for their practice. Yet key learning about power, influence and positionality occurred when the intervention for the study was forced to move away from a local concept (in the constructing phase) that would have involved local urban youth educators and organization leaders. Instead, the study shifted to developing a national intervention that presented finding to participants at a National Urban Extension conference and to leaders at National 4-H Council who ultimately provided an opportunity for urban audience-

specific training, validating that the study findings provide potential funders with evidence of need.

Conclusion

As the initiator of an action research project within my organization, I was able to facilitate learning and meaning making among a group of eight expert performing urban youth educators from urban cities across the United States. As change agents within our respective organizations, our efforts resulted in the generation of new knowledge including enhanced understanding of participants' boundary spanning behaviors, urban youth educators as communities of practice, the use of technology in inquiry projects, organizational supports needed and the potential for ongoing individual and organizational development for others following this process. Working collaboratively using the action research framework, the NART identified behaviors used by urban youth educators to navigate resistance, categorized those behaviors within a boundary spanning model and made recommendations for practice. Participants gained an appreciation for the action research process and use of the process to improve their practice.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore how expert-performing urban community-based 4-H youth educators span boundaries between their local programming site and the host organization, and how they navigate resistance from the urban community and the rural-oriented Cooperative Extension system. The study also aimed to share related implications for staff training and for supports to relevant, sustainable “thriving” programs in urban communities. The primary research questions guiding this study were: (1) What strategies do urban 4-H youth educators use to navigate resistance from the urban community and the rural-oriented Cooperative Extension system? (2) What behaviors do urban 4-H youth educators use to span boundaries for the Cooperative Extension system and for working within the system? (3) What is the impact of action research on learning at the individual, organizational and national policy levels related to the boundary spanning behaviors of urban youth educators?

This chapter presents findings from the face-to-face interviews, phone interviews, group meetings, and critical incident interviews conducted with the national action research team (NART), study stakeholders and an organizational policy official at the national system executive office. These data were augmented with systematic researcher notes. The findings are organized by the categories and subcategories that emerged from a qualitative analysis of the data in response to each research question. Table 7 provides an overview of each research question and its respective categories and subcategories.

Table 7

Overview of Findings

Research Question	Category	Subcategory
1. What strategies do urban 4-H youth educators use to navigate resistance from the urban community and the rural-oriented Cooperative Extension system?	Educators developed an awareness of organizational and community culture; and the impact of both on urban program and staff development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of organizational culture • Understanding and translation of community culture for the organization
	Educators developed and relied on an urban educator subculture for program sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators as organization outliers • Boundary spanning activity
2. What behaviors do urban youth educators use to span boundaries for the rural-oriented Cooperative Extension system and for working within the system?	The boundary spanning behaviors used: assessing, engaging, reformulating and advocating fit the community-based problem solver quadrant of the Weerts and Sandmann (2010) boundary spanning model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging • Assessing • Reformulating • Advocating
3. What is the impact of action research at the individual, organizational, and national policy levels related to the boundary spanning behaviors of community-based, urban 4-H youth educators?	Action research impacted learning and the potential for learning at multiple levels within organizations and among individuals within and outside the organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual learning • Group learning • Organizational learning • Policy level learning

Strategies Urban Youth Educators Use to Navigate Resistance

The first research question broadly explores the strategies urban 4-H educators use to navigate resistance from the urban community and the rural-oriented Cooperative Extension education system. This question was to directly address the problem statement for this study which was: Why do urban youth educators receive the same training as 4-H educators across the state but fail to produce thriving programs?

The assumptions underlying this problem statement reveal a lack of understanding of the challenges involved in developing youth programs in urban communities and in training those tasked with program delivery. Cooperative Extension professionals have provided traditional rural-oriented programming to rural and suburban youth for decades, cementing a culture within the organization that struggles with supporting both non-traditional clients and the Cooperative Extension urban 4-H professionals tasked with serving this group.

To gain an understanding of way study participants navigate resistance from both the Cooperative Extension organization and the urban community, data from critical incident of the NART team and reflections on group meeting data were used. Two overarching themes related to strategies used to navigate resistance emerged with six subcategories. Subcategories included (a) understanding organizational culture, (b) understanding and translating community culture for the organization, (c) management of traditional program outliers, (d) informal learning by educators, and (e) examples of urban 4-H educators' boundary spanning activity. Table 8 summarizes the findings.

Table 8

Strategies for Navigating Resistance to Programming

Research Question 1	Category	Subcategory
What behaviors do urban youth educators use to span boundaries for the rural-oriented Cooperative Extension system and for working within the system?	Educators developed an awareness organizational and community culture; and the impact of both on urban program and staff development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of organizational culture • Understanding and translation of community culture for the organization

	Educators developed and relied on an urban educator subculture for program sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educators as organization outliers • Management of outliers • Boundary spanning activity
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Cognizance of Organization and Community Culture

The primary strategy used by urban youth educators to navigate resistance was acquiescence to the culture of the organization. This culture was explained by one of the study's initial Cooperative Extension stakeholders when he noted:

Most important, state-level faculty currently has no one who understands or appreciates urban programs because they are all from small counties. There is a need to develop leadership to empower urban programs at the state level. The program development wheel is not producing a product saleable in urban areas.

The action research team reflected and expressed their awareness of organizational culture during group meetings and during critical incident interviews. During a group meeting, one NART participant reflected on 4-H culture outside of urban areas, noting:

How we think about 4-H in the city is very different from the rest of the state as well. For us it's leadership empowerment, that kind of thing, but introducing students to, how do you say it, the world of work networking. It's building communication skills, it's service and citizenship. The rest of the state is really project based, it is agriculture, it's farming, it's horses, it's dairy; you know very, very rural, some of these 4-H'ers have been in 4-H

all their lives, they have family 4-H. So a family started a club and you know, you, your brothers and sisters . . . it's like a generational 4-H.

A critical incident interview of a NART member revealed her idea of what is needed to shift the culture of the Cooperative Extension organization when she said:

First, you got to put yourself in the presence of it. You got to get an understanding of urban programing and you can't be all the way at the top trying to look down to get a good view. Sometimes, you need to be right in the midst of it to see and I don't know how realistic that can [be] with leaders or deans or whomever to come in and just really get a true understanding of the different programs being offered in the urban county. But I think that's one of the things because we can make decisions all day long the from top but until you get in a midst of it and get a true understanding of the youth you're serving, the demographic, all of that makes up that community. Until you get a good understanding of things, your views are going to be a little bit cloudy. Because to me you're not in the midst of it. So I think that that's one of the things. [It's] just taking the time out to really know about the urban county and, you know, going into a school with the [educators] or the program assistant or talking to the teachers, or talking to the administrator or talking to the commissioners in that county to see what type of impact the program has had on their youth.

When asked about their ability to integrate their knowledge of urban communities into the broader organization, many educators responded that they don't view their position in the organizational hierarchy as "strong" or "significant" enough for their input to be considered. The organization was found not to have established mechanisms to support two-way communication that would allow educators to be heard beyond their general reporting of program impacts.

Making a difference with urban youth is important to these educators not only for the purpose of producing significant outcomes, but also because program impacts and outcomes weigh heavily on performance reviews even for those serving outlying, non-traditional audiences. Therefore, the ability to successfully navigate the outlying urban community on behalf of the rural-oriented Cooperative Extension educational system is crucial for survival in a mature organization.

Such navigation requires flexibility, innovation and advocacy. Elise⁵ noted during a critical incident interview:

One of the things I'm finding is that I've got to be the loudest spokesperson. And I got to be my own cheerleading squad and I got to be my own coach right now, and I got to be my own fan right now. And I'm okay with it because I know what type of program it is and I see a bigger picture in all of this. So, I'm okay with it. But you can't change the mindset of people and you can't change the culture [of the organization]; you can't change the culture until the people in the culture start changing.

Although much of the data pointed to a lack of training and support for urban youth educators as a key challenge facing these educators, one educator expounded on another challenge of working with urban populations: the inability of Cooperative Extension to capture the attention of urban youth through new, innovative and relevant program offerings. She shared: Because we are in an urban county, there are so many extracurricular activities for these children to do and you have to work and continue to do things that are hands-on. You try and maintain them from their beginning years, like in the 4th grade, and you try and maintain those same youths as they go--but then, like I said, other things they get off into dance and they get off into the band, and they get off into all these other extracurricular activities that they overpower ours.

⁵ All names in this section are pseudonyms

And we're still doing a lot of the tradition and you're trying to stay abreast and stay on top of new programs, things that will bring their interest, but the youth now is--to me they have gotten into doing so many things that I just think we can't keep up with it.

Cultural Translators

Coupled with an understanding of community needs and the overall complexity of the urban community, attention to the organization's history and culture helps build urban youth educators' learning capacity. Many of the behaviors and strategies for managing urban programs are unseen by organization leaders, but necessary for program stability. One strategy, neutralizing culturally sensitive situations, was used on behalf of the sponsoring organization. Neutralizing situations that arise from stigmas associated with rural traditions is a strategy informed by an understanding of the history and culture of both the urban community and the rural-oriented higher education system. Most of these situations arose as a result of urban students being among the minority at statewide events. One educator reported, "If they're a person of color, if they're coming from the city, I feel like I need to warn them and prepare them or their family for something [insensitive that could possibly happen]. [If I don't], I feel like I'm doing a disservice to them, like I don't think it's fair to throw them in and hope everything works out."

Strategies or behavior that prepares and protects students, parents and volunteers from cultural insensitivity was also demonstrated in another educator's experience while attending a state level 4-H event in a northeastern state where the Confederate flag was flown. She shared:

When I first came to 4-H, and we're talking in the late 80's somewhere in there, I came and brought a group of students up and it was like my first time. We get up there on campus and they raised the Confederate flag; it was outside of one of the buildings. I

tried to get them to settle down and [encouraged them to] start no trouble. I had to do all this briefing [about] how to behave yourself, etcetera in the city so that when we go upstate there's no assumptions, misperceptions of who these young people are and we don't want to fall into any stereotypical ideas that they may have of students of color.

This example provides a firsthand understanding of how cultural and racial intolerances may compound the stereotypes that often plague the mature rural-oriented organization. Louise felt she had to teach her urban students to be sensitive to and tolerant of other cultures, but that was not reciprocated by the rural educators in the state. She believed she had to “do all this prepping and briefing, [only] to find out that nobody else is required to prep and brief their students on how to interact with us [urban 4-H'ers].” She went on to express how her staff and students felt seeing the Confederate flag flying at a 4-H event. “When we saw the confederate flag hanging outside, to us that [was] a slap in the face. The first year it happened, I addressed it, [and] it came down.” However, the educator exclaimed, “Don't you know in a year or two that Confederate flag was hanging again!”

This experience demonstrates the difficulty of developing and sustaining diverse clubs. Based on the tradition and legacy of the program in some states, it was found that adults--many of whom had probably been 4-H'ers themselves-- perpetuated much of the intolerance. Louise continued by saying:

[There] was another county upstate that had that flag, [and] we had chaperones that were telling their students not to mingle with [our city kids], don't hang with those students.

[When you] stripped away the people who had come as adults, the students were fine.

The students naturally gravitated to one another; they listened to similar music and if they didn't have similar music they were just learning about each other. But when the adults

were in the mix all of a sudden I saw students literally being ushered away from my young people. That was the year that it hit the fan, that's the best way for me to say it.

Encounters with intolerance served as learning experiences that became part of the urban youth educators' best practices. It became an important element of the urban youth educators' best practices to explain the history and culture of the organization on behalf of the organization, often helping to improve the organization's image. In serving as translators for the organization, although their efforts often go unnoticed, urban youth educators have helped change the image of the organization and created a reference for Cooperative Extension leaders to use to explore gaps in cultural sensitivity. One urban youth educator observed:

We might be the only people of color there, we started at work having cultural workshops, we brought in people to talk about race, so I mean, it grew, and something definitely grew out of that, where there was awareness. It was almost like people didn't know that could even be an issue, you know. So, good things came out of it to a point, but I would be fooling myself if I said [I] expect [my students] to get [totally] welcomed.

This comment suggests that there is still work to be done relating to cultural sensitivity. The urban youth educators' experiences as cultural interpreters for the organization have evolved into a subculture of best practices used and shared among urban youth educators for the benefit of the rural-oriented higher education system and the outlying urban community.

Urban Educator Subculture Evolution to Sustain Programs

An *outlier* is defined by Merriam-Webster (2013) as "something that is situated away from or classified differently than the main or related body". From the perspective of the organization and in their own eyes, urban youth educators are perceived as "outliers" to 4-H educational tradition. This perception, stemming from their responsibility for managing

nontraditional “outlier” clientele on behalf of the Cooperative Extension organization, has led to the formation of an urban youth educator subculture. Responding to their assessment of an impervious traditional approach, study participants characterized members of the subculture as those who hold a tempered rejection of such programming content and delivery for the urban context. As indicated by the data in this study, this subculture is made up of those creative rebels or rogue educators who take the risk of altering programs to fit the needs of their audience without formalized support or guidance from the Cooperative Extension organization. The study’s initial stakeholder suggested the need to leverage urban youth educators’ knowledge held within its own programming subculture when he stated, “we need to look at the talent in our urban counties; they specialize in urban.” Participants in this study provided evidence of a subculture of educators, often untapped by organization leaders, who have created an informal learning environment through which to identify and “specialize in” strategies and best practices for reaching outlying audiences.

