

ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE

Charles E. Stamper

The Graduate School

Morehead State University

March 31, 2017

MAKING THE BEST BETTER:  
ASSESSING THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF KENTUCKY  
4-H AGENTS

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Abstract of capstone

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the  
College of Education  
At Morehead State University

By

Charles E. Stamper

Paintsville, Kentucky

Committee Chair: John H. Curry, Associate Professor

Morehead, Kentucky

March 31, 2017

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## ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE

MAKING THE BEST BETTER:  
ASSESSING THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF KENTUCKY  
4-H AGENTS

University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Specialist for 4-H Youth Development conducted a comprehensive needs assessment of the professional development system of Kentucky 4-H Youth Development Agents. A qualitative research design was used to give nine 4-H Agents the opportunity to identify the strengths and challenges of the current professional development system. Responses were analyzed and recommendations were presented in the Needs Assessment Report.

KEYWORDS: 4-H, agent, professional development, needs, assessment

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Candidate Signature

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Date

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4-H AGENTS

By

Charles E. Stamper

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John H. Curry, Ph.D.  
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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this Capstone to my extraordinary wife, Stephanie, and my wonderful daughter, Emma. Thank you both for your support and love during my trek. You understood when I had to stay at the computer, in the library, or in class, instead of being with you. You have my heart! And, of course, I dedicate this work to my Creator and Lord. Thank You, Christ, for everything! John 11:35

Now, what do I do at night?

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There are so many people I would like to acknowledge as I complete this Capstone. It has been a tough three years, but I believe the decision to apply to Morehead State University was the best decision I could ever have made. The classes were challenging and the assignments were tough, but I had a strong educational foundation on which I relied. For their support, I would like to recognize...

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Mrs. Betty Patton, my high school French teacher and Assistant Principal. Mrs. Patton never let me quit and challenged me to stretch my comfort zone.

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My wife, Stephanie, who was my late-night study partner for all three years.

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**MAKING THE BEST BETTER:  
ASSESSING THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF KENTUCKY  
4-H AGENTS  
Executive Summary**

**What was the Core of the Capstone?**

The purpose of this study was to assess the professional development needs of University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension 4-H Agents. The motto of the 4-H program is “To make the best better” (4hhistorypreservation.com, 2016). Strengthening the professional development system of the agents charged with leading the county-based educational programs in Kentucky will enhance their skills as 4-H Youth Development Agents. In order for the 144 youth development professionals charged with leading the 4-H program in Kentucky to accomplish this task, they must have continuing professional development. Research supports the benefits of professional development, including staff retention, improved health and safety, reduced stress, leadership succession, better use of resources, improved program quality, reduced hiring and orientation costs, improved job satisfaction, and more rapid and successful organizational change (Bowie & Bronte-Tinkew, 2006; Garst, Baughman, & Franz, 2014; Guskey, 2000). Extension 4-H Agents work in the 120 Kentucky counties as part of the Cooperative Extension Service (CES) system. 4-H Youth Development Agents focus their work on addressing issues facing youth and families in their county. In Kentucky, professional agents staff the County Extension office and focus on three major disciplines: agriculture and natural resources, family and consumer sciences, and 4-H Youth Development. Currently, Kentucky’s Extension Agents are in the process of implementing a plan of work, which will direct the path in educational programming for the next four years. The plan of work will describe

how the Extension Agents plan to address the issues affecting the clientele in their county.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the guiding force for state-level CES programs at the national level, has targeted professional development at the state level for Cooperative Extension Service Agents as a directive. In “A Vision for the 21st Century” (National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, 2002), the USDA suggests the future of a strong and viable national CES system depends upon states being proactive with educational programming which would adjust to the ever-changing communities in 21st Century America. The report continued by offering the idea that the new century would create a community of high-tech and high-touch citizenry and CES staff must adapt to advanced modes of communication. Two of the resulting national mandates from this study included all CES staff spending ten percent of their time on professional development and implementation of an information-based technology plan (National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, 2002). Currently, the majority of professional development opportunities for CES Agents in Kentucky are face-to-face in-service sessions (personal communication, C. Stamper, 2016). During January 2015, 95 percent of the professional development sessions offered to 4-H Agents were face-to-face (In-service Training, 2015). As suggested in the “Vision for the 21st Century” (National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, 2002), the CES must create professional development opportunities for agents which use technology and advanced communication strategies. This study proposed to assess the professional development needs of Kentucky Extension 4-H Agents. The central research question in the study was:

1. What are the professional development needs of Kentucky Extension 4-H Agents?

There were two focus areas for this study. The first focused on the need to assess what Kentucky 4-H Agents have been receiving in professional development, how they react after attending these professional development sessions, and if the current structure of primarily traditional in-person professional development sessions were meeting their professional development needs (McCawley, 2009). The second focus was to assess what mode of professional development sessions would best meet the needs of Kentucky Extension 4-H Agents and be most effective, engaging, and accessible (McCawley, 2009).

Extension program quality depends upon a highly qualified and consistently trained staff of educators (Garst, Baughman, & Franz, 2014). Consistent professional development must be offered in order to achieve a high quality staff of CES Agents. Higgins and Harreveld (2013) noted educators wanted and needed professional development and would search out opportunities to attend professional development if they felt the topic would benefit their teaching. The challenge is finding a design that meets the needs of the agents and is the most appropriate presentation mode.

Cooperative Extension Service Agents in Kentucky are expected to participate in 36 hours of professional development every two years. Since 2014, a work group composed of county agents, content specialists, and administrators has been working on reviewing the current professional development system offered to county agents. This work group was given the task of creating a model for in-services addressing the professional development needs of county agents. The work group also followed the mandate of the “Vision for the 21st Century” (National Association of State Universities

and Land Grant Colleges, 2002) which challenged state Extension systems to train their staff so Extension Agents will be able to address the changing issues affecting the residents in the county they work. The new professional development plan must be able to offer learning opportunities for county-based agents to be able to deliver these programs in diverse ways.

There were definite gaps in the existing research literature on professional development for 4-H Youth Development Agents. Baker and Hadley (2014) found even though most new agents prefer face-to-face orientation, more tenured agents would like to explore the development of online communities of practice and online mentoring sessions. There were no studies found that focused on online professional development of 4-H Youth Development Agents, however some studies did include 4-H Agents.

