



August 2010
Volume 48 Number 4
Article Number 4RIB2

[Return to Current Issue](#)

Motivational Orientations of Adults Participating in a Cooperative Extension Master Gardener Program

Robert Strong

Assistant Professor
Texas A&M University
College Station, Texas
r-strong@tamu.edu

Amy Harder

Assistant Professor
Department of Agricultural Education and Communication
University of Florida
Gainesville, Florida
amharder@ufl.edu

Abstract: The purpose of the study reported here was to develop a better understanding of adult participation in the Master Gardener Program in Putnam County, Tennessee. Eighty-nine participants were surveyed, and 66 participants returned their completed survey, for a 74.16% response rate. Adults participated "to obtain a practical benefit," "to feed an appetite for knowledge," "to satisfy an intellectual curiosity," and "to satisfy an inquiring mind." MG Coordinators should market their programs as opportunities to learn and share specific gardening knowledge. More comprehensive research is needed to determine if adults are primarily interested in the MG Program strictly for knowledge.

Introduction

Persistent budget deficits for Extension programs at land-grant institutions have strengthened the need for the Extension volunteer to supply constituents with reliable information on the organization's behalf (Steele, 1994). Master Gardeners attend classes to learn horticultural information before assisting the local Extension agent with homeowner education (Reiners, Nichnadowicz, Nitzsche, & Bachelder, 1991). Flagler (1992) said a clear-cut description does not exist as to what motivates adults to take part in the Master Gardener (MG) program. Given the importance of Master Gardeners to Extension, it is important to understand the factors influencing their decision to participate in the MG program.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the study reported here was based on Houle's (1961) Typology. Houle (1961) outlined three separate classifications based upon adults' purposes and values of education that described the motivations of adults to participate in continued learning. The three classifications were goal-oriented,

activity-oriented, and learning-oriented (Houle, 1961). Goal-oriented adults participate in an educational program due to their need for education or because of a personal interest. An activity-oriented adult chooses an educational program based upon the amount of social experiences with other adults. Adults who are learning-oriented perceive continued learning as a duty and believe pursuing education will enhance their lives.

No particular orientation is better than the others (Houle, 1961). The differences in adults are the focal point of Houle's (1961) Typology. A specific course or educational program may draw individuals from all three classifications, with each participating for their own respective objective. Extension's objectives are to design, implement, and evaluate educational experiences to assist groups or individuals by increasing their knowledge and skills in solving problems (Seevers, Graham, & Conklin, 2007). Recognizing that adults are in one of the three classifications is helpful for guiding adult education (Houle, 1961).

Purpose and Objective

The purpose of the study reported here was to develop a better understanding of adult participation in the MG Program. The primary objective was to describe the motivational orientations for adults participating in the MG Program.

Methodology

The findings presented here are part of a larger study conducted to develop an understanding of factors related to the enrollment and tenure of Master Gardeners. The portion of the study reported here is focused on the motivational orientations of Master Gardeners. It was a descriptive study using a census of participants ($N = 89$) from Putnam County's MG Program in Tennessee. In Tennessee, there are approximately 2,000 active adult Master Gardeners who serve 46 of Tennessee's 95 counties.

The questionnaire included 43 statements from Mergener's (1979) Education Participation Scale (M-EPS) and 10 questions about participant demographics. The M-EPS was derived from Boshier's (1971) Education Participation Scale, which was derived from Houle's (1961) Typology. The constructs within the M-EPS were Competence-related Curiosity, Interpersonal Relations, Community Service, Escape from Routine, Professional Advancement, and External Influence. The Competence-related Curiosity construct aligned with learning-oriented adults. The Interpersonal Relations and Community Service constructs aligned with activity-oriented adults. The Escape from Routine, Professional Advancement, and External Influence constructs aligned with goal-oriented adults. Variables on the M-EPS were measured on a five-point scale: 5 = *very much influence*, 4 = *much influence*, 3 = *moderate influence*, 2 = *little influence*, 1 = *very little influence* (Mergener). Reliability for the internal constructs of the M-EPS were calculated ex post facto and ranged between .63 - .83.

The researchers used the methods outlined by Dillman, Smyth, and Christian (2009) to increase response rate from participants when implementing a mail questionnaire. The data collection instrument was printed in a booklet layout and then mailed to the sampled population. Eighty-nine participants were surveyed, and 66 participants returned their completed survey to the researchers, for a 74.16% response rate. Early and late respondents were compared, and no significant differences existed. Therefore the results may be generalized to the target population (Lindner, Murphy, & Briers, 2001).

The majority of respondents were women (83%), and all but one respondent was white. Forty-six percent of respondents were 56 years of age or older. Also, 74% of respondents had obtained at least an Associate's Degree. Respondents' annual income tended to be between \$25,000 - 49,999. Over 58% of respondents had

participated in the program for over 2 years.