Boundary Spanning Activity

Scott (1998) characterizes boundary spanners as the bridge between an organization and those interacting with the organization. The term *entrepreneur* is often associated with starting a business. Social entrepreneurs, however, adopt a mission to create and sustain social value using businesslike discipline, innovation and determination, then “look for the most effective methods of serving their social missions” (Dees, 1998, p. 1). Because of their outlier status and inability to fully integrate into the organization, the mission of boundary spanning entrepreneurs is carried out in the subculture created by these players. The mission for the entrepreneurial boundary spanning urban youth educator is to create thriving program for urban youth despite their perception of scant support from and the unaccommodating structure of the organization.

These urban youth educators, as social entrepreneurs, focus on the needs, opportunities and possibilities related to their direct context. They aspire to achieve programming success as defined immediately and locally, rather than tolerating stagnation in an organization they perceive as failing to change in ways necessary to serve the urban community. In describing the flexibility required of urban educators to uphold their social mission and the mission of the organization to address the multidimensional needs of clients in urban communities, one educator stated:

I think urban programming has so much to offer because we're no different than everybody else. We just work [hard]. In our counties, in urban counties [we] are addressing so many of the issues and competing with so many other things and introduced to so many other things. So I think the programming that we [develop] addresses the needs of all.

In some urban Cooperative Extension county offices, county staff leaders and youth educators from neighboring counties share insights related to understanding the needs of communities within a cluster of urban counties. These staff members are active in the urban youth educator subculture and provide support missing from the state training system. One educator discussed the value of the support this subculture provides:

First of all, it [being part of this subculture is] reassurance that I know they got my back. I know people; I know that I'm being supported. I truly know that I'm being supported and if there would not be a hesitation of calling on my [county] leaders because I know that if I have an issue or concern then I can call whomever and we can work together to try to figure [out challenges]. That's one of the things to just know for sure that I have, I mean that others have my back. Just to know that others have my back.

To summarize the answers to the first research question, these study findings show that urban 4-H educators use several strategies to navigate resistance from the rural-oriented organization and the urban community. First, educators accepted the challenges that exist as a result of the organization's culture and lingering stereotypes about participants. To circumvent these barriers, a subculture of educators with their own ideologies and strategies for creating thriving programs has emerged.

Boundary Spanning Behaviors Urban 4-H Educators Use to Span Boundaries for the System and for Working within the System

The second research question examined behaviors used by urban youth educators to span boundaries for the mature, decentralized, rural-oriented higher education system and for working within the system. Since urban youth educators are community-located, they conceptually fit the community-based problem solvers quadrant described by Weerts and Sandmann's (2010) model of university-community engagement boundary spanning roles at public research universities. Consistent with the model, participants in this study reported that they felt close to their communities and had formed relationships with community stakeholders developed over time. They focused on site-specific problem solving, resource acquisition and collaborations for programming efficiency. "Frequently these staff members come from community organizations or practitioner roles that align them more directly with community needs as opposed to institutional ones" (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010, p. 642). These "outlier managers" often operate outside of the traditional personnel training structure and for the purposes of this study are categorized as staff outliers responsible for managing outlying urban programs. These entrepreneurial boundary spanners are not "readily amenable to traditional approaches, but rather

demand the application of new ideas, creativity, lateral thinking, and a rejection of conventional practices” (Williams, 2010, p. 15).

Boundary Spanning Behaviors Employed to Develop and Sustain Urban Programs

Demands on mature organizations require the development of competencies among boundary spanning actors needed to successfully convey information and resources to and receive them from external environments (Scott, 1998). Study findings show that outlying boundary spanning actors successfully use strategies to receive information that informs their practice as urban youth educators and to act on behalf of the Cooperative Extension system. The four categories shown in Table 9 include: engaging, assessing, reformulating and advocating.

Table 9

Boundary Spanning Behaviors of Urban 4-H Educators

Research Question 2	Category	Subcategory
What behaviors do urban 4-H youth educators use to span boundaries for the Cooperative Extension system and for working within the system?	The boundary spanning behaviors used: assessing, engaging, reformulating and advocating fit the community-based problem solver quadrant of the Weerts and Sandmann (2010) boundary spanning model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging • Assessing • Reformulating • Advocating

Engaging boundary spanners. As noted above, boundary spanners create a “bridge between an organization and its exchange partners” (Scott, 1998). Urban 4-H educators act as boundary spanners forming a bridge between Cooperative Extension and urban communities. These spanners represent their organizations in “initiatives, building relationships, identifying threats and opportunities and embedding insights and learning back into the organization” (Ansett, 2005). Because of their “social closeness” to the urban community (Weerts &

Sandmann, 2010), boundary spanners reflect the values of engagement through their networking, negotiating and collaborating efforts with the urban community, engaging community stakeholders through a two-way approach.

Kevin, an educator from the western region of the United States, demonstrated engaging boundary spanning behaviors by advocating for the 4-H program in the county he serves. After relating the history and benefits of 4-H to stakeholders, he explained that the program “gives you access to the university in ways that you do not already have, it gives you access to the national network of 4-H young people and/or resources, it connects you to [Cooperative Extension] in a way that you are not connected otherwise.”

In describing the Boys’ Program to stakeholders Kevin further displayed engagement boundary spanning behavior. He related:

When we would lay out our programs, they [stakeholders] would say that’s fine and dandy but this is how we need it to work in this community. So in some ways, we had to go back to the drawing board and sort of redesign or re-image, if you will, the Boys’ Program so that it fit their needs. We told them at the beginning, for example, that we’re not a tutoring program. [But] we had to eventually incorporate tutoring in our program-- but we have to limit it because we wanted to get to the *learn by doing*, the experiential, the inquiry-based learning opportunities that [are] the hallmark of the program. So we had to sort of figure out a way to include tutoring. So we developed a fourth part, four components to the program, [which included tutoring], the actual experiential learning, a snack and a little recreation time.

Kevin's experience illustrated a two-way, mutually beneficial partnership in which Kevin, representing Cooperative Extension, collaborated with community stakeholders to develop and apply knowledge to address the needs of youth in the community.

Similarly, Brenda demonstrated a two-way, mutually beneficial relationship when collaborating with stakeholders. She described working with a group home for girls to teach life skills, recalling:

[T]hey found us through a counseling center that works with their home that they're in. They found 4-H. And one of their, it's kind of weird, the women through her church heard of the [program and] she came to our training, and she realized while she was at the training that this would apply. Yes, to the youth at her church, but then it would apply to the girls that she works with through the counseling center. She brought [the 4-H program information] to the counseling center and said, Hey, this is a program that's available. We think these life skills would be great for our group to learn and through the counseling center she then connected us to the group home. So it's kind of been a long process of getting to know them. My direct role has been just mostly the coordinating piece of it. Community-based instructors do most of the instructing there, but we've all worked with the girls a little bit. They've come through our office, we've gone to their home, we've gone to the counseling center, we've taken them around on some field trips too, gotten them into programs to [a local grocery chain] to learn how the grocery store works and other opportunities they normally wouldn't get in those particular situations.

Brenda, an educator who serves a highly transient population, described the mutual benefits of collaborating with other youth-serving organizations to reach more youth, noting excitedly:

Yes, while they were here—we’ve been having [programs with] them [in our office], and the nice thing with that group is they have their own van. So they’re able to get to our really nice facility—we have a really nice facility, we have probably one of the nicest Cooperative Extension offices in the country from what I hear from people, we have like a seven-lab kitchen and all kinds of great stuff. So when we got the girls here, one of the other Cooperative Extension programs asked us what we were doing, and we were able to connect through them [to] their Healthy Steps to Freedom drug prevention and rehabilitation, and we were able to connect this group with that as well. So they’ve made a bigger circle inside of [our state Cooperative Extension program] outside of just 4-H. And they also connected to master gardeners too, [and] the gardeners are helping them with their gardening program, in addition to us.

Brenda summed up the benefit of programming through engaged collaboration by stating, “they reached out to us and then we realized we could work together to make it better.” She also enumerated additional outcomes of the engaged collaboration that increased the visibility of and participation in the 4-H program in the urban community. Brenda noted that the impact is particularly significant because:

[T]his isn’t the only group home in the area; it just happens to be the one that we were able to get connected with. But I can see this has a lot of potential for a program to get restarted. I believe they had some sort of program similar to this year’s before I was here. Not through 4-H, but through a different Cooperative Extension program. So this seems like a good way to get some of that back. I think it’s definitely an area of need that has gone untapped, at least from this university.

As a boundary spanner between the university and the urban community, Brenda created opportunities for engaged collaboration with other youth-serving organizations. These efforts subsequently produced additional opportunities to spread awareness and increase participation among non-traditional “outlying” clientele, while also incorporating other programming areas of Cooperative Extension to provide outreach.

Assessing boundary spanners. Good program planning is considered to be the foundation of successful community-based informal education programs. In their research on effective urban programs and those who plan them, Barker and Killian (2011) stated, “having the ability to look ahead or creating a vision and anticipating audience needs, and developing contingency plans to meet those needs; strategically thinking ahead and working with the plan” (p. 1).

Obtaining buy-in and input from community stakeholders is a precursor to promoting and creating educational programming with a community. Having an opportunity to conduct asset and needs assessments is also foundational to program planning and sustainability (Caffarella, 2002; Cervero & Wilson, 2006). Assessment, defined as “determining what is absent and necessary for problem resolution or improved quality of life” (Netting, O’Connor, & Fauri, 2008, p. 262), is often undertaken by urban youth educators in response to unmet needs.

Conducting an effective assessment requires identifying those who can accurately speak for the needs of the community. This was confirmed Kevin who observed that “gaining access and entry” into the urban community was a crucial first step for assessment. Because “4-H did not have much resonance in these communities,” to gain entry Kevin relied on “familiarity and an understanding based on what I looked like” to connect with community stakeholders. The critical stakeholders in his case were “parents” and “folks that are going to give you cover,

accommodate and vouch for you.” As Kevin noted, the community stakeholders would say, “You know what, the University of the West, that may be a legitimate operation but I trust him.” Kevin learned that his similarity to and familiarity with the population he sought to serve linked him to the stakeholders, giving him “the kind of leverage to carry out a successful program.” Another educator in the study concurred, stating, “that’s important that, you know, in the urban community if people see you as a resource, instead of someone who needs something from them.”

Reformulating boundary spanner. Outlier managers of Cooperative Extension youth development programs adapt to the needs of urban clientele despite the organization’s steadfast commitment to its existing core curriculum and delivery modes. Reformulating the 4-H program for the urban community is often identified in the literature as strategy successful educators have used to reach youth in outlying communities (Webster & Ingram, 2007). Weerts and Sandmann (2010) noted that technical experts are typically at the interface with community stakeholders as they attempt to provide technical assistance to solve a community problem. This study found that negotiating this interface often required urban youth educators to re-image or re-formulate the program to fit the needs of the community. This was evident in one educator’s pitch to urban students about the benefits of 4-H. She stated:

I do think that in general agriculture and urban youth they don’t mix, but if you break it down into like the economics of it with marketing and different things, there can be a mix. Because I didn’t grow up with a farm background or knowing anything about gardens and planting, but I was open to learn[ing] the different aspects of agriculture. Just the word *agriculture* alone can be standoffish to an urban youth, like they can just automatically feel that they don’t belong in that category. But if they’re open to

listen[ing] to the different aspects of agriculture, they possibly could see themselves being a part of agriculture in a more broad aspect. I explain [the benefits of agriculture] to them in a more fun way, like I try to [highlight] the trips and the workshops and the college visits. My hope is to get their foot in the door and then they'll learn more about [agriculture] the same way I did.

Williams (2010) described behaviors employed by entrepreneurial boundary spanners to reimage programs for different social contexts. These risk-takers seek to further their mission and goals not by creating something entirely new, but by engaging in “creative repackaging of existing ingredients” (p. 17). In the example above, the goal was to increase participation in the 4-H program among urban students in Jackie’s county; reformulating the traditional marketing pitch and highlights of the program aided in this effort.

Identifying the need to reformulate and diffuse the 4-H brand into the urban community, another educator shared:

You can still represent 4-H and all that it stands for, but let’s talk about other issues, I mean other issues that we can address through 4-H. And so it just changes the look of it. It doesn’t water it down. It just changes the look of it. And also, you’re bringing in, you’re introducing this world of 4-H to others who have no idea what 4-H is. And so, sometimes they still want to structure it although it’s out-of-the-box programming. They’re still trying to box it into something that I think that [has] always been ongoing. And I think that’s what urban counties, urban programming, urban 4-H Extension is dealing with a lot of times, because you have all these great innovative programs targeting the need of the kids that you serve but it receives poor recognitions, sometimes

it receives lack of recognition because it somewhat doesn't fit in the box of what has been tradition.