#### **Who was the capstone study meant to impact?**

The capstone study will be presented to the Assistant Director for Kentucky 4-H Youth Development to strengthen the professional development of county-based 4-H Agents. Dr. Mark Mains assumed the role of Assistant Director in November 2016. A summary of the study was presented to the Assistant Director for his review in March 2017 (see Appendix A for the Summary). The findings will be used to strengthen the professional development system for Kentucky 4-H Agents and therefore enhance their competencies.

The Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service (CES), along with all land grant universities with Extension systems (Brown & Jackson, 1983), celebrated their 100th year of existence in 2014. The Kentucky CES is housed in the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food, and Environment, but functions under the direction of the

Associate Dean for Extension. Kenneth Jones, Extension Staff Development Coordinator (personal communication, 2015), stated there is a new mandated structure for professional development within the Kentucky CES system which will allow agents the opportunity to choose what basic professional development sessions they need to attend.

According to the Kentucky CES website (In-service Training, 2016), agents must complete at least a minimum of 36 professional development hours before advancing in their career ladder. The career ladder is the merit-based professional development system in the Kentucky CES, since there is no tenure track for county-based staff. The professional development plan included in the career ladder does not specifically list whether or not sessions are face-to-face or online.

In the past two decades, there have been limited studies dealing specifically with the professional development of CES Agents, but there were similarities in studies involving educators in higher education. Some state CES systems have studied the professional development process and have found a continued need in competency development (Conklin, Hook, Kelbaugh, & Nieto, 2002; Lakai, Jayaratne, Moore, & Kistler, 2012). There are multiple definitions of competency, but a simple definition would be the technical and application skills necessary for a CES agent to perform his job at an acceptable level (Lakai, Jayaratne, Moore, & Kistler, 2012; Stone & Bieber, 1997). In order to achieve acceptable levels of skill development, CES Agents must have continued professional development (Shih & Evans, 1991; Senyurelki, Dworkin, & Dickinson, 2006).

Four H (4-H) is the youth component of the Cooperative Extension system and focuses on the positive development of youth (4-h.org, 2016). As an organization, 4-H

has its roots in rural community development, but now focuses on rural and urban youth issues. In Kentucky, there are 144 Extension Agents assigned as 4-H Agents (What is 4-H, 2016). Of the 120 counties in Kentucky, 100 counties have a full-time 4-H Agent (personal communications, C. Jacobs, 2016). According to the 2015 4-H Annual Report (What is 4-H, 2016), there are 250,000 registered 4-H members in Kentucky.

Kentucky 4-H Agents must offer six hours of educational programming in six out of seven core areas, including agriculture, family and consumer science, health, communications and expressive arts, leadership, natural resources, and science/technology/energy/mathematics (Program Areas, 2016). Each 4-H agent must have basic core competencies in each of the areas they offer, creating a need for continuous professional development. Granted, 4-H Agents are not required to lead each educational session, but must train the volunteers who will be leading the sessions in the agent's absence. Currently, 4-H Agents are required to attend a three-day in-service, titled 4-H Series, each year to receive the majority of their professional development. There are other professional development sessions offered throughout the year, but not as extensive as the three-day series. The six major job requirements for Kentucky Extension 4-H Youth Development Agents are:

- Educational programming with the competencies of planning and organizing, able to travel to sites outside the office, written and oral communication skills, teaching, and presentation skills;
- Leadership and council development with the competencies of recruitment and marketing skills, confidentiality, attention to detail, ability to work with and value a wide range of personalities, and teaching skills;

- Public accountability and service with the competencies of written and oral communication skills, dependability, courteous and responsive to the public, social media skills, and service orientation;
- Facilitation, collaboration, and teamwork with the competencies of initiative, leadership abilities, able to easily meet people and form relationships, open and honest communication skills, and team player;
- Professional development with the competencies of ability to learn new concepts, leadership and presentation skills; and
- Supervision with the competencies of supervision and coaching skills. (CES Personnel, 2016).

Educators in higher education have similar professional development needs of Extension Agents. Both sets of educators deal with learners who are not required to attend the sessions being offered, but rather attend based on personal choice. Another similarity is the age of learners, with both sets offering educational programs to multi-age participants. Higher education, like the CES system, is experiencing changes as institutions search for ways to improve the organizational system (Brancato, 2003; Koehler & Mishra, 2009). Educators are not just relaying information to students, but connecting their students to the international community (Brancato, 2003; De Jongh, Frantz, & Rhoda, 2014; Mulvey, 2013). This mission is similar to the educational goal of CES Agents, who must connect local citizens to modern practices, which will sustain their communities.

One way educators can enhance their professional development is through the creation of an online learning organization (Cochrane, 2014; Donovan, 2009). Brancato

(2003) described a learning organization as an entity interested in creating a bridge of understanding between its faculty and the organization's mission, vision, and goals. An online learning organization follows that premise and creates an opportunity for faculty to continue their professional development online, while pursuing the institution's goals. Brancato used Senge's model of a learning organization to understand the need for faculty professional development. Senge's model (as cited in Brancato, 2003, pp. 4-5) included five components: (a) personal mastery, (b) team learning, (c) mental models, (d) shared vision, (e) and systems thinking. Senge suggested faculty professional development plans including these components would have a greater chance of being successful.

Driscoll (1999), and Drew and Klopper (2014), suggest using web-based professional training in the workplace because of cost savings to the organization, as well as making the scheduling of specialists presenting the material more manageable. Administrators may be interested in developing online professional development because it is easier to track employees' attendance and rates of completion (Bennett & Barp, 2008). Cho and Rathbun (2013), along with Polly and Hannafin (2010), studied successful online faculty development programs and found these common characteristics:

- Communication of the goals of the session,
- Communication of the expectations of the participants,
- Time expectations for participants, and
- Appropriate timing of the session.

Research suggests, however, that the most vital item in successful faculty professional development systems is the acceptance by faculty of online technology as an

adequate alternative to face-to-face professional development (Haley, 2008; Muth, 2011; Owens, 2012; Smith & Sivo, 2012; Whitaker, Kinzie, Kraft-Sayre, Mashburn, & Pianta, 2007). Beavers (2009) offered that adults learn differently than children, and must be treated differently during the learning session. Beavers (as cited in Beavers, 2009) suggests instructional designers follow Knowles' assumptions of adult learners when developing online professional development:

- Have an independent self-concept and who can direct their own learning,
- Have accumulated a reservoir of life experiences that is a rich resource for learning,
- Have learning needs closely related to changing social roles,
- Are problem-centered and interested in immediate application of knowledge, and
- Are motivated to learn by internal rather than external factors (p. 4).