Findings

The study's objective was to describe Master Gardeners' motivational orientations as described by the M-EPS. Adults believed a Competence related Curiosity had much influence on their decision to participate in the MG Program ($M = 4.12, SD = .82$). Professional Advancement ($M = 1.21, SD = .45$) and External Influence ($M = 1.16, SD = .48$) had no influence on respondents' participation in the MG Program. A summary of the means and standard deviations for each construct is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1.
Respondents' Motivational Orientations by Construct

Construct	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Competence-related Curiosity	4.12	.82
Interpersonal Relations	2.77	.87
Community Service	2.53	.80
Escape from Routine	1.89	.91
Professional Advancement	1.21	.45
External Influence	1.16	.48
<i>Note: N = 66. Scale: 5 = very much influence, 4 = much influence, 3 = moderate influence, 2 = little influence, and 1 = no influence.</i>		

Means and standard deviations for the items within each of the six constructs of the M-EPS are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.
Descriptive Statistics for the Constructs of the M-EPS

Construct and Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Competence-related Curiosity</i>		
To Obtain Practical Benefit	4.32	.93
To Feed an Appetite for Knowledge	4.29	.84
To Satisfy Intellectual Curiosity	4.09	1.17
To Satisfy an Inquiring Mind	4.08	.98
To Seek Knowledge for its Own Sake	3.82	1.30
<i>Community Service</i>		

To Improve My Community Work	3.20	1.21
To Improve My Ability to Serve Mankind	3.08	1.26
To Prepare for Community Service	2.86	1.24
To Be a More Effective Citizen	2.85	1.28
To Gain Insight into Human Relationships	1.83	1.02
<i>Interpersonal Relations</i>		
To Share a Common Interest with Someone Else	3.71	1.31
To Participate in Group Activities	3.26	1.14
To Become Acquainted with Congenial People	3.00	1.34
To Fulfill a Need for Personal Associations	2.34	1.24
To Improve Social Relationships	2.05	1.01
To Take Part in an Activity Which is Customary in the Circles in Which I Move	1.83	1.21
To Comply with the Fact that People with Status and Attend Adult Education Classes	1.52	.88
<i>Escape from Routine</i>		
To Get a Break from Routine of Home or Work	2.08	1.18
To Provide a Contrast to the Rest of My Life	1.95	1.16
To Have a Few Hours Away from Responsibilities	1.83	1.13
To Gain Relief from Boredom	1.69	1.10
<i>External Influence</i>		
To Comply with Recommendations from Someone Else	1.32	.77
To Fulfill My Professional Obligation	1.18	.68
To Carry Out the Recommendations from Some Authority	1.18	.56
To Fulfill Requirements of a Government Agency	1.17	.62
<i>Professional Advancement</i>		
To Secure Professional Advancement	1.27	.67
To Give Me Higher Status on the Job	1.14	.63
To Comply with My Employer's Policy	1.08	.32
<i>Note: N = 66. Scale: 5 = very much influence, 4 = much influence, 3 = moderate influence, 2 = little influence, and 1 = no influence.</i>		

Respondents tended to rate the five items associated with the Competence-related Curiosity construct as having much influence. Adults believed "to obtain a practical benefit" ($M = 4.32, SD = .93$), "to feed an appetite for knowledge" ($M = 4.29, SD = .84$), "to satisfy an intellectual curiosity" ($M = 4.09, SD = 1.17$), and "to satisfy an inquiring mind" ($M = 4.08, SD = .98$) had much influence on their decision to participate in the MG Program.

Responses for the five items associated with the Community Service construct ranged from moderate influence to little influence. Respondents reported "to improve my community work" ($M = 3.20, SD = 1.21$) and "to improve their ability to serve mankind" ($M = 3.08, SD = 1.26$) were moderate influences on their participation. Adults believed "to gain insight into human relationships" ($M = 1.83, SD = 1.02$) had little influence on their participation.

Responses for the seven items associated with the Interpersonal Relations construct ranged from moderate influence to little influence. Respondents reported "to share a common interest with someone else" ($M = 3.71, SD = 1.31$) had much influence on their MG Program participation. Adults were least likely to report "to comply with the fact that people with status and prestige attend adult education classes" ($M = 1.52, SD = .88$) as an influence on their participation.

Respondents tended to rate the four items associated with the Escape from Routine construct as having little influence. Respondents reported "to get a break from the routine of home or work" ($M = 2.08, SD = 1.18$), "to provide a contrast to the rest of my life" ($M = 1.95, SD = 1.16$), "to have a few hours away from responsibilities" ($M = 1.83, SD = 1.13$), and "to gain relief from boredom" ($M = 1.69, SD = 1.10$) had little influence on their participation in the MG Program.