In addition to reformulating, reshaping, or redesigning the delivery of programs, study participants routinely “re-funded” or developed alternative funding strategies as well. One educator shared:

We have [found] funding to pay our volunteers so that they were program assistants, [and] that has helped a lot, because we want them, we want people in the community to get involved and I think that was an area that we were lagging, that we really didn't have adults stepping up, they could step into that role. Paying the program assistants a small stipend to, you know, to work with the schools or the after-school programs or run a program in the library, has helped significantly.

This educator further reformulated the traditional program by successfully “partnering with after-school programs, where they already have the kids, they're already running programs, and looking for more resources.” Such a redesign of the delivery model helps to develop thriving programs in urban communities. One participant captured the challenge and importance of this spanning role, noting: “The gap mainly for urban counties is that they [Cooperative Extension leaders] really do not understand our situation. I think that they do not understand how hard it is, how much of a challenge it is for us to keep these youth with the material that they have.”

Another educator emphasized the need for the state specialist to participate in efforts to shape programming to reach the outlying urban audience, reflecting:

Well, and I know the specialists would probably say, Well, what do we need to do? We don't know; that's what we're asking you. You need to come up with something just for the urban county and because we know all the other programs are working in the rural

counties; but first they need to understand the difference because they'll [say] Well, this is working in this county. Okay, look at that county!

Advocating boundary spanners. Advocating for Cooperative Extension 4-H programs is a behavior boundary spanning actors use to connect the urban community to the Cooperative Extension organization. One educator shared that urban children, “were not benefitting from the program in ways that we saw and knew that other children who did participate were.” He further explained, “my own passion for working with kids of color and believing, you know, that 4-H is and can be a vehicle for quality out-of-school programming” drove his use of advocacy as a strategy to produce thriving programs for the Cooperative Extension system and the urban community.

Jackie’s critical incident interview reflected the effectiveness of advocacy to students and stakeholders. Jackie identified one of the most significant experiences in her efforts to produce thriving programs as “going to county schools and speaking with some of the teachers and the kids about 4-H, and them actually jumping on board and becoming 4-H members in a new 4-H club and actually participating in a lot of the activities that we have throughout the county for 4-H members.” She stated that there had been some challenges in the past, with students thinking of 4-H as only “animals and farming and things like that, so a lot of urban kids don’t think they fit into that group.”

Jackie also indicated that many students who represent diverse populations “don’t really participate in the county-wide events or the fair.” So she wasn’t sure “how they were going to [respond], but they ended up taking it really well and like I said, they’re already participating and joining in on the countywide program.” Her goal was to get “more urban youth involved” in the

program and she feels that based on her efforts, “at least they will be knowledgeable of it. They’ll know about 4-H.”

When asked about the potential to integrate knowledge learned at the community-based educator level back into the organization, many educators didn’t view their positionality as significant enough for them to influence the organization. Thus, they felt they needed to both advocate for the community they served and defend their resulting programming choices. One educator noted in a critical incident interview that she felt she would “have to continue to be a loud voice and promote the program and any other program that we have in this county.”

One educator emphasized the need for urban audience-specific programming to teach the core values and core mission of the Cooperative Extension youth development program, which differentiate 4-H from other youth-serving programs in the congested urban context. She noted that in rural counties:

They don’t have all these other [activities] that an urban county has. So I think maybe developing things that will fit an urban situation [is important] because the rural counties, hey, they’re adapting, they’re going fine, they have no problem. But for us, we need something that’s going to stand up against all the other extracurriculars that are going on.

In summarizing the findings related to the second research question it was found that urban youth educators rely on their experience to determine how and when to act in one or multiple boundary spanning roles to create context-appropriate programs.

Learning in Organizations through Action Research

Action research is the development of knowledge as it is experienced in real-life situations as a catalyst for individual, organizational and large-scale societal change (Bray, Lee, Smith, & Yorks, 2000). Action inquiry is a reflective process involving inquiry done “*by or with*

insiders to an organization or community, but never *to* or *on* them (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 3). Learning organizations are institutions in which learning and change are continuous. Senge (1990) stated that a learning organization is a place where “people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspirations are set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together” (p. 3). Marsick and Watkins (1999) asserted that continual learning is accomplished by the “alignment and collective capacity to sense and interpret a changing environment to generate new knowledge through continuous learning and change; to embed this knowledge in systems and practices; and to transform this knowledge into new products and services” (Marsick and Watkins, 1999, p. 80). Findings associated with learning at the individual, organizational and policy levels within organizations are shown in Table 10.

Table 10

Learning through Action research

Research Question 3	Category	Subcategory
What is the impact of action research at the individual, organizational, and national policy levels related to the boundary spanning behaviors of community-based, urban 4-H youth educators?	Action research impacted learning and the potential for learning at multiple levels within organizations and among individuals within and outside the organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual learning • Group learning • Organizational learning • Policy level learning

Individual Learning

People within organizations must change before organizations make shifts toward systematic change. When speaking of the potential impacts of the proposed study, the initial stakeholder listed the potential benefits of validating the “right” methods for addressing

challenges in urban programming, noting that this process can “validate whether delivery models are appropriate or not, help create obtainable goals, [discover] the possibilities, understand potential and set achievable goals, and define success from the eyes of kids and parents.”

Participating in action research revealed to the NART members the importance not only of using the action research process in their respective locations, but also of sharing its significance and expanding its use among urban youth educators and among organization leaders.

By reflecting on experience and through other modes of informal learning, the urban youth educators developed new intentions, approaches and solutions; and enacted these strategies in their boundary spanning roles. One member stated:

It would be beneficial sometimes to allow us to reflect on our practice, you know.

[We]’ve been doing it so many years and sometimes you go nonstop, nonstop, nonstop.

It’s hard to sometimes stop and say, Hmm, let me think about this and the impact that it has had, or, you know, what I think needs to happen to enhance this or make it a little better. Having these opportunities gives you that opportunity to reflect on years of doing this programming and how it has impacted the children that you serve.

As the researcher, I learned through action research to facilitate the development and appreciation of a shared framework of understanding among the NART. Awareness of action research’s significance and its potential to transform individuals was evident when members shared their thoughts about the process or reflected on their boundary spanning roles. In the exit interview, one member observed, “I like and look forward to using [the action research process] more” for program development. He continued, “looking at some of the things we’ve learned along the way and discovered during this process, I’ve been thinking around ways of applying these [processes] here.”

Members also developed alternative approaches to address challenges to practice and learned to think about “what we are doing while we are doing it” (Schön, 1987, p. 26). Such learning was in evidence in the comments of a NART member whose responsibilities include spanning the boundaries in the Cooperative Extension 4-H partnership with U.S. military youth development programs. Of the group’s efforts to “restructure their strategy of action” with regard to program development, she stated:

We’re actually having a retreat in a couple of weeks for our 4-H program and this is the process we’re going to use. We are doing our homework now and we’re bringing in what other programs are doing to [evaluate] the common trends in youth development. So we’re planning on having an action project out of that as well. This is something within our organization that I’m definitely going to be working with – in our military programs especially.

Through the use of action research, both immediate learning and the potential for ongoing individual and group learning was evidenced in the study.

Group Learning

An unexpected outcome of this study was its finding related to the role of technology in facilitating action research. The use of a virtual learning community was necessitated when this study shifted from the local to the national level. Virtual learning communities may convene to conduct original research, but typically the purpose of these environments is to increase participants’ knowledge through professional development or formal education.

Virtual learning environments facilitate collaborative and cooperative learning by enabling engagement and discussion not otherwise possible among members in dispersed locations (Bradley & McConnell, 2008). By allowing synchronous and asynchronous

communication and access to and from geographically inaccessible communities (Gannon-Leary & Fontainha, 2007), such technology supports the use of collaborative pedagogical models, in this case for use by NART members representing urban 4-H in cities from the east to the west coasts of the United States. The group's distribution across four time zones was addressed through the use of Wimba[®] technology, which allowed the NART to meet in an advanced virtual classroom in synchronous meetings that offered audio, video, white board and social learning capabilities. Using Wimba[®] technology to support the NART members' work over the course of three years was essential in enabling the virtual meetings and critical incident interviews that produced the research study results.

Organizational Learning

Organizational learning theory provides a framework for analyzing the processes and factors required to meet new demands from an organization's external environments. By working together to identify, analyze and address problems, members of an organization create the adaptability and flexibility necessary for organizational success. Senge (1990) expresses the need for organizations to "discover how to tap into people's commitment and capacity to learn at all levels" (p. 4). This study's organizational stakeholders expressed a desire to work together to overcome the challenges of producing thriving programs in urban communities. While leaders espousing a desire for change may have good intentions, the absence of opportunities for individuals and organizational leaders to utilize action research to reflect collectively on perceptions, rules, norms and strategies for addressing organizational challenges creates a barrier to organizational learning.

In an interview, one of the study's initial stakeholders identified and advocated for progressive learning outcomes. When asked about the consequences of pursuing unsustainable initiatives in the urban counties, he stated:

If Cooperative Extension is not able to reach and impact urban youth, then overall statewide financial support will erode. Rural counties' input is becoming less loud and is in danger of becoming insignificant in the overall world of youth development if there is no success shown in urban areas – as shown in rural areas.

The ability to reach urban audiences thus significantly influences the potential for survival of the state's youth development programming efforts. The stakeholder reflected on past successes throughout the state and on continuing challenges in urban counties, stating:

There have been growth cycles [in urban counties] not substantial or sustained. The urban growth percentage has been less in urban areas during times of growth. There have been no changes in how we do programming in urban areas. Results have been based on the use of a continual design.

This stakeholder acknowledged the organization's adherence to traditional programming models to address challenges in urban communities and suggested that this approach is a problem. He asked, "Is the problem the people or the model? Do we need a new delivery model?" He concluded by making a statement that aided in the development of the study: "We need to validate whether we are using the right method."

Within the inquiry process, double-loop learning may be achieved when organizations provide space for their members to reflect on and distinguish between the symptoms of resistance and the underlying causes of that resistance (Bovey & Hede, 2001). Such an approach may be prompted by engaging urban youth educators who, through their subculture, model a

community of practice for the broader organization. Leveraging the skills and knowledge these educators use to span boundaries between the sponsoring organization and the outlying community also adds a human dimension to the change effort, rather than relying solely on technical, quantifiable factors (Bovey & Hede, 2001, p. 535).

Discussing organizational learning and processes, one NART member noted:

I think if someone is applying for a job in an urban area and it's for 4-H then they should have some idea of what they're getting into as far as an urban area. My challenge has always been the University side. I was ok going into the community and working with the community, it was always getting the University to see. [They would say] How come you don't do it like this? How come you're not participating in this? It was [necessary] to explain to them the difference between the urban community and the rural 4-H. That was more the challenge for me – not that I needed to learn something, but it was definitely the University aspect for me.

Despite the evident benefits of bottom-up leadership in higher education (Kezar, 2012), however, the participants reported that their positions prevented them from integrating these insights into the organization and thereby initiating change.

Policy Level Learning

This study had to be moved from the local organization level to the national level as a result of local educators' resistance to participation. The need to shift from a local to a national study highlights the challenges to integrating new processes of learning into mature organizations. It also demonstrated the importance of identifying "champions" who are positioned to effect change at the top rungs of an organization. The need to create a feedback loop that circumvented local organization leaders and sought support for change from a national

organizational leader illuminates the pervasiveness of resistance at multiple levels. I was warned of the potential risks by the stakeholder, who cautioned that “going outside the box can be political, but necessary.” The resistance forced me to reframe the study and move to the national system, seeking an influencer with the authority, voice and motivation to facilitate the convergence of local and national level learning for overall system change.

In summarizing the results of the third research question of this study, leading individual and organizational change involved mastering the balance between the needs of the organization and of the individuals within the organization (Ackerman, 1986). It is individuals who accomplish the learning within and on behalf of the organization, and who prepare organizations for the adaptations and developments needed to respond to changing environments (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007).

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this action research study was to explore the behaviors urban youth educators use to navigate resistance from the urban community and the rural-oriented Cooperative Extension system. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What strategies do urban 4-H youth educators use to navigate resistance from both the urban community and the rural-oriented Cooperative Extension system.
2. What behaviors do urban 4-H youth educators use to span boundaries for the Cooperative Extension system and for working within the system?
3. What is the impact of action research on learning at the individual, organizational and national policy levels related to boundary spanning behaviors of urban 4-H youth educators?

This chapter summarizes findings from participants serving as youth educators in eight urban U.S. cities, who were identified as expert performers or exemplary in their programming efforts in urban communities.

The organization or system within which this study took place is of a particular but not uncommon type. It can be characterized as a mature, decentralized provider of non-formal education services, historically providing those services to a specific audience. Important aspects of this study included the system's degree of openness to learning and change initiated by organization members responsible for reaching outlying audiences. Resistance to change in mature, decentralized organizations can "prohibit strategies for successful programming from being accepted and implemented successfully" (Smith & Torppa, 2010, p. 2).