### **How was the Capstone Project Implemented?**

This study consisted of a needs assessment conducted in order to answer the central research question. According to McCawley (2009), a needs assessment is a “systematic approach to studying the state of knowledge, ability, interest, or attitude of a defined audience or group involving a particular subject” (p. 3). Cooperative Extension uses needs assessments to learn about important issues facing Extension Agents in order to design the most effective educational programs. A needs assessment allows the gaps between what exists and what is needed. By following the direct assessment design, six categories of findings were assessed:

- Impact,
- Approaches,

- Awareness,
- Outcomes,
- Demand, and
- Credibility (McCawley, 2009).

The impact shows what is currently being accomplished by the current format of professional development of Kentucky 4-H Agents. The different approaches for professional development were discussed. The goal was to discover what could be the most effective. The needs assessment included discussion around the types of professional development sessions are currently being offered and which sessions have been attended most by agents. The study compared the expected outcomes of the current professional development sessions with what the agents feel they are gaining. This information was collected in order to get an understanding of the perception of professional development being offered to Kentucky 4-H Agents.

The Comprehensive Needs Assessment Model (McCawley, 2009; Witkin & Altschuld, 1995) was used as the model for this study. The comprehensive needs assessment had been used successfully by CES professionals (Conklin, Hook, Kelbaugh, & Nieto, 2002) and was an appropriate model to use for the study involving Kentucky Extension 4-H Agents. Since the study involved Extension personnel directly, this was considered a direct assessment. McCawley (2009, p. 3) defined a direct assessment as a comprehensive needs assessment which “requires research involving data collection from clientele.” In this study, the Kentucky 4-H Agents were considered the clientele. Based on McCawley’s comprehensive needs assessment model (2009), the study included the following seven steps:

- 1) Writing objectives,
- 2) Selecting the audience,
- 3) Collecting data,
- 4) Selecting the participants,
- 5) Instrument selection,
- 6) Data analysis, and
- 7) Follow up.

#### **Writing objectives.**

The first step in the process was to decide on the objectives of the study. After consultation with the 4-H Program Leader for the Kentucky 4-H Program, the two major objectives of the study were to: (1) discover the current situation of professional development for Kentucky 4-H Agents, and (2) discover what mode of professional development sessions will best meet the needs of Kentucky Extension 4-H Agents.

#### **Selecting the audience.**

The second step in the assessment process was to select the audience. The unit of analysis for the proposed study were the Kentucky Extension 4-H Agents. As of May 1, 2016, there were 144 4-H Agents in Kentucky. The demographic breakdown is in Table 1 below.

Table 1

*Demographic Information of Kentucky 4-H Agents (N = 144)*

Characteristic	n	%
Sex		

Female	86	60
Male	57	40
Race		
Caucasian	132	92
Afr-American	7	5
Other	4	3

---

Note. Totals of percentages are not exact because of rounding.

The participant type for this study was a criterion purposive sample, used with small case numbers, to maximize quality assurance. Selecting participants intentionally in order to collect information specifically geared toward the research question is a strategy in criterion purposive samples (Maxwell, 2002). According to Creswell (2007), when using a criterion purposive sampling technique, all study participants must fit the same criterion so that a cohesive study can be performed where all the participants have had experience with the phenomenon. In the proposed study, all participants will be Kentucky 4-H Agents. Permission to conduct the study was acquired from the Assistant Director who was in place during the proposal phase of the study, the current Assistant Director who was hired during the data collection phase of the study, and the Assistant Director for Operations.

#### **Collecting data.**

Selecting the appropriate method for collecting the information needed to make an informed comprehensive needs assessment was imperative. Creswell (2014) and Yin (2011) suggested using triangulation as a means of collecting rich data. Triangulation

involves collecting data from at least three different sources directly related to the study. Triangulation strengthens corroboration of the findings. Online interviews, qualitative documents, and qualitative observations were used as the three methods of collecting data. The online interviews were conducted with participating Kentucky 4-H Agents. The online communication tools used for the interviews were Skype for Business (formerly Lync, 2016) and Zoom (Zoom Video Communications, 2016). Skype for Business and Zoom allowed one-to-one interviews, which were recorded for later transcription. Since the comprehensive needs assessment model is considered direct assessment, the interviews were conducted directly with participants. An email was sent out in October by the new Assistant Director announcing the study and permission for Kentucky 4-H Agents who fit the characteristics to participate. Interested 4-H Agents were to contact the researcher to begin the process. When the window of time for interested agents to express interest had expired, a personal thank you note was sent to each person. Twenty-five agents responded with interest. Ten of the 25 did not meet the characteristics of the study and were sent an additional message thanking them. The first nine of the remaining interested agents were selected as the first set. Personal communication was sent to each one giving an overview of the study, expectations of the participants, and timeline for interviews. Of the first nine, eight accepted, and number 10 was then placed on the list and the agent accepted. Nine 4-H Agents accepted the opportunity to participate in the study.

The next step in the data collection process included creating an interview schedule. Online interviews with the nine 4-H Agents happened between November and December 2016. Study participants were sent two documents, the IRB-approved consent

form and the list of initial questions. The consent form was sent one day prior to the interview and the initial questions were sent approximately two hours before each individual interview. Study participants needed time to read the consent form thoroughly before the interview, without the interview answers sounding scripted, so the questions were only sent a short time beforehand. Each interview was conducted online and was recorded. The interviews only included the participant and the researcher, in order to protect confidentiality.

The face-to-face observation was conducted during the 2016 Kentucky 4-H Professional Development Series and was conducted directly with 4-H Agents participating in professional development sessions. The session was a three-hour session with a project-based maker theme. The presenter, Torey Earle, Kentucky 4-H Extension Specialist, had been mentioned during the interviews by multiple agents. The researcher also participated in one online professional development in-service geared toward development of youth mentors in a county 4-H program. A national team of mentoring experts presented the session.

The third type of data collection included a document review of the professional development records for the participating agents. Each Kentucky 4-H Agent must enroll online to receive credit for attending professional development sessions. It is the responsibility of the session leader to grant credit for participating agents. The attendance records for each participant was reviewed.