Respondents tended to rate the four items associated with the External Routine construct as having no influence. Respondents reported "to comply with recommendations from someone else" ($M = 1.32, SD = .77$), "to fulfill my professional obligation" ($M = 1.18, SD = .68$), "to carry out the recommendations from some authority" ($M = 1.18, SD = .56$), and "to fulfill the requirements of a government agency" ($M = 1.17, SD = .62$) had no influence on their participation.

Additionally, respondents tended to rate the three items associated with the Professional Advancement construct as having no influence. Respondents reported "to secure professional advancement" ($M = 1.27, SD = .67$), "to give me a higher status on the job" ($M = 1.14, SD = .63$), and "to comply with my employer's policy" ($M = 1.08, SD = .32$) had no influence on their participation in the MG Program.

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Houle (1961) suggested an educational program may entice adults searching to address a specific learning objective. The study reported here found MG Program participants were involved primarily for their motivation to learn. Learning-oriented adults have a strong desire to learn and identify perpetual learning as a responsibility that will improve them as members of society (Houle, 1961). A limitation of the study was the examination of a single county MG Program. More comprehensive research is needed to determine if adults are primarily interested in the MG Program strictly for knowledge.

Identifying the learning orientations of Master Gardeners may assist Master Gardener coordinators in constructing their roles as educators (Houle, 1961). MG participants in the study were neither goal- nor activity-oriented. The findings imply the Master Gardeners were not seeking social relationships or to provide community service from their participation. Also, professional development, external influence, and to escape routine were not motives for participation in the MG Program.

Houle (1961) said the differences in adults are the heart of his typology. Participants in this local MG program drew adults that were primarily learning-oriented. More specifically, adults wanted "to obtain a practical benefit," "to feed an appetite for knowledge," "to satisfy an intellectual curiosity," and "to satisfy an inquiring mind." Determining which learning orientations participants predominately fall into helps educators to plan their instruction accordingly (Houle, 1961). In the study, adults were similar in their learning orientations associated with their participation in the local MG program.

Master Gardener Coordinators may benefit from marketing their programs as opportunities to learn more detailed information related to gardening and to share knowledge with fellow citizens. This may entice more adults who are mainly interested in learning and sharing horticulture related subject matter to participate. Master Gardeners should continue to be marketed as the go-to outlet for horticultural information. As such, they would continue to assist Extension in increasing clientele's knowledge and skills (Seevers, Graham, & Conklin, 2007) in order to provide solutions to their problems.

References

- Boshier, R. (1971). Motivational orientations of adult education participants: A factoranalytic exploration of Houle's typology. *Adult Education Journal*, 21(2), 3-26.
- Dillman, D. A., Smyth, J. D., & Christian, L. M. (2009). *Internet, mail and mixed-mode surveys: The tailored design method* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.
- Flagler, J. S. (1992). Master Gardeners and horticultural therapy. *HortTechnology*, 2(2), 249-250.
- Houle, C. O. (1961). *The inquiring mind*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Lindner, J. R., Murphy, T. H., & Briers, G. E. (2001). Handling nonresponse in social science research. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 42(4), 43-53.
- Mergener, M. A. (1979). The motivational orientations of pharmacists toward continuing education. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 39(08), 3775B. (UMI No. 7820638)
- Meyer, M. H., & Hanchek, A. M. (1997). Master Gardener training costs and payback in volunteer hours. *HortTechnology*, 7(4), 368-370.
- Reiners, S., Nichnadowicz, J., Nitzsche, P. J., & Bachelder, S. (1991). Using Master Gardeners to evaluate home garden tomato varieties. *HortTechnology*, 1, 136.
- Seevers, B., Graham, D., & Conklin, N. (2007). *Education through Cooperative Extension* (2nd ed.). Albany, NY: Delmar Publishers.
- Steele, D. L. (1994). *Volunteer leader inventory*. Rotary training guide. Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN
- Swackhamer, E., & Kiernan, N. E. (2005). A multipurpose evaluation strategy for Master Gardener Training Programs. *Journal of Extension* [On-linr], 43(6) Article 6FEA4. Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2005december/a4.php>

Copyright © by Extension Journal, Inc. ISSN 1077-5315. Articles appearing in the Journal become the property of the Journal. Single copies of articles may be reproduced in electronic or print form for use in

educational or training activities. Inclusion of articles in other publications, electronic sources, or systematic large-scale distribution may be done only with prior electronic or written permission of the Journal Editorial Office, joe-ed@joe.org.

If you have difficulties viewing or printing this page, please contact JOE Technical Support.