In a study measuring the capacity for and receptivity to change in one such organization, Cooperative Extension, Smith and Torppa (2010) asked, “What can Extension organizations do to flourish during continuous change?” (p. 2). Knowing that current social and economic pressures will necessitate organizational change, this question is particularly relevant and timely. Within this context, this study investigated how one mature organization faced the challenge of increasing access to and provision of quality educational youth programming in urban communities.

Study Summary

This action research multiple case study used the critical incident technique to gather qualitative data. An action research team of eight members was created, consisting of urban youth educators identified from Cooperative Extension organizations across the country. These participants were identified as urban programming exemplars through a snowball sampling process. The team worked collaboratively over a year and a half to share critical incidents of urban practices, to code critical incidents, to plan for disseminating initial findings, and to participate in delivering developed interventions.

Working as an urban youth educator in a mature, decentralized non-formal education system was the catalyst for my interest in helping the organization address the challenge of developing and sustaining programs for urban communities. I hoped that this collaborative research and change effort would help the organization’s professional and program development training system develop support mechanisms customized to the needs of urban educators and their communities. One aim of the study was to increase participants’ capacity to engage in action research as a process for generating knowledge and developing actionable interventions to improve practice. Team members indicated their intent and in some cases current replication of

the action research process that includes defining a practice problem, developing a shared framework, and ultimately planning and implementing an intervention to improve their practice and programming system.

Another aim of the study was to identify boundary spanning behaviors that were effective in creating thriving programs in urban communities, and that therefore advanced the organization's mission among urban residents. Additionally, the action research team's immersion in the action research process increased their awareness of the boundary spanning behaviors they use to reach the outlying urban community on behalf of the Cooperative Extension organization, the parallels of the process of action research and the self-directed, experiential learning among urban 4-H educators; and the potential for learning at the local and national levels relative to the development of actionable knowledge.

Culture and Subcultures

There were two major findings related to the study's first research question, which identified participant strategies to provide and sustain impactful programming in urban communities in the face of resistance. The first finding was that educators who deliver urban programs as part of the organization's traditionally rural-based youth development mission have accepted the limited relevant content and delivery supports for urban programming and developed their own knowledge base. This knowledge base draws on informal learning episodes, direct observation of and experiences with clients, and interactions with stakeholders in the urban community. This learning is developed and contained as a subculture that is often invisible to organization leaders.

The second finding was that the knowledge developed and held in the urban youth educator subculture is called upon in two ways. It is used to develop strategies for managing

outlying audiences on behalf of the organization's youth development unit. It is also used by urban youth educators acting on behalf of the outlying community to develop programs using boundary spanning behaviors that are not part of the organization's common training language. The knowledge is shared among the urban youth educators and their colleagues within an unstructured, unorganized subculture. Findings show that urban youth educators want leaders at the system level to recognize their efforts. However, they realize that many organizations lack a mechanism to foster the convergence and leverage of bottom-up (urban youth educator) knowledge and top-down knowledge (Kezar, 2012) to effect change.

Boundary Spanners as Community-based Problem Solvers

Data for the second research question, which related to urban youth educator's behaviors, led to an expansion and adaptation of the community-based problem solver quadrant in Weerts and Sandmann's (2010) model of university-community engagement boundary spanning roles at public research universities. The present study identified specific boundary spanning roles urban youth educators use to navigate resistance. These behaviors (shown in Figure 8) can be aligned, like the Weerts and Sandmann model, on a continuum from technical to socio-emotional, as well as on a social closeness continuum indicating the degree of closeness to the external partner (outlying community) or sponsoring organization.

The *engaging boundary spanner* is one who is close to the outlying community and engages in two-way interaction such as collaborating, networking and negotiating involving socio-emotional based tasks. Mirroring the engaging boundary spanner on the socio-emotional continuum is the *advocating boundary spanner*, who is socially close to the sponsor organization. The role of the advocating boundary spanner is that of a neutralizer and cultural translator for the sponsor organization. *Assessing boundary spanners* focus on needs assessment,

resource acquisition, and champion identification for the outlier community. These tasks, which are primarily technical in nature, are mirrored along the technical-practical continuum by the quadrant containing the *reformulating boundary spanners*, who employ innovation and creativity to develop programs on behalf of the sponsoring organization. Pinpointing where boundary spanning urban youth educators lie within the model in specific situations, as well as how the mix of social closeness and task-oriented behaviors among community-based problem solvers informs practice, provides important information to communicate to the sponsoring organization.

Action Research for Individual, Organizational and Policy Level Learning

Lastly, findings from the study related to the third research question show that participants developed a level of appreciation for action research as a process that created a community of practice, validated their practices, and coalesced their energies into action. Critical incident interviews from the NART team members were the primary source of data for identifying best practices in boundary spanning behaviors. At the same time, these interviews and their collaborative analysis were an opportunity for urban youth educators to take stock of their leadership of urban programs and as such served as professional development for the NART members and led to double-loop learning. Broader organizational learning was initiated through the prestige and power of a key policy influencer, however, the “take” and pervasiveness of the recommended changes is uncertain.

These findings from the data inform four conclusions drawn from the study. The conclusions address informal learning by urban youth educators in subcultures; boundary spanning behaviors of urban youth educators and the potential for individual, organizational and policy level learning; and the role of technology in the process of action research. The following

section will introduce each conclusion and situate the study's findings within the existing research literature.

Study Conclusions

Conclusion 1: As a subculture of self-directing urban youth educators, organization outliers use informal learning to manage internal and external resistance.

As community-based Cooperative Extension professionals across the nation face increasingly complex educational programming challenges, urban 4-H educators are called on to develop innovative strategies to develop, implement, and sustain programs in urban communities. Many of the issues that arise in serving these communities can be attributed to expansions of and shifts in populations and an increasingly diverse clientele (Borich, 2001). It is thus increasingly important for the Cooperative Extension educator to understand the perspectives of urban communities and the historical, political, economic, and social nuances that have helped shaped them. If an individual is seeking to program and work with individuals to improve the quality of life, a basic understanding of how people live and operate is very important to the success of the program and the acceptance of the program deliverer (Webster & Ingram, 2007, p. 1). It is crucial for organization members to be able to learn from day-to-day interactions and draw on their experiences to expand their knowledge base.

The urban youth educators in this study learn from and base their actions on their experience. Because the concept of learning from experience is such a broad descriptor, for the purposes of this study, *informal learning* has been adopted as the appropriate lens to describe urban youth educator learning. Marsick and Watkins (2001) define informal learning as “intentional but not highly structured,” adding, “examples include self-directed learning, networking, coaching, mentoring, and performance planning that includes opportunities to

review learning needs” (p. 26). In an earlier work, Watkins and Marsick (1990) defined informal and incidental learning in contrast to formal learning:

Formal learning is typically institutionally sponsored, classroom-based, and highly structured. Informal learning, a category that includes incidental learning, may occur in institutions, but it is not typically classroom based or highly structured, and control of learning rests primarily in the hands of the learner. Incidental learning is defined as a byproduct of some other activity, such as task accomplishment, interpersonal interaction, sensing the organizational culture, trial-and-error experimentation, or even formal learning. Informal learning can be deliberately encouraged by an organization or it can take place despite an environment not highly conducive to learning. Incidental learning, on the other hand, almost always takes place although people are not always conscious of it. (p. 12)

Urban youth educators were found to replace less relevant, less applicable training with an ideology based on their direct experiences with the subject client system. Their subculture is based on their needs and the needs of their clients and is characterized by the boundary spanning practices necessary to sustain programs in the communities they serve. William (2010) refers to such individuals as *entrepreneurial boundary spanners*. Figure 8 shows, with a solid line, the distinct difference between traditional urban youth educator program development as delivered by the Cooperative Extension training system and the urban youth educator self-development that results from interaction with urban community stakeholders. In the traditional model, training flows from the Cooperative Extension system to the 4-H educator, who then delivers the outreach curricula in the urban community.

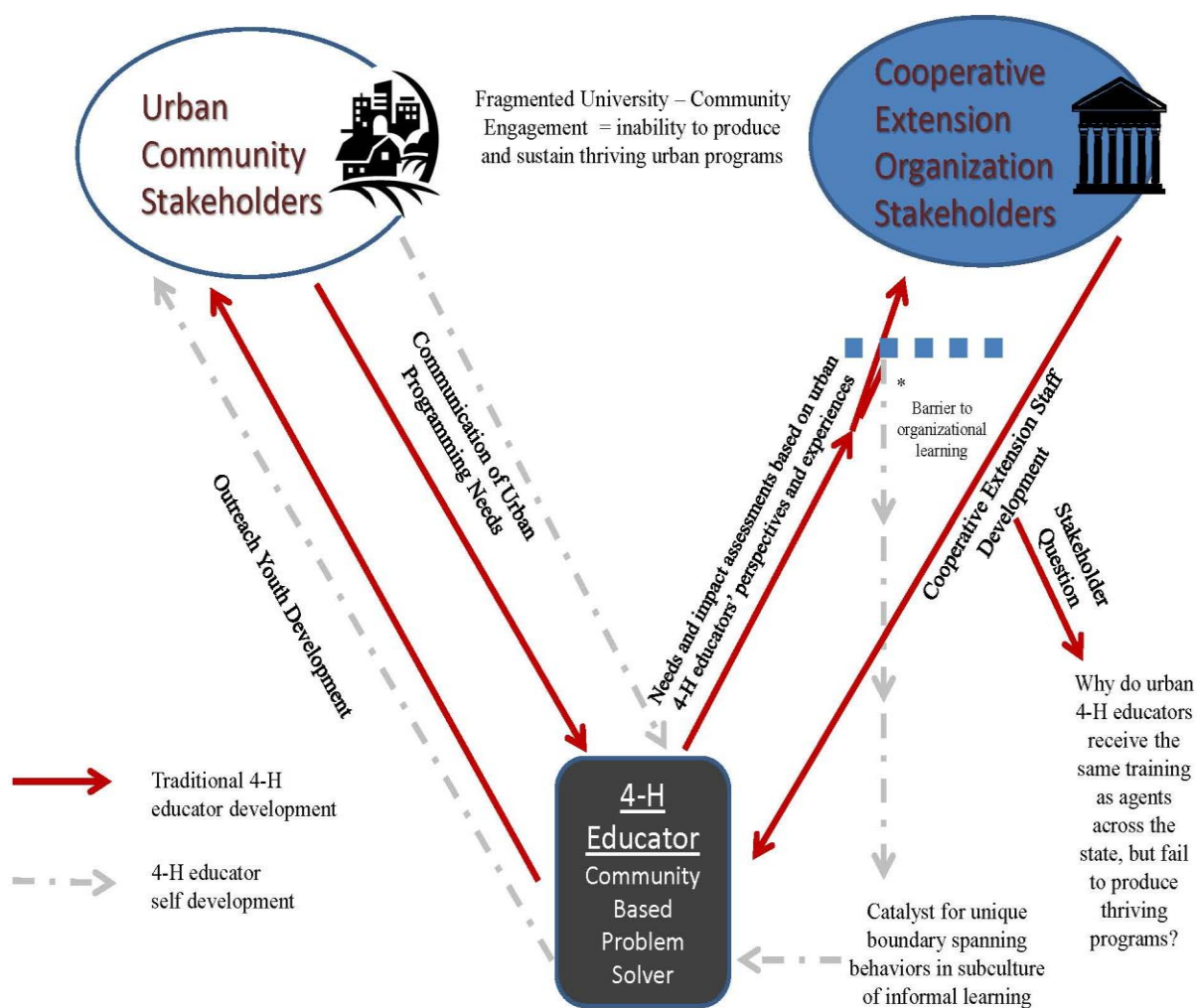


Figure 8. Depiction of catalyst for boundary spanning subculture among urban 4-H educators.

In practice, either through observation or direct communication with stakeholders, these educators develop an understanding of the needs of the urban community and the youth they serve. As shown in Figure 8, much of what the community-based problem solvers observe, communicate and learn from experience in the field fails to fully reach Cooperative Extension leaders due to barriers or resistance. Such resistance serves as the catalyst for creating urban youth educator subcultures, whose learning is depicted in the figure by the dotted line catalyzing

at the barrier to organizational learning. In this way urban youth educators add their own ideology to the programming loop, drawing on experience, observation and communication as sources of self-directed learning to develop best practices for creating and sustaining successful programs.

In particular, study participants accepted the system's program and professional development training orientation toward rural topics and audience; and recognized the implications of this programming approach for producing relevant urban 4-H programs. The capacity of individuals to add to this knowledge base is largely determined by their capacity for self-directed learning. Long (1994) explains that in self-directed learning, a type of informal learning, "the learners' psychological processes . . . are purposively and consciously controlled, or directed, for the purpose of gaining knowledge and understanding, solving problems, and developing or strengthening a skill" (p. 14). Because this learning is not formal or institutionally structured, the channels needed to communicate this knowledge to organizational leaders rarely exist. Thus the dispersal of strategies used by managers of outlying audiences to navigate resistance is often blocked, and there may be little support for creating a space to inform organizational learning. This lack of support and the absence of communication channels constitute resistance from the sponsoring organization.