#### **Selecting the participants.**

The fourth step in the comprehensive needs assessment process included selecting the participants. Yin (2011) and Emerson (2001) suggested the participants be directly

related to the research question. Having a direct relationship to the research question allows the findings to be on target. The study would begin with nine participant interviews. However, additional interviews could be held until saturation was reached. Saturation was reached when no other new information was collected (Creswell, 2007). The participants were currently full-time 4-H Agents in Kentucky with at least two years of experience. Table 2 shows the characteristics of desired participants. A checkmark was placed beside each characteristic fulfilled by the study participants.

Table 2

---

*Study Participant Characteristics*

---

## Area of State

East Region Agent ✓

Central Region Agent ✓

Western Region Agent	√
Sex	
Male Agent	√
Female Agent	√
Race	
Caucasian Agent	√
Afr-American Agent	√
Tenure	
<10 Years Tenure	√
>10 Years Tenure	√

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### **Instrument selection.**

The study followed a qualitative design. The qualitative philosophy in this study was hermeneutic phenomenology. The goal of the phenomenological perspective is to “understand the lived experience of individuals and their intentions within their lifeworld” (Crabtree & Miller, 1999, p. 28). Hermeneutics goes beyond basic phenomenology. The goal of hermeneutics is to interpret the lived experience to understand the “political, historical, and sociocultural context in which it occurs” (Crabtree & Miller, 1999, p. 28). Modern research proponents of hermeneutic phenomenology have strived to make it defined as a science whose purpose is to “describe particular phenomena as lived experience” (Carpenter & Speziale, 2007, p. 76). Herbert Spiegelberg described phenomenology as both a philosophy and a method.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is considered a qualitative method of research study. The basic premise of hermeneutic phenomenology is to describe the essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon. There are four basic characteristics of hermeneutic phenomenology. The characteristics are listed here, and then a discussion follows explaining their relationship to the professional development phenomenon:

- A return to the traditional tasks of philosophy;
- A philosophy without presuppositions;
- The intentionality of consciousness; and
- The refusal of the subject-object dichotomy (Creswell, 2007).

The phenomena being studied were the professional development experiences of Kentucky Extension 4-H Youth Development Agents. The perspectives associated with hermeneutic phenomenology were discussed as they applied to Kentucky 4-H Agents. When applying the first characteristic to 4-H Agents there was a direct relationship between the two. The original aim of philosophy is to gain wisdom, and this study was an avenue to do so. Hermeneutic phenomenology will remove the empirical study aspect of research from the study. By studying the life world of 4-H Agents, wisdom will be gained by researching the documents recording the current professional development requirements for Extension Agents and use that knowledge to design a structured online professional development system.

The second characteristic in hermeneutic phenomenology attempts to reach an epoche during the research process. The goal of hermeneutics is to reach understanding without presuppositions (Van Manen, 1990). The approach is to do away with preconceived thoughts of what is real in nature. A possible relationship between this

perspective and the Kentucky Extension system was noted due to each 4-H agent will be working in different counties across the state and have different professional development experiences. The intentionality of consciousness is the idea that all objects appear real from the lens of the person being studied. There was a direct relationship between 4-H Agents and their need for professional development because in reality, their position requires them to attend professional development annually. Husserl described reality as “not being divided into subjects and objects, but the dual nature of subjects and objects as they appear in nature” (as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 58). The intention of the 4-H agent is to use the skills learned during professional development sessions in the development of the educational program. The fourth characteristic in hermeneutic phenomenology also deals with reality. The characteristic posits that the reality of an object is only part of reality if it is within the understanding of the experiences of the individual. There was a direct relationship between the 4-H Agents and this perspective when it deals with the reality of each individual agent and his/her version of reality. In this study, reality would be the most effective structure for professional development.

The design included a semi-structured interview. The first four questions were written to gather demographic information about the participant. The second set of questions included nine questions, which were used to answer the research question. Since phenomenology is an iterative process, more targeted questions were asked, if necessary, based upon the answers given by study participants. The questions were developed by the researcher and reviewed by the Assistant Director, who also had experience in qualitative research. The advantages of using interviews as a data collection process include being able to get a richer perspective of the experience being studied,

generating information at a deeper level than closed-ended questions, and the opportunity to clarify the comments given by the study participants (McCawley, 2009; Maxwell, 2005). The questions related directly to the central research question concerning assessing the professional development needs of 4-H Agents (see Appendix B for the Interview Protocol).

### **Procedure.**

The protocol questions were developed to gather the information needed to answer the research questions of the study. The participants were selected based upon their willingness to volunteer as participants of the study. All nine were invited to attend an online, one-on-one interview discussion with the researcher using Skype for Business (2016) or Zoom (2016). All participants were asked to review the IRB consent forms before the interview. Participants were asked if they understood the information covered in the consent forms. Each of the nine agreed to sign the forms. Signed forms were scanned by the participants and returned by email. Each initial interview was scheduled to last approximately one hour. Actual interviews averaged 45 minutes. Following the text transcriptions, member checking with participating 4-H Agents was conducted. Each participant was contacted and given a section of transcript and his initial analysis of the meaning. The participants were given the opportunity to clarify, delete, or agree with the analysis. According to Crabtree and Miller (1999), member checking gives the participants the opportunity to review to make sure their thoughts were conveyed correctly. The original questions went through an external auditing process to ensure quality assurance. The committee chair, along with the committee members, reviewed and approved the questions prior to the interviews. Even though a standard list of

questions was used with each interview, the questions were reworded or clarified based upon the need of the participants.

### **Data analysis.**

Ricoeur's structure for analyzing the data collected (as cited in Carpenter & Speziale, 2007) was the process selected for this study. Ricoeur listed the processes as naïve reading, structural analysis, and the interpretation of the whole. Naïve reading of the transcribed texts was the first step. To ensure accuracy, an initial listening to the recorded interviews of each of the 4-H Agents within a 48-hour window after the interview occurred was conducted. Memos were taken during the initial listening. The next included the transcription of the interviews. The transcription included listening to the interview and typing the discussion as close to word-perfect as possible. Becoming familiar with the texts of the 4-H Agents' interviews was imperative, so structured notes and memos were also taken during transcription. Memos refer to any writing done in a qualitative study other than transcriptions and coding (Maxwell, 2005). In this study, memos were recorded from the beginning of the study until the end of the study. Field notes, memos, transcriptions, and coding were used to create the emerging themes of the study. Naïve readings were conducted after each interview was transcribed. Each question was analyzed individually. A color-coding of themes was used to capture initial thoughts or definitions. This began the formulation of general themes. All general themes were grouped together for review.