The study participants' experience as urban youth educators ranged from 3 to 34 years. The learning that occurred during that time is stored in individual, as opposed to organizational, repositories within a subculture of urban youth educators who are called upon to navigate resistance from both internal and external environments. Much of the ongoing learning undertaken by urban youth educators is informal, self-directed learning that circulates within this

subculture. Interested urban youth educators pick up this information in the form of advice or tips for managing similar situations.

In their description of knowledge transfer and diffusion, Hazy, Tivnan and Schwandt (2003) posit that “agents” accumulate knowledge by interacting with other knowledge-bearing “agents” or educators (p. 7). Urban youth educators capture, transfer and use experience-based data from these informal communities of educators to overcome barriers and reach outlying communities despite resistance. In outlying communities, this resistance results from particular perceptions of the organization’s orientation and traditions and from a lack of awareness of the organization’s relevance to and value for outlying audiences. In the case of Cooperative Extension, much of the resistance from urban residents stems from the perception of 4-H as relevant only to farm youth with an interest in livestock and farming. Boundary spanning behaviors and strategies exchanged in the subculture of learning from experience were found to assist urban youth educators in overcoming this perception and creating and delivering thriving programs in outlying communities. The urban youth educators in this study learned and shaped their knowledge by drawing upon the experiences gained from their role as boundary spanners.

The informal learning that occurred among this study’s subculture was self-directed and experiential. Urban youth educators replace less relevant, less applicable training with an ideology based on their direct experiences with the subject client system. Their subculture is based on their needs and the needs of their clients and is characterized by the boundary spanning practices necessary to sustain programs in the communities they serve. The learning resulted in behaviors and best practices adopted by educators who span the boundaries between Cooperative Extension and the urban community. When facing challenges, urban youth educators drew on

knowledge obtained from experience, personal motivation and intuition to guide program development and shape their understanding of urban community needs.

Focused learning helps Cooperative Extension organizations understand and respond to shifts in services for clients in order to maintain a competitive edge (Rowe, 2010). For systems to learn, recognition of errors and triggers of undesirable outcomes must be made explicit and addressed through policies and standard procedures (Watkins & Marsick, 2001). The inability to articulate and share this learning through a structured, organized framework is a problem precipitated by the well-intended urban youth educators. The knowledge of effective boundary spanning behaviors is held within a subculture that often remains invisible to organization leaders.

These educators are self-taught through informal learning based on experience with, observation of and communication with urban community stakeholders. They reject irrelevant information from the Cooperative Extension organization and balance the misalignment by translating cultural nuances learned through experience on behalf of the Cooperative Extension organization. Acting as boundary spanning social entrepreneurs, urban youth educators transform the existing programming and delivery model of the sponsoring organization into more palatable programs and engagement strategies that increase community awareness of Cooperative Extension programs and their benefits for urban communities.

Conclusion 2: The boundary spanning behaviors of assessing, engaging, reformulating and advocating link the sponsoring organization and the outlying audience.

Boundary spanning has been described as a bridge between an educational organization and the outlying community it seeks to serve (Scott, 1998). The importance of assessing, engaging, advocating and reformulating boundary spanning behaviors increases as organizations

and their external environments become more complex. These behaviors are used by urban youth educators to gather information from the external environment for the purpose of building partnerships, identifying risks and opportunities, and depositing key information back into the organization (Ansett, 2005).

Based on the data from this study, such behaviors are reflected in the technical expert quadrant of the community-based problem solver model. Figure 9 shows the boundary spanning behaviors of urban youth educators with their subcategories. Often, boundary spanning behavior provides only a short-term solution to challenges experienced by organization leaders, who face external pressures, without much consideration of the systematic dimensions, from a growing urban clientele (Strum, 2009). Boundary spanning actors, according to Wagner (2000), have an obligation to look for “the possibility of a recurrence or pattern and to take steps to change the structure in order to prevent a similar problem in the future” (p. 100). The adaptation of the Weerts and Sandmann (2010) boundary spanning model for this study emphasizes that urban youth educators are constantly moving along both the university-community continuum and the technical/practical-socio-emotional continuum. This experience provides a unique source of knowledge that could be used to enhance connections between the sponsoring organization and the urban community.

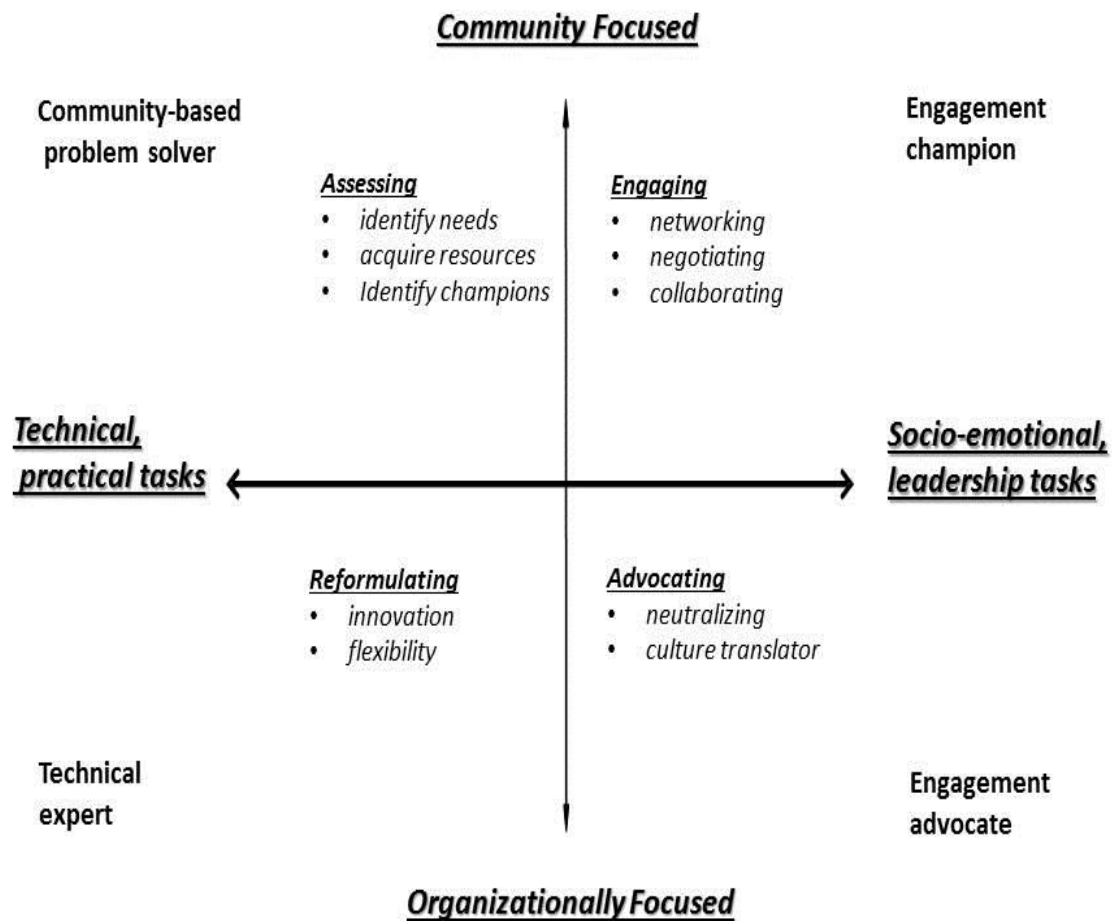


Figure 9. Outlying youth educators as community-based problem solvers. David adaptation of Weerts and Sandmann (2010) University-Community Engagement Boundary-Spanning Roles at Public Research Universities model.

As described in the literature review, Weerts and Sandmann's (2010) model identified four types of boundary spanning actors in university engagement research-extensive institutions. The authors explain:

We view spanning roles and practices on a continuum. On the x-axis, boundary spanning roles can be understood through a range of task orientations, from technical, practical tasks to socio-emotional or leadership tasks. Where a spanner sits on this continuum depends on his or her expertise, position in the organization, and overall skill set. On the

y-axis, spanners may be examined via their closeness to the community or the university (social closeness). That is, spanners may be more integrated with the community or institution based on a number of factors, including professional or personal background, experience, disciplinary expertise, and position or overall role in the organization.

Spanners can be classified in one of four roles based on where they align with the x- and y axes: community-based problem solvers, technical experts, internal engagement advocates, and engagement champions. (p. 650)

Weerts and Sandmann (2010) describe community-based problem solvers as “typically focused on problem support, resource acquisition, and overall management and development of the partnership” (p. 643). It is this category that fits best with the broad boundary spanning roles of urban youth educators. While actors within the community-based problem solver quadrant perform duties that fall into each of the four quadrants of the model, they focus primarily on resource acquisition, problem support and partnership formations, as found in this study.

The adapted framework identified four categories of boundary spanning behavior—assessing, engaging, reformulating, and advocating—based on the social closeness between the boundary spanner and the outlying community and clearly characterizes behaviors assessing, engaging, reformulating and advocating boundary spanners use when working on behalf of the urban community and the sponsoring organization. This expansion of the original model also adds the urban community as a context for helping “practitioners consider how individual identities, skill sets, and distance to university and community may contribute to successful or unsuccessful boundary spanning efforts” (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010, p. 653).

Because urban youth development workers have multifaceted interactions with the urban community, “prompted by the demands of problem solving, they have the opportunity to

intervene at the level appropriate to contextually determined needs and opportunities” (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010, p. 646). On the individual level, interacting directly with exchange partners provides opportunities for experiential learning acquired as these actors, operating as community-based problem solvers, float in and out of the four quadrants, conceptualized by the adaptation of Weerts and Sandmann’s (2010) boundary spanning framework. It is not uncommon for boundary spanners to operate within multiple quadrants at once. Exploring boundary spanning behaviors used by urban youth educators enables the individuals and the organization “to spot patterns, interpret dynamics, and enlist participation of relevant actors” (p. 646).

Conclusion 3: Identification and acknowledgement of boundary spanning behaviors used by urban 4-H youth educators hold potential for learning at individual, organizational and national policy levels.

It has been argued that mature organizations must be flexible, creative and innovative in the face of challenges to their orthodoxies and resist the temptation to pull away retreat from uncertainty (Clampitt, Williams, & DeKock, 2002; Kuhn & Marsick, 2005) in order to contemplate alternative futures. It is therefore crucial for organization leaders to develop mechanisms through which successful boundary spanning behaviors may be identified and to provide support for the individuals and communities of practice within self-formed subcultures of urban youth educators serving outlying urban audience. The benefits of such an effort far outweigh the challenges, and such initiatives enhance connections that, in turn, will strengthen internal self-organization, knowledge integration and cooperative evolution, and yield more effective ways of operating (Ashmos, Duchon, McDaniel, Jr., & Huonker, 2002) within the organization and among the clients and communities the organization serves.

Weerts and Sandmann (2010) describe community-based problem solving boundary spanners as being “on the front lines of making transformational changes in communities,” with the responsibility to “broker relationships” between sponsoring organizations and outlying communities (p. 12). Much of the knowledge boundary spanners use to engage outlying audiences is gained informally and are therefore not visible to leaders of their sponsoring organization. The strategy involved in connecting with outlying communities to advance the mission of the sponsoring organization is complex. The absence of channels through which to communicate the knowledge of these boundary spanning actors inhibits organizational learning around issues of social closeness, task orientation and the tradition and culture of mature organizations themselves.

Individual learning. The eight urban youth educators who comprised the NART embarked upon action research to clarify the problem identified by a Cooperative Extension stakeholder, to explore their solutions in action, and to implement a plan for knowledge creation to improve practice. During the study, the participants and researcher held focused group meetings to clarify the research problem, conducted critical incident interviews to elucidate the boundary spanning behaviors urban youth educators use to address the problem, and developed a plan to deliver an intervention to a national 4-H policymaker. Learning opportunities occurred at multiple levels during this process.

Reflection on practice is an important component of learning in adults (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007; Mezirow, 1991). Schön (1987) promoted using the reflective process as an integral piece in individual professional development. He noted, “We think critically about the thinking that got us into this fix or this opportunity; and we may, in the

process, restructure strategies of action, understanding or phenomena, or ways of framing problems. . . . Reflection gives rise to on-the-spot experiment” (p. 28).

Reflection on practice impacts what Argyris and Schön (1974) refer to as *action theories*. Individual urban youth educator practitioners may articulate a desire to produce thriving programs, but their theory-in-use may actually hinder their progress toward that goal. The authors posit that reflection on practice reveals the actual theory-in-use and whether it is a “fit” (p. 74) for the individual’s desired situation. Examining or reflecting on this “fit” results in one of two consequences: either the theory-in-use is confirmed, or incongruity is revealed between the urban youth educator’s or the organization’s espoused goal and their theory-in-use. Uncovering incongruence through reflection involves acknowledging the inconsistency and creating a plan to bridge the gap.