The next step was structured analysis. Structured analysis occurred when the transcripts were reread and patterns of thought identified. Emerging concepts were mapped out according to emerging patterns. Patterns into meaning by grouping the

responses under major themes. The final step in the process was the interpretation of the whole. After multiple readings, the goal was to have a comprehensive understanding of the needs of county-based Extension 4-H Youth Development Agents as those needs apply to professional development. The general themes were compared against the original transcripts again to identify themes that are more specific. This was done so the themes that described the essence of the responses of the study participants would be clarified.

The second form of data analysis came after observation of an actual in-service session attended by 4-H Agents. The researcher did enroll and observed a face-to-face in-service attended by at least one of the study participants. Field notes were taken during the session and then a follow up email message was sent to the participant requesting their perspectives of the in-service. The same process occurred with the researcher attending an online professional development session. The purpose of observation is to get a well-rounded idea of professional development. The notes taken during this phase of the study were incorporated into the generated themes.

The third form of data analysis was accomplished by reviewing the professional development records of the study participants (see Appendix C for a Sample Professional Development Record). The review looked for the number and types of in-services attended, the modes of presentation, and the topics covered. During the initial interview, the participants were asked about the details of the professional development records. The results were integrated into the general themes.

### **Follow up.**

Watkins (2000) agreed with McCawley (2009) concerning the importance of follow up after the data has been analyzed. If there is no follow-up, there is no justification for the study. Yin (2011, p. 255) explained the need for the final report to not only “present your findings, but communicate the findings to the interested parties.” The original findings were sent to the State 4-H Program Leader after the Committee Chair approved. Mains said, “Excellent work. I want to present this to our state staff for discussion and review” (personal communication, 2017). The executive summary will also be presented to the study participants. There will be two goals for the presentation of findings: share the findings openly and broadly, and communicating personal knowledge in a way the public will understand (Yin, 2011, p. 256).

#### **Why were this capstone and related strategies selected?**

The principal investigator in the study is an employee of the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service and is in the Kentucky 4-H Youth Development department as a subject matter specialist. Duties in this position include curriculum and program development for Kentucky’s 4-H Agents and providing professional development for 4-H Agents and volunteers involved in the program. As new issues arise in the 4-H program, professional development must be offered to equip the agents with the skills needed to address those needs. A needs assessment would assist the state-level staff in the design of new educational materials and the most effective mode of presentation.

Professional development needs of Kentucky 4-H Agents were not assumed to be known, nor the most effective way to present the professional development sessions, prior to the study taking place. In order to assess the needs of Kentucky’s 4-H Agents,

their thoughts and experiences needed to be heard. What are the current programming issues being addressed by 4-H Agents? How do they feel about the current professional development being offered? What do they feel they need, in the area of professional development, to be more prepared to address those programming issues? What professional development do they feel they need to enhance their competencies as 4-H Agents? What methods of receiving professional development would they prefer?

Conducting a needs assessment for this capstone project was determined to be the most appropriate strategy for documenting the needs of Kentucky 4-H Agents. The decision to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment was reached after reviewing three needs assessment models, including training needs assessment, strategic needs assessment, and comprehensive assessment. The training needs assessment model was not selected because the training needs assessment model is used to “examine performance problems or new technologies” (Rossett, 1987, p.14). No specific problems in the professional development system have been identified prior to the proposed study, nor have specific technology tools been suggested for 4-H agent professional development.

Next, a strategic needs assessment was considered. Gupta, Sleezer, and Russ-Eft describe the purpose of a strategic needs assessment as a way of examining “the internal and external factors that affect performance within the context of an organization’s business strategy and identifies the gaps between the current and desired conditions” (2007, p. 158). Since there have not been any performance gaps identified in the 4-H agent professional development system, this strategy would not answer the central research question. Therefore, the decision was made to use the comprehensive needs

assessment as the strategy for the proposed study. As previously mentioned, a comprehensive needs assessment will match the purpose of the study by assessing the professional development needs of Kentucky 4-H Agents.

### **When was the capstone implemented?**

The comprehensive needs assessment, upon approval by the committee chair and committee, began in the fall of 2016. Online interviews were conducted with nine Kentucky 4-H agents using Skype for Business (2016) and Zoom (2016) as the tools. The interviews were conducted in November-December 2016 (see Appendix D for Agent Interview Transcripts). The initial analysis ran in tandem with the interviews. The thematic analysis began in November. The report was written in December-January. The decision was made that nine interviews would allow enough new information to be collected for analysis. Additional 4-H Agents would be interviewed until saturation of data had been reached (Creswell, 2007). The program year for 4-H Agents ended September 30 and all professional development for the year had to be completed by that date.

### **Possible impact of the capstone?**

The impact of this capstone was to gauge if the perceived professional development needs of Kentucky 4-H Agents match the current professional development sessions being offered. Conducting comprehensive needs assessment allowed the opportunity to discuss the programming needs with the 4-H Agents and determine what topics and presentation modes are needed for them to develop in their roles as 4-H Agents. A comprehensive needs assessment identified any gaps in the current system, which will provide direction for instructional designers in the future. The results were

presented to the Kentucky 4-H Program Leader. The Kentucky 4-H program welcomed a new program leader in the fall of 2016, so this information will assist the new program leader in his/her role as statewide 4-H leader. The results of the assessment will also be shared with the Kentucky 4-H Subject Matter Specialists. The Subject Matter Specialists will use the information to develop future professional development opportunities for Kentucky 4-H Agents. A comprehensive needs assessment supplies the decision-makers with justification for allocation of available resources (Watkins, 2014; Office of Migrant Education, 2001).

### **Possible threats to the validity of the capstone?**

During the research process rigor was maintained through verification, validation, and validity (Creswell, 2007). Verification was achieved by conducting the review of literature, adhering to qualitative study guidelines, using a criterion sample, keeping field notes, and bracketing personal experiences. Validation was achieved by the multiple readings of the transcribed texts, compilation of themes through the common thoughts of the participants, and development of a codebook.