Relying on standard or operationalized ways to address resistance rather than questioning the assumptions, trade-offs and factors accepted as “known” is referred to as *single-loop learning* (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Such a strategy follows a pre-established plan that enables the individuals or organization confronting resistance to maintain control. Uncovering factors that contribute to and work toward efficiency is an important step in problem solving, but subjecting the factors themselves to critical scrutiny is what Argyris and Schön (1974) describe as *double-loop learning*.

When individuals are in single-loop learning mode, they are “focusing primarily on their actions and not on underlying assumptions or overt patterns of behavior” to detect and correct errors that deviate from the ideal (Eilersten & London, 2005, p. 2). This mode of learning was expressed, for example, when a stakeholder acknowledged the use of the “traditional box model” for addressing urban programming issues. Argyris (1990) posits that double-loop learning occurs

when ideas or policies are confronted and publicly tested. The potential for double-loop learning was evident in the stakeholder's assertion that "we need to validate whether we are using the right method" to deliver relevant, sustainable programs in urban communities.

Double-loop learning challenges organization members' mental models and assumptions in an effort to expose underlying organizational policies or structures that help bring about incongruence in ideal structures and conditions (Eilersten & London, 2005). Eilersten & London (2005) note that "double loop learning is reflective and is appropriate when dealing with complex, non-programmable issues" (p. 3). One member of the NART exhibited double-loop learning when she shared how participating in the inquiry team helped her improve her understanding and develop new knowledge through hearing others' perspectives. She noted:

To hear of the other ways people are dealing with this [urban programming] problem--for me it's given me a different perspective on really evaluating what we're doing and it prompted me to [also] ask my team some different questions. After our first [NART] meeting, I went back to my team and asked them some questions, and fortunately in the middle of all of this I had some graduate students from the university working on a program evaluation project come in. So they came in and I was able to use some of our discussions to help them evaluate our program as well. So it has been an overall good learning experience for me. I think it is great to take this to the next level and share [within our respective organizations] because it is not good enough for just the [NART members] to know this information.

Many organization leaders operating from theories-in-use make "inferences about another person's behavior without checking whether they are valid and advocating one's own views abstractly without explaining or illustrating one's reasoning" (Edmondson & Moingeon,

1999, p. 161). Such thinking is evident in the study's problem statement as expressed by the Cooperative Extension stakeholder who asked, "Why do urban youth educators receive the same training as 4-H educators across the state but fail to produce thriving programs?" The assumptions about urban youth educators and the defense of the Cooperative Extension training system inherent in this question are consistent with what Argyris (1990) described as Model I reaction, or a reaction of defensiveness.

Anderson (1994) posits that such defensiveness may be viewed as avoiding something, such as a truth about oneself or an organization that we don't wish to acknowledge. This leads to the temporary fix identified by Argyris and Schön (1974) as single-loop learning. Anderson observes that moving away from something stifles the potential for growth and learning because our own desires and goals no longer control our actions, which are controlled instead by what we are avoiding. Such actions prevent the integration of collaborative questioning needed to change an organization's culture of learning.

Organizational learning. In contrast, when organizational culture is successfully challenged and reaches the point of refining or changing traditions or standard operating procedures, double-loop learning occurs (Argyris, 1990). Such learning was evidenced at the individual level in the study when NART participants clearly described challenges to reaching outlying audiences using traditional methods offered by the sponsoring organization. By reflecting on experience and through other modes of informal learning, the urban youth educators developed new approaches and solutions and enacted these strategies in their boundary spanning roles.

Organizational learning theory provides a framework for analyzing the processes and factors required to meet new demands from an organization's external environments. By

working together to identify, analyze and address problems, members of an organization create the adaptability and flexibility necessary for organizational success. A mature organization's survival depends on its ability to continue learning and to remain flexible, creative and innovative in the face of challenges to its orthodoxies (Kuhn & Marsick, 2005). The ability of managers of outlying audiences to resist assimilation into the organization and advocate for the integration of new knowledge prompts the learning that helps mature organizations survive. Kuhn and Marsick (2005) explain that inquiry into and reflection on an organization's mission, vision, goals and outcomes can challenge the dominant culture and longstanding traditions that often generate resistance in mature organizations.

Resistance in mature organizations is seen as an effort to maintain the status quo when pressured to change the status quo (Zaltman and Duncan, 1977). Senge (1990) argues that in order for systems to learn, they must look beyond the past to understand contemporary problems. This, he goes on to say, is important for mature organizations that are hoping to move away from longstanding traditions that stifle learning and into a holding environment that supports re-creation of cultural norms that support inquiry and learning from resistance. As one stakeholder observed:

There is a huge group inside and outside 4-H that are hardcore traditional agriculture focused. Some feel that every dollar in [the city] is wasted on kids who don't need 4-H. Some have questioned, Why do we need 4-H in [the city] when the only cows are on billboards? Naysayers are vocal now because of budget cuts. . . . both energy and resistance are increasing and battling.

As resistance emerges from both within and outside the organization, the ensuing battle stifles the potential for organizational learning at all levels. This battle directly impacts the organization as a whole which espouses the need and desire for change.

Before an organization can change, people within the organization must change. This brings us back to the role of action research in effecting change within organizations. The primary stakeholder listed the potential benefits of validating the “right” methods for addressing challenges in urban programming, noting that this process can “validate whether delivery models are appropriate or not, help create obtainable goals, [discover] the possibilities, understand potential and set achievable goals, and define success from the eyes of kids and parents.”

Within the inquiry process, double-loop learning may be achieved when organizations provide space for their members to reflect on and distinguish between the symptoms of resistance and the underlying causes of that resistance (Bovey & Hede, 2001). Such an approach may be prompted by engaging urban youth educators who, through their subculture, model a community of practice for the broader organization. Leveraging the skills and knowledge these educators use to span boundaries between the sponsoring organization and the outlying community also adds a human dimension to the change effort, rather than relying solely on technical, quantifiable factors (Bovey & Hede, 2001, p. 535).

The flow of learning, as shown in Figure 10, begins with the Cooperative Extension system providing the basics of professional training and development for all educators in the state. In the single-loop learning mode, urban youth educators assimilate and use the delivery model and content prescribed by the Cooperative Extension training system to deliver programs and services to their urban audiences. Because such educational efforts convey a traditional curriculum through traditional channels, however, community stakeholders often dismiss them as

failing to address the needs of the audiences they support. Thus much of what the urban youth educator has to offer may either be rejected at the onset or subsequently rejected by the audience through low participation and sustainability rates.

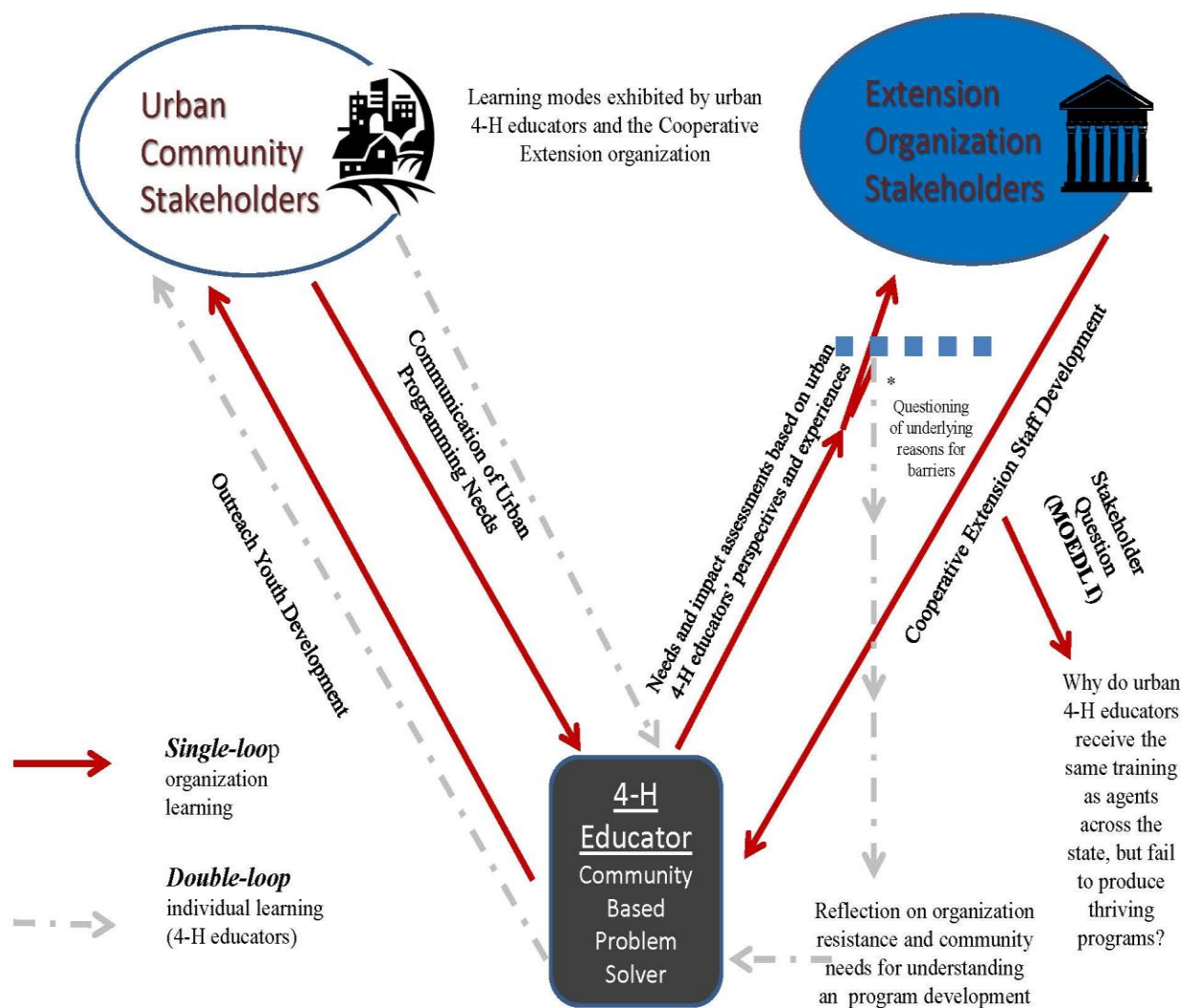


Figure 10. Single-loop and double-loop learning in urban Cooperative Extension program delivery among individuals and the learning organization.

As insights emerge from experience with community-based stakeholders and as participants increasingly question underlying patterns, urban youth educators begin to make

“sense of the situation.” This creates the conditions for them to go back to the double-loop learning mode and question “earlier understandings” (Marsick & Watkins, 2010). The inability of urban youth educators to integrate their learning into the Cooperative Extension system leads to the development of the subculture in which self-directed, double-loop learning takes place. Such a context fosters the development of creative and innovative approaches, producing thriving programs that appeal to and sustain the participation of urban youth.

One study participant praised the action research process and spoke of its potential benefits for meaning making, observing:

It would be beneficial sometimes to allow us to reflect on our practice, you know.

[We]’ve been doing it so many years and sometimes you go nonstop, nonstop, nonstop.

It’s hard to sometimes stop and say, Hmm, let me think about this and the impact that it has had, or, you know, what I think needs to happen to enhance this or make it a little better. Having these opportunities gives you that opportunity to reflect on years of doing this programming and how it has impacted the children that you serve.

Despite the evident benefits of bottom-up leadership in higher education (Kezar, 2012), however, the participants reported that their positions prevented them from integrating these insights into the organization and thereby initiating change.

The findings in this study support Skolaski’s (2012) suggestions to organization leaders to gain organizational support of boundary spanning staff in Cooperative Extension. She suggested the slogan “See It, Value It, Support It, Fund It and Change It!” To “see it,” she recommended that sponsoring organizations should:

- Recognize the work of boundary spanning staff in both a public and private way (e.g., newsletters, social media, annual reports)

- Acknowledge staff members' unique and adaptive skills (e.g., staff come from diverse backgrounds)
- Recognize the field of boundary spanning within the [organization's] priorities (e.g., develop boundary spanning goals within strategic plan (p. 194)

This study's findings specifically suggests the need for action research among participants of urban educator subcultures or communities of practice to confirm the unique and adaptive skills of the boundary spanning urban Cooperative Extension 4-H youth educators. This goal of the action research team should be to identify behaviors and categorize them as related to specific organizational goals. The adaptation of the Weerts and Sandmann (2010) model can be used as a guide to link needs and situations to boundary spanning behaviors. This would serve as key learning for the individuals involved in the process and result in overall organizational learning.

A mature organization's capacity for learning and its ability to be flexible, creative and innovative in the face of challenges to its orthodoxies affects its stability. According to Kuhn and Marsick (2005), "as an organization matures, an entrepreneurial spirit of discovery gives way to complacency, risk aversion, inward focus and incrementalism. The gravitational pull of the past and forces of equilibrium make it difficult to contemplate alternative futures" (p. 32). Identifying boundary spanning behaviors used to navigate resistance in mature organizations aids in understanding how specific skill sets, flexibility and preparation for spanning roles, albeit learned informally, contribute to the success or failure of boundary spanning efforts (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010).

Skolaski (2012) emphasizes the importance of valuing such knowledge. Her recommendations for demonstrating that this knowledge is valued include: (1) promoting

collaborations and partnerships between staff (2) finding ways to connect or network with one another on initiatives; and (3) implementing mentoring program for new staff in the field. (p.194)

Knowledge gained from “recognizing work being done” would aid in developing support for flexibility and innovation, as well as provide guidance for the development of recruitment strategies, hiring processes and job descriptions for urban youth educators (Skolaski, 2012, p. 194). This knowledge can also inform training, development and coaching efforts for other educators working with outlying audiences. Using the self-formed subculture among urban youth educators to create structured, supported communities of practice recognized by the Cooperative Extension organization as a source for valuable boundary spanning knowledge can be serve as a the focus of training and coaching efforts to support urban program leaders. Acknowledging the self-organized community of practice among urban youth educators and providing support for the often successful self-directed knowledge generated by these educators can benefit both the educators and the organization. Leuci (2012) found that a “micro-community for learning was not always synonymous with officially designated teams,” but both fostered important learning in organizations (p. 8). She explained further that face-to-face engagement was crucial for exchanging tacit and invisible knowledge among individuals within an organization and for creating space to share group knowledge and ideas.

Leaders who understand the components, strategies and outcomes of the boundary spanning behavior needed to manage outliers are better positioned integrate clarity related to spanning activities and actors for the organization. Linking the work of boundary spanners to the organization’s mission using the language of organization leaders can increase the visibility of urban youth educator efforts to reach outlying audiences. According to Rowe (2010), “sculpting” an environment in which urban youth educators learning is acknowledged, supported and used to

effect change will take “deliberate action and monitoring.” Practically, the results can be translated into “new goals, procedures, expectations, role structures, and measures of success” (p. 5) at local and national levels.

National level learning. Identifying champions at the top rungs of an organization who are positioned to affect change is important. Circumventing the local culture to due to the pervasiveness of resistance to change was necessary due to political risk. I was warned by one of the local level stakeholders who cautioned that “going outside the box can be political, but necessary.”

The national learning level impact of the study was evident after the team shared initial findings with a national 4-H policy influencer associated with securing outside funding sources for staff development. The policy influencer invited the NART to report our findings in a national white paper as a means of developing funding to evaluate and provide supports for urban youth educators to deliver 4-H programs to urban audiences. The policy influencer stated that the findings regarding “cultural sensitivity training were spot-on with what was needed to share with funders.” As a result, two of the six states represented by study participants were eligible to submit applications for funding to provide data for the white paper. It is possible findings from this study used in practice and for creating policy may generate support at the local level to sustain relative program and staff development for Cooperative Extension 4-H youth educators working in urban communities.

Conclusion 4: Technology, with limitations, can facilitate geographically dispersed participants in action research.

Change can be informed by innovative processes that allow individuals to explore real workplace issues at a time and place best suited for the participants’ work-life balance. Study

participants were found to be frustrated yet creative, innovative, self-directed learners in urban communities who were engaged in navigating resistance on behalf of the sponsoring organization and the outlying community. Their common interests and shared desire to work collaboratively in the field of urban youth education created a sense of enthusiasm around the formation of the NART, despite its status as a virtual community. The need to use technology to facilitate action research for this study did not diminish the participants' interest in gaining a better understanding of their own world and the worlds of the other participants, although the use of technology presented some challenges to the action team's engagement and group dynamics due to the lack of face-to-face interaction.

For this study, it was necessary to identify and utilize efficient and effective technology to facilitate NART group meetings since participants would not have the opportunity to engage face-to-face. As a community of practice, participants gathered to achieve the goal of developing actionable knowledge for managing problems faced by urban youth educators. Using email, Wimba[®], discussion boards, and conferencing tools provided a learning environment in which representatives from various geographic locations could develop an understanding and appreciation of one another's perspectives and develop plans to resolve problems. Using action research via technology proved to be an efficient means for evaluating research and adult learning strategies, specifically the boundary spanning behaviors urban youth educators use to navigate resistance.

The novelty of using technology to conduct action research resulted in some limitations. Limitations involved technical difficulties and the inability to provide solutions for participants regarding their respective universities' information technology support structure. Other limitations included the inability to clearly pinpoint the phases of Tuckman's (1965) forming,

storming, norming and performing group dynamics model. Table 11 provides an overview of Tuckman's group dynamics at each of the four phases as related to the virtual convening of the NART.

Table 11

Virtual Action Research Team Group Dynamics and Challenges

Group Dynamics				
Tuckman:	Forming	Storming	Norming	Performing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members get to know each other Exchange information about themselves, task and expectations Establish trust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conflict surfaces regarding roles and responsibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members agree on ways of sharing information and working together Relationships strengthened Member agree on team obligation and strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team members work toward project completion Members help and encourage each other
NART as a virtual team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All members were present on initial meeting call, introduced themselves and shared interest and expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All members were not able to agree on meeting dates and times for group meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agreed on and participated in CI interviews Participated in coding sessions Showed levels of commitment to the project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of team engagement influences participation/performance
Challenges to NART as virtual team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of face-to-face interaction to read non-verbal cues No informal interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitator guided all meetings and set dates/times due to lack of consensus/access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitator often delayed due to technical difficulty Difficulty around 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reliance on asynchronous communication Input/performance balance influenced

	during meeting or outside of meeting time • Risk of misinterpretations	• Technical problems/access influenced participation	commitment to Wimba [®] format • Members used conference call option	
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The table also provides details of the NART relative to each phase of the group dynamics model. During the forming phase, NART members were present on the inaugural group meeting call and expressed excitement about the formation of the action research team. As shown in the table, despite initial excitement and interest in the study's purpose, challenges often impacted group dynamics and required more direct interaction and guidance from the study facilitator. The table also provides challenges faced by the NART. Challenged included: lack of face-to-face interaction that could result in misinterpretations, technical problems accessing the virtual group meeting room resulting in meeting delay, and impact to meeting participation.

Implications for Theory

Boundary spanning theory in the context of community engagement relies heavily on the work of Friedman and Podolny (1992). These authors suggest that boundary spanning behaviors are best viewed at the individual and organizational levels, with the latter referring to the web of broader institutional strategies organizations use to set policy and structure operating systems. Individual boundary spanners are those responsible for interacting with external constituents. "These spanners negotiate power and balance between the organization and external agents to achieve mutual objectives, and they also represent the perceptions, expectations, and ideas of each side to the other" (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010, p. 7).

Boundary spanning theory suggests that the relationships spanners have with external partners are a function of social closeness and task orientation, which drive the communication

and identity of the partnership (Friedman & Podolny, 1992; Richter, West, Van Dick, & Dawson, 2006). Translating messages across boundaries and translating information gathered from both internal and external partners for the purpose of collaboration takes special skill and effort (Tushman & Scanlan, 1981). Skolaski (2012) noted that past research utilizing boundary spanning theory demonstrated how techniques work, how conflict is mediated, how partners are managed and how boundary spanning behaviors impact group performance and outcomes. While traditional uses of boundary spanning theory are derived from product management, using this theory as the research lens to examine how sponsoring organizations receive input from outlying communities to structure relationships, initiatives, programs and collaborations represents a new approach.

Such an application of this theory will aid in examining community-based problem solver focused boundary spanning roles, which will help illuminate the complexity of communication beyond the individual spanning level. Organizational policies and procedures that dictate supports for boundary spanning actors can be examined closely and recommendations can be made to increase support for boundary spanners acting on behalf of the sponsoring organization. At the same time, establishing a clear understanding of individual and organizational roles will support emerging theories of community-based problem solver boundary spanning roles in mature organizations.

Implications for Practice and Policy

This research yielded implications for both practice and policy in decentralized non-formal education systems like Cooperative Extension organizations. The implications are organized in a progressive fashion starting with the insights gained by participants and action research team members.

For Individuals

Critical reflection was found as a key component in the development of competent boundary spanners in this study and should be a consideration during planning and implementation of professional development for urban 4-H youth educators. According to Anderson and Herr (2005), the goal of the inquiry process is not only to improve practice, but also to develop and transform the individuals participating in the process. Through the practice of a reflective inquiry process, a new perspective of the role of urban 4-H educators was achieved by the individuals, by the group of individuals, and by informing the broader organizational system. Reflection on practice is an important component of learning in adults (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007; Mezirow, 1991). Schön (1987) promoted using the reflective process as an integral piece in individual professional development. He noted, “We think critically about the thinking that got us into this fix or this opportunity; and we may, in the process, restructure strategies of action, understanding or phenomena, or ways of framing problems. . . . Reflection gives rise to on-the-spot experiment” (p. 28).

Participants, as well as the researcher, noted the impact of the reflective process on their practice. While discussing the process and experiences with the NART, members reflected that the action research process offered them an opportunity to stop and evaluate their role in the planning, development and delivery of programming for the outlying audience they serve. Reflecting critically on what works and doesn’t work in their programming efforts to outlying audiences provided a new awareness of the impacts and outcomes of their behaviors as boundary spanners. It also introduced them to an inquiry process that allowed them to delve deeper into their reflections on day-to-day practice to make meaning that can inform the direction of programming efforts.

Such reflection on practice is particularly critical for novice urban Cooperative Extension 4-H educators who are expected to act as exemplars who have developed strategies and boundary spanning behavior based on experience over time. Boundary spanning behaviors found in this study are sophisticated, expert competencies and professional development designed to teach these practices must acknowledge the complexity associated with the development of these boundary spanning actors. As with novice K-12 educators (Onaforowa (2004 and Grierson, 2010), novice urban educators are more efficient in technical, practical skills. Following the development of K-12 teachers, boundary spanning urban youth educators move from novice to expert performers following years of self-reflection on experiential learning episodes. As with boundary spanning urban youth educators, much of the novice teachers' understanding and behavior of their role as educators is grounded in their perception of themselves as well as having a deeply rooted belief in their abilities as teachers (Onaforowa, 2004). Onaforowa (2004) contends that these inherent beliefs pose problems for novices as they begin the process of building a base of practical knowledge that is grounded in theoretical practice. "Therefore the novice is challenged with balancing theory with practice acquired through experience, and since practices improve with experience, the affective capability may not develop at the same pace as the cognitive capability" (Onaforowa, 2004, p. 34). Grierson (2010) asserts that this struggle is based on the need to develop one's self-efficacy as their level of awareness continues to grow.

This level of awareness can be likened to knowledge gained from the experience of urban Cooperative Extension youth educators. Grierson further adds that the "robust reflection that provokes candidates to examine their tacit assumptions about teaching and learning, consider alternative perspectives, and delineate new directions is a key component of effective teacher education" (p. 4).

Additionally, this study identifies and categorizes boundary spanning behaviors of community-based problem solvers associated with university community engagement activities. The implications related to practice involve organizational acknowledgement of outlier boundary spanners, their learning in outlier subcultures or unstructured communities of practice and the establishment of formal and informal structures to facilitating related individual and organizational learning.

For Organizations

“An investment in knowledge pays the best interest” – Benjamin Franklin

Finding from this study can inform the creation of policies guiding the systematic change necessary to enhance engagement with outlying audiences. Research in the area of boundary spanning can be used to design a framework to be used as an organizational development strategy for collegial inquiry that involves boundary spanners and organization leaders, for the purpose of uncovering strategies used by urban youth educators as boundary spanners. It is vital to educate and reconnect leaders with outlier managers in organizations where they are disconnected by culture, tradition, or geography. Developing a mechanism for incorporating the experiences and informal learning of community-based staff into the training of organization leaders would create new awareness within organizations at multiple levels.

Carefully designed policies that support mechanisms, such as action research or appreciative inquiry, can be used for capturing and learning from the experiences, perspectives, and insights of those closest to the problems. This can be used for acknowledging and leveraging valuable knowledge that could serve as a catalyst for changes in ongoing policy and practice developments. Institutional support and training policies for boundary spanners and organization leaders to leverage boundary spanning skills and knowledge should be considered.

Finding from this study have implications for local and national policy related to urban programming relative to program development, staff development, hiring procedures, performance evaluations, leadership development and organizational training at all levels. Evaluating leadership to boundary spanners is critical for program improvement. Such assessment can lead to much-needed change which according to Skolaski (2012) includes efforts to:

- Change negative attitudes about boundary spanning staff and the field in which they work
- Develop flexible human resources and financial systems that recognize and accommodate the different needs boundary spanners may have
- Allow flexible staff schedules to meet the needs of community partners
- Stress the importance of maintaining a two-way, mutually beneficial relationship with community partners. (p. 194)

This study's findings suggests the addition of the following to Skolaski's efforts for change:

- Illuminate boundary spanning impacts on mission
- Create an atmosphere of acceptance of communities of practice with target audiences

Recommendations

Practically, this study serves as a foundation for educating urban youth educators at the beginning of their careers and as supplemental training for seasoned educators who are tasked with engaging outlying communities on behalf of mature non-formal educational organizations. Participants in this study reported that they had no training related to urban audiences, but recognized that learning gained from experience aided their own professional development and the development of their programming efforts. The subculture of informal learning based on

experience, observation and advice from others within the subculture helped shape boundary spanning identities and behaviors among the study participants.