There are multiple ways of ensuring the validity of a qualitative research study (Creswell, 2014). Triangulation was used to capture the essence of the lived experiences of 4-H Agents. In this study individual interviews, field research, and document review were the sources of triangulation. A second method employed to check validity was member checking. As the iterative process continued, selected participants were allowed to review chunks of the results to confirm the thoughts of the participants were captured. This member checking occurred multiple times in the research process. A third process of checking validity was the use of an external auditor to review the overall research

protocol. The external auditor read the proposal independently and discussed the process with the researcher throughout the process to guarantee the research design was appropriate and was appropriate to answer the research questions.

There are also threats to validity from a positivist perspective. One of these is history. History is the time lapse from the time the participant agrees to take part in the study to the time the study is published (Miller & Whicker, 1999). If there are situations occurring which would change the perceptions of the 4-H Agents during this time-period, the study may have been affected. This was taken into consideration during the interview process and noted in the comments during the memoing. Another threat to the validity of this study was the test validity. Even though the Hawthorne Effect has never been replicated in a similar manner, there was the chance 4-H Agents participating in the study would feel they needed to be super-positive about their professional development, in fear of looking negative (Miller & Whicker, 1999). Reasonable efforts were made to explain the protocol for maintaining confidentiality during and after the study. The third threat to the study's validity was bias. Since the participants all came from a specific criterion, and were asked by an email invitation, there is a chance for bias to occur (Miller & Whicker, 1999). The researcher made every effort to bracket personal feelings and accepted any participant who met the criteria for the study.

In order to assure reliability of the study, Gibbs (as cited in Creswell, 2014) suggested using external coders to crosscheck the coding process. The intercoder agreement would ensure the codes developed were not biased. Miles and Huberman (as cited in Creswell, 2014) recommend at least an 80% level of intercoder agreement. An

external auditor was enlisted for this study to crosscheck the developed codes. A 90% agreement was reached.

### **Possible limitations to the capstone?**

There were limitations to this capstone. The study participants were only representative of 4-H Agents in Kentucky and can only be generalized to that audience. Another limitation was the small sample size. Even though qualitative studies may employ small sample sizes, it was difficult to generalize beyond the unit of analysis. A third limitation was the specific criterion for study participants. The findings can only be generalized to the 4-H Agents in Kentucky. Outside organizations similar to Kentucky's 4-H program could possibly use the findings in their professional development system.

### **Data Summary**

What follows are the questions asked to each participant in the study. Following the questions are the combined responses. The last part of each section is the analysis of the results.

**4-H Agent Question 1:** Could you please describe or define what the term professional development means to you as a 4-H Agent in Kentucky?

### **Responses**

The participants had varying responses for this question. The responses were grouped into four major terms based on the words used to answer the questions. Education, learning, development, and essential were the terms most often used. Education was used

most often. Some of the participants used the descriptors “continuing, guidance, and intentional” (personal communication, 2016) when describing professional development. Another term was learning. The participants described professional development as learning skills or credentials in order to better themselves and their work (personal communication, 2016). The third term was development. The participants used the words grow, improve, and equip to describe professional development as a process (personal communication, 2016). The fourth term was essential. The participants felt professional development was essential to remain relevant in their positions. One participant said, “Professional development is an opportunity to gain an education and also credentials...I think it’s ongoing and should last your entire career. It should focus on keeping you up-to-date with what’s going on in the world” (personal communication, 2016).

### **Analysis**

The participants realize the importance professional development plays in their roles as 4-H Youth Development Agents. The four major terms used each showed a change over time, after professional development, in skills necessary for the position. The participants realize professional development is continuing and must be intentional. During the interviews two participants said, “This is tough. I never really thought about what professional development is” (personal communications, 2016). This raised the question if the importance is ever expressed to agents, or just the number of hours expected. Along with the importance of professional development, is the definition or expectation of what professional development is discussed during the hiring process? There was no major difference in any response based on demographics of the participants.

**4-H Agent Question 2:** Can you please describe the professional development sessions you have attended in the last two years?

### **Responses**

Some of the participants listed individual sessions they had taken during the past two years and some just gave an overview of the types of professional development. It was noted one participant kept distinguishing his comments by “professional” or “programmatic” professional development (personal communications, 2016). The major categories of professional development included state-supported, associations, advanced degree programs, in-services, and supervisor-initiated. State-supported professional development were those presented or coordinated by state subject-matter specialists. These included the 4-H Series, a three-day conference-style series of sessions held each December; Youth Development Institute (YDI), a year-long experience focusing on positive youth development; Volunteer Administration Academy (VAA), a year-long experience focusing on working with volunteers; Professional Associations, which agents may join on their own, but must pay any membership fees out-of-pocket. There were three major associations mentioned: the Kentucky Association of Extension 4-H Agents, National Association of Extension 4-H Agents, and Epsilon Sigma Phi, a joint-program association. A couple participants are currently working on their doctorates and have focused on their classes as professional development. One made a comment, “Taking classes is professional development” (personal communications, 2016). The individual in-service sessions were placed into one group. The general topics mentioned were urban programming, STEAM, and diversity. One participant did mention his supervisor required the staff in his district to stay after their monthly staff meeting for additional

training. This participant was not pleased. His comments were, “They [Administration] try to infuse professional development into staff meeting and force-feed information to us. But, at the end of the day, most agents are burnt out at that point and don’t want to listen to another hour on something...” (personal communications, 2016).

### **Analysis**

It was noted all nine of the participants attend the 4-H Series because it is mandatory. The VAA and YDI are state-supported, but agents must apply for admittance to these programs. Interesting, agents are encouraged to be members of their respective associations, but they must pay their own membership fees. Two agents were in the process of getting advanced degrees, and they considered college courses as the majority of their professional development the last two years. There was no notice of any negative feelings about the types of professional development described. However, there was a difference in answers based on tenure of agents. The majority of those who had 10+ years of experience only attended the mandatory in-services or professional development associated with their state and national associations. The participants who had less than 10 years mentioned a more diverse set of experiences, outside of the mandatory sessions.

**4-H Agent Question 2a:** Can you please describe the presentation mode(s) of the professional development sessions you have attended in the last two years?

### **Responses**

As a follow-up question, the participants were asked what type(s) of presentation modes the professional development sessions were. All nine answered they had participated in face-to-face sessions. Seven of the participants had participated in at least one web-based

professional development session. One participant has also participated in a community of practice, similar to an online learning community.