Boundary spanners in mature organizations need to attend to the skills necessary to carve out a place at the planning table for them to share their learning, with the goal of improving their own practice and those of others in similar positions. The findings from this study can be used to mediate role conflict, evaluate the balance between internal and external partners, and inform and train boundary spanning urban youth educators to manage outlying audiences on behalf of mature, non-formal educational organizations. The urban youth educators in this study recognized the importance of both utilizing action research to evaluate their efforts and of disseminating their findings. As one participant observed, “this process should be shared with others.” This model for creating and gaining new knowledge can be replicated and enacted in communities of interest and communities of practice, both face-to-face and virtually, among urban youth educators seeking solutions to challenges faced in serving urban communities and navigating internal resistance.

Table 12 below shows recommendations from studies examined and included in the review of literature for this study. Recommendation from the study conducted by the NART are compared to the findings and recommendations from the studies discussed in Chapter 2.

Previous studies suggest competencies needed to effectively engage the urban community. Many of the recommendations are met by the educators themselves sans support or resources from the sponsoring organizations. Providing support for developing communities of practice or existing subcultures is important for the sponsoring organization in its efforts to effect change.

Table 12

Comparison of Recommendations Related to Youth Educators in Urban Communities

Resource	Findings From Literature	Study Findings
Boyle & Brown (1964)	Participants generally expressed favorable attitudes toward serving urban communities; however educators believed resources should not be shifted from rural programs to serve the urban population	Participants in this study were actual urban youth educators working in urban communities with a desire for more supports from the organizational level to support programming
Ritsos & Miller (1985)	Competencies in organizational skills were the highest priority with competencies in communication skills close second; research and evaluation received the lowest rating	Boundary spanning behaviors of assessing, engaging, reformulating and advocating were the four main categories identified with subcategories
Richardson (1994)	Program delivery inputs should be selected with respect for the specific needs of the targeted learners involved Audience's level of formal education, sophistication, age, preferred learning modes, physical mobility, and other personal, professional, or unique characteristics can affect receptiveness to content	Assessing boundary spanners develop and understanding of the urban communities needs and use this information to plan and develop programs based on presenting needs. Engaging boundary spanners gather this information from community stakeholders
Skuza (2004)	Staff must be trained to identify and address the multifaceted, adaptive challenges of urban programs in underserved communities Challenges constantly shift No one solution to urban programming problems	Study suggests that the Cooperative Extension organization should incorporate knowledge gained by expert performing boundary spanners in novice educators' training to prepare and provide resources for the challenges of serving outlying clientele
Hartmann et al. (2007)	Must establish urban community stakeholder supports Engage community residents in program planning and development	Engaging boundary spanners engage community stakeholders in two-way, mutually beneficial program development to sustain urban programs
Webster & Ingram (2007)	Must develop familiarity with the community, longstanding relationships with families, and an understanding of the norms and values that exist in the urban community	Boundary spanning actors serve as cultural translators for Cooperative Extension's understanding of the urban community; advocating boundary spanners develop relationships with youth and families; and translate the culture of the organization to non-traditional clients
Ahmed & Morse (2010)	Specialization was working well 2 years after it was established and participants nearly two-thirds of the participants reported major increases in opportunities related to programming	Development of urban educators' subculture with specific solutions to urban challenges provide mechanisms to support and develop thriving programs in urban communities

Many boundary spanning actors feel they are invisible. Thus, capturing, acknowledging and highlighting the knowledge generated by urban youth educators delivering programs within self-created and self-supporting subcultures requires “a conscious and intended effort by individuals at a higher level in an organization to provide visible extra-role or role-expanding opportunities for individuals or groups at a lower level in the organization to have a greater voice” (Glew, O’Leary-Kelly, Griffin, & Van Fleet, 1995).

Future Research

While research is increasing in the areas of university and community partnerships for engagement, few studies have focused on the roles of individual and organizational actors (Skolaski, 2012; Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). While this study has contributed to this literature, it points to the need for continued work. It suggests at least four broad areas for future research: (1) enlarging the sample and varying the context; (2) studying the motivation of outliers; (3) involving organizational leaders and their policies in related research; and (4) asking further research questions.

One area of future research relates to broadening the study participants. This study sought to identify the boundary spanning behaviors necessary to reach and engage stakeholders while navigating resistance, finding that organizational leaders lacked the ability to see extended strategies implemented and efforts made by urban youth educators. Future work could utilized boundary spanning actors from other youth-serving organizations, attempting to reach audiences that have historically been left out of their traditional programming circle. Future studies could focus on identifying the supports needed for such communities, the role of internal and external champions; and the structural needs for ongoing professional development for communities of practice seeking to solve workplace problems. Attention to the age and maturity level of various

organizations may introduce additional factors, as this study focuses specifically on boundary spanners managing outlying audiences in mature organizations

Another major area of research relates to exploring the internal motivation of educators managing outlying audiences. With regard to boundary spanning behaviors, urban youth educators were found to be internally motivated to perform beyond their areas of learned competency. In addition, a third area of future research should investigate and evaluate mechanisms for making these behaviors visible to organizational leaders and for integrating this knowledge into higher levels of the organization to improve practice. These efforts could focus on the sponsoring organization leaders' perception of urban youth educators' boundary spanning roles.

Future research areas might also include engaging organizational leaders along with boundary spanners in appreciative inquiry. Engaging organizational leaders in the inquiry process together with boundary spanning actors could aid in establishing a knowledge base for boundary spanning work while fostering the opportunity for deeper understanding for the purpose of developing policy associated with the practices.

Lastly, the findings of this study yielded several additional questions for future research, including: In what ways do urban youth educators attempt to share their knowledge with the broader sponsoring organizations? What factors hinder the organization's adoption of knowledge generated by and stored in urban youth educator subcultures? Would organizing urban youth educator subculture participants into a formal community of practice impact the sponsoring organization's ability or willingness to integrate knowledge from the urban youth educators? What effect does the number of years of experience have on boundary spanning competencies

among urban educators? Such questions arising from the present study could be examined in future studies.

Conclusion

This study identified strategies and behaviors leveraged by urban youth educators to navigate resistance while attempting to serve non-traditional, outlying audiences. The study produced results and insights for the individual study participants and the potential for learning at the individual, organizational and national policy level. Through the identification and characterization of strategies and behaviors, the need for changes in policy and increased support was established.

Reflecting on practice provided a framework for boundary spanners to conceptualize the linkages they were making as a result of their experiences with hard-to-reach audiences. Reflecting on practice sparked greater interest in the action research process among the urban youth educators. Participants shared their current attempts to use the structured problem solving process and their intention to incorporate this process into their practice.

Findings suggest that urban youth educators use audience-tailored means of reaching the outliers they serve. As outliers themselves, responsible for managing program development and delivery for outlying audiences, their efforts are not readily visible to the sponsoring organizations. Organizations could benefit in multiple ways from acknowledging the boundary spanning roles and strategies of urban youth educators and using these behaviors and strategies to inform policy. In addition, organizations would benefit from developing supports for the boundary spanners who currently gather in informal communities of practice. Individually, urban youth educators provide important outcomes for the sponsoring organization as a result of their internal motivation and ongoing effort. Their proven impact from self-directed, action learning

knowledge generation following problem identification and the development of solutions based on experience is analogous to the process of action research. Structuring and leveraging these skills and the knowledge gained among urban Cooperative Extension 4-H youth educators can advance the mission of the mature organizations in non-traditional, outlying communities and inform professional and program development to shape best practices for others facing similar challenges.

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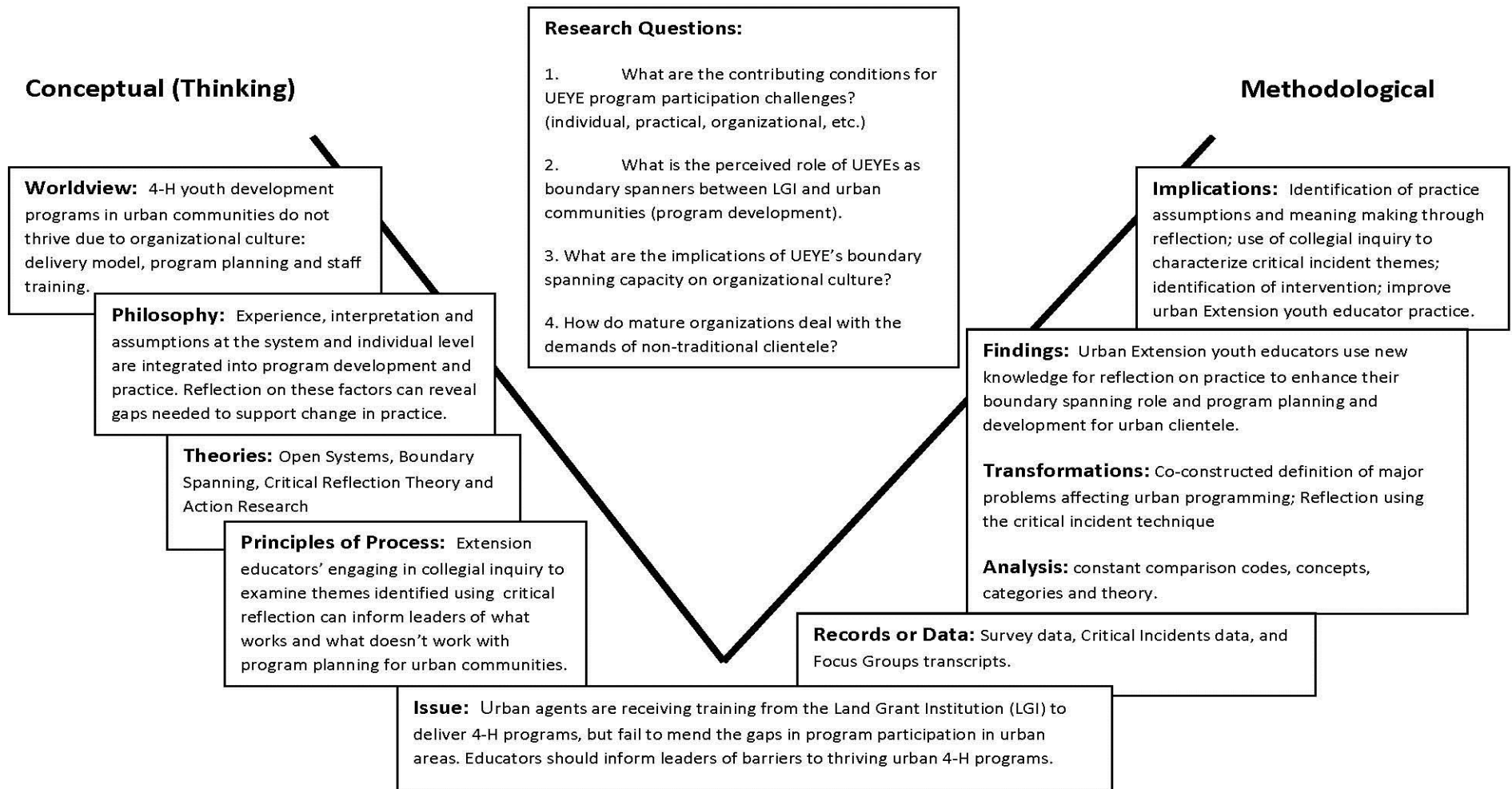
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APPENDIX A



APPENDIX B



Thank you for your interest in participating in my dissertation research, “Discrepancies between issue identification and program participation as perceived by urban Extension youth educators”. As we’ve discussed, I am building an action research team of Extension youth educators representing urban 4-H programs in cities across the country. The study will investigate barriers to urban youth programming and evaluate educator perspectives of organizational conditions needed to support thriving 4-H programs in urban communities.

To participate in this study, please follow the link below to complete the consent form.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/_UrbanYouthEd

Best meeting dates and times will be discussed during our initial team meeting in March. Please use the link below to select your availability.

<http://www.agreeAdate.com/9382604963C2A7660418DCD17D5F3C87CE>

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information about your participation, please feel free to contact me at 404-423-5905 or Dr. Lorilee Sandmann at 706-542-4014.

I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Victoria David

APPENDIX C

Master List:

CODE	Theme	SUBCODE	Theme
ENG	Engagement	EVL	Evaluation
REL	Relating/Understanding of culture	MAR	Marketing
ADV	Advocating	OUT	Outcomes/Impacts
RES	Resource Acquisition	VOL	Volunteer Development
COL	Collaboration	FUN	Fund Development
INO	Innovation/Flexibility/Creativity	CHP	Champion ID
NEG	Negotiating	NAS	Needs Assessment
NET	Networking	ENG	Engagement
EXP	Exposure		
REI	Reimaging		

Final List:

CODE	SUBCODE
Assessing	NAS RES CHP
Engaging	NET NEG COL
Reformulating	INO
Advocating	REL [Culture Translator]