### **Analysis**

The overwhelming majority of in-services attended by the participants had been face-to-face, direct instruction. The researcher intentionally did not lead the participants in describing specific types of professional development, in order to gauge what their perception of the concept was. None of the participants mentioned reading peer-reviewed research articles as professional development. None of the participants mentioned viewing educational videos as professional development. There seemed to be a mindset that professional development is only what counts for credit hours.

**4-H Agent Question 3:** What professional development needs do you foresee in the next three to five years?

### **Responses**

The participants gave a variety of responses to the question about the perceived professional development needs for the next three to five years. One participant made a comment that resonated throughout the responses, “I think finding ways to relate our programming to an issue and keeping us part of that network in our community,” is why we need these professional development topics (personal communications, 2016). Five major categories of needs were found. The first was centered on curriculum. The participants want updated information as it applies to the seven core curriculum areas. There were four mentioned specifically: workforce preparation, college/career readiness, citizenship, and STEAM (personal communication, 2016). The next category mentioned were programs. These were 4-H programs in the state not directly related to a curriculum.

The programs mentioned were 4-H summer camp, teens, and urban youth. A third category mentioned were community issues and included the topics of drug misuse and abuse and state and national trends affecting youth. The fourth category was the integration of technology into 4-H programming. The participants realized the need to learn more about integration of technology. One comment made was, “Technology is everywhere. You don’t even have to touch it, you can just look at a device and [speak to it and it will respond]. I think we must be able to use the technology we have available” (personal communications, 2016). The fifth category was not expected, but occurred multiple times during the interviews. Participants want professional development around the issues the new Assistant Director sees as the new direction for the Kentucky 4-H Program.

### **Analysis**

The 4-H Agents seem to know what they would like to have in regard to professional development the next few years. Their professional development needs appear to be issues that arose from the community needs assessments conducted before the new plan of work cycle. They have a desire to prepare themselves to work with the diverse youth in their counties. They want a variety of training ranging from national trends in youth development, to specific curriculum pieces supported by the Kentucky 4-H Program. There was a difference in what the agents with more than 10 years of experience mentioned and what those with less than 10 years mentioned. Those with more tenure wanted professional development which will focus on the issues occurring nationally and locally, independent of curriculum; those with less tenure perceived to need more training on set curriculum for the programs being offered in the Kentucky 4-H Program currently.

The participants are also interested in following the direction the new Assistant Director is going to set for the 4-H program.

**4-H Agent Question 4:** What would be the most effective presentation mode for you as a 4-H Agent?

### **Responses**

The participants had multiple themes for the most effective presentation mode for them. Responses were not separated into groups because they all relate to multi-media presentations. The majority of participants want professional development sessions to be hands-on and the participants engaged. Eight of the nine agents prefer face-to-face sessions, while one prefers online presentations. However, most of the participants mentioned the importance of including technology into their sessions to increase engagement. Two participants mentioned they preferred self-study instead of group sessions. Self-study was defined as independent study, not necessarily as part of a large group (personal communication, 2016).

### **Analysis**

The agents' responses to this question seemed to match the focus of their profession. The 4-H program's focus is for participants "learning by doing" (personal communications, 2016). The work the agents do involves mostly hands-on presentations with project-based tasks. The participants seem to take on the characteristics of the work they do. One participant commented, "We need to get up and move around. When we're sitting, we're just like kids. 4-H Agents work with kids, so we're kinds like the kids" (personal communications, 2016). Despite the comments made by participants concerning the need

for integration of technology into programming, this was missing in their comments about their own preferred mode of professional development. Of course, this relates back to the majority of the participants' attendance of a majority of face-to-face sessions. There was no technology-divide between sexes or tenure of participants. The majority preferred face-to-face over online professional development.

**4-H Agent Question 5:** How would you describe a 21st Century Learning Environment?

**Responses**

The participants gave descriptive words when asked to describe what they thought about a 21st Century Learning Environment. Responses were not grouped, but listed and explained based on the number of times mentioned. The term most mentioned was "hands-on" (personal communication, 2016). Agents felt learners are more involved when there is a hands-on component in the session. The next was engaging. The majority of agents said the presentations must be "engaging" (personal communications, 2016). One agent commented, "The title may have gotten our attention, but the presentation is what keeps us engaged" (personal communications, 2016). The agents also mentioned the sessions must include technology when appropriate. "Technology is everywhere," was mentioned by a participant, and "we need to know how to integrate it" (personal communications, 2016). Blended learning was also mentioned as a response. The agent suggested professional development have a self-study part that occurs before the session, then the face-to-face part include explanation, discussion, and application. A last comment was the integration of college and career options into each session.

**Analysis**

Again, the 4-H Agents described the 21st Century Learning Environment in the same way they do their jobs, by following the 4-H practice of learning by doing. The agents felt the environment must include a multitude of resources and teaching tools. Even though the term hands-on (face-to-face) was mentioned, the integration of technology was listed as important as well. However, technology in this case seemed to be whatever the youth have at the time. It was noted that one of the agents who is in the process of attaining an advanced degree mentioned wanted to explore blended learning more. Currently, most professional development occurs with explanation, discussion, and application all during the same session. Again, there was no technology-divide between sexes or tenure of participants.

**4-H Agent Question 6 and 6a:** What was the most meaningful professional development session you participated in the last two years, and what made it the most meaningful?

**Responses**

The types of professional development mentioned during this question were compiled and grouped in three categories: multi-session, single-session, and external. Participants mentioned two multi-session professional development options, the Volunteer Administration Academy and the Youth Development Institute. Both of these sessions occur over a 12-month period and have multiple sessions required for participants. The reasons given for the VAA were it was “challenging”, “built confidence”, “included multi-generations”, and built “rapport” (personal communications, 2016). The reasons given for the YDI were that it “offered a variety of experiences”, “included peer

discussion”, was “advanced”, and the capstone was “tough and challenging” (personal communications, 2016). The next category was single-session and included Outdoor Health (OH), National Youth Science Day (NYSD), and Camp Updates. The reasons given for OH were that it was “interdisciplinary”, “structured yet flexible”, and “relevant” (personal communications, 2016). The reasons given for NYSD were that it was “hands-on”, “relevant”, and “adaptable to county-use” (personal communications, 2016). The next single-session mentioned was the Camp Updates. 4-H Camping is a mainstay in Kentucky 4-H. Reasons given were that the sessions included “smaller groups” and “two-way communication” (personal communications, 2016). The third category mentioned was external professional development. This included a session not developed by subject matter specialists in Kentucky 4-H, Common Measures. The reasons given for CM were that it was “interesting”, “necessary”, and “engaging” (personal communications, 2016).

### **Analysis**

The sessions listed in this question were all (mostly) face-to-face. None of the sessions was totally online. There was no mention of self-study. The sessions included some aspect of hands-on education and discussion. There was an impression the information covered in the sessions were able to be adapted to each county’s need. The majority of agents who mentioned the multi-session opportunities had tenure of more than 10 years. The majority of those mentioning single-session had tenure of less than 10 years.

**4-H Agent Question 7:** If you could suggest ways to make the current professional development system stronger, what would they be?

### **Responses**

The suggestions were listed individually, since they are individual in nature. Some suggestions were mentioned more than once and are noted by an asterisk (\*) if they were mentioned at least three times.

- 1) Explain what the professional development expectations are for 4-H Agents. \*
- 2) There seems to be a thought that sessions cannot be added throughout the program year. Why is this? Why can't the process include an option to add sessions throughout the year if the issue arises in a county? \*
- 3) Administration does not seem to understand the professional development needs of 4-H Agents. However, they evaluate 4-H Agents on the sessions completed. How can Admin come to realize the needs of county-based 4-H Agents?
- 4) There needs to be more diverse offerings than programmatic. Agents need personal development as well. This would show 4-H Agents they are supported.
- 5) 4-H Series needs to be restructured. Could mandatory sessions be held on the second day, so Agents would not need to attend the first or third unless necessary?
- 6) New Agents need to be mentored about the importance of professional development.
- 7) The Resource Guide needs re-worked. It is confusing and not easy to work. \*

8) Not all the 4-H Specialists appear to be involved in professional development. Is there a reason for that? (personal communications, 2016).

### **Analysis**

The participants did not hesitate during this session. Everyone had at least one suggestion to improve the current system. None of the participants stated the system is broken, but just needs revising. Most of the suggestions deal with communication issues. The communication issues are between county to state, agent to state, and state to agent. Multiple agents mentioned the online Resource Guide for Agents. This web-based resource houses all the resources specifically targeted toward 4-H Agents. The Resource Guide is maintained at the state level. Another interesting comment made multiple times arose about the process for determining professional development topics. Currently, the topics are submitted and decided six-eight months prior to the new program year. The participants mentioning this wanted to know why sessions could not be added throughout the program year, if the need arose. The third suggestion made most often was for the expectations of professional development to be explained by the Program Leader and District Directors to 4-H Agents. There seems to be a mindset that there is no consistency about what constitutes professional development and its importance when it comes to those evaluating 4-H Agents.

### **Overall Analysis**

Overall, the answers were straightforward and easy to understand. There were no major differences in comments given based on sex of participants, so females and males

were not skewed in their responses. There were also no major differences based on race. There were two races represented in the study, white and black (terms used by participants). The entire state was represented in the study as well, having participants from all three regions (east, central, and west). No major differences in responses were found based on region.

### **Recommendations**

A Comprehensive Needs Assessment must include multiple levels. In this study the recommendations are for the State and County level employees. State level employees include the Assistant Director for 4-H and the Subject Matter Specialists. The County-level employees include 4-H Agents.

#### **For State**

- 1) Create a consistent definition of what professional development means, and the different, acceptable types of professional development (for-credit and not-for-credit).
- 2) Develop a Guiding Document explaining the importance of professional development for 4-H Agents.
- 3) Develop a Guiding Document explaining the relationship of professional development to evaluation of 4-H Agents.
- 4) Develop professional development sessions that are hands-on, engaging, and follow the 4-H practice of learning by doing.
- 5) Develop professional development sessions that integrate technology.
- 6) Develop professional development sessions that allow for self-study. For example, a journal review of an appropriate topic.

- 7) Develop professional development sessions that include a variety of presentation methods, i.e. web-based, face-to-face, blended, or flipped classrooms.
- 8) Develop varying levels of professional development sessions, including basic and advanced.
- 9) Allow professional development sessions to be added during the program year as issues arise.
- 10) Explore different forms of online professional development, i.e. single-session, multi-session, tweet-up, Communities of Practice.

**For County**

- 1) Keep in contact with direct supervisors about professional development expectations.
- 2) As new 4-H Agents, discuss professional development plans with mentors.
- 3) 4-H Agents choose the professional development sessions that interests them.
- 4) 4-H Agents choose the professional development sessions to meet the needs of the county program.
- 5) Explore different presentation modes of professional development, i.e. web-based, face-to-face, self-study.
- 6) 4-H Agents become local experts based on professional development.

**Reflections on Leadership Experience**

The committee asked why this study was an educational leadership project. Fullan (2016) suggested educators exhibit six competencies that make them seen as educational leaders by promoting success by

- Facilitating a vision of learning;
- Advocating a culture of learning;
- Ensuring the management of effective learning environments;
- Responding to diverse community needs;
- Acting with integrity; and
- Understanding and influencing the larger cultural context. (pp. 251-252)

The study embodies the characteristics mentioned by Fullan (2016) by creating a vision for learning by looking at the current professional development system through the experiences of the 4-H Agents and recommending possible ways of strengthening the system. The study advocates a culture of learning by presenting the perceived educational needs of 4-H Agents to the 4-H Program Leader in a non-threatening way. The recommendations will assist in ensuring the management of effective learning environments by providing a diverse array of professional development opportunities. Professional development sessions will respond to community needs and will integrate multiple forms of educational technologies. During the study, the research protocol was followed and the study was conducted with the highest level of integrity. Finally, following the characteristics of a comprehensive needs assessment, the study must address professional development on multiple levels. This study addresses the professional development needs of county-based 4-H Agents and will be presented to the subject-matter specialists at the state level who create professional development sessions.

There was no distress during the interview sessions. Agents were open and honest. Agents seemed comfortable answering the questions and had no problems stopping the interview when clarification was needed. There was little negativity during the interviews. The desire of the agents to continue to develop professionally in order to do their work was appreciated. They seemed to love their work and the communities they work. Leadership occurs on different levels. The 4-H Agents work to be educational leaders in their communities. The state-level subject matter specialists work to be educational leaders at the state level, in order to provide support for the county-based 4-H Agents. The 4-H Program Leader oversees the entire 4-H Program in Kentucky, and therefore wants the most competent and well-trained 4-H Agents possible. This study allows all three levels to be enhanced. The motto of the 4-H Program is “To Make the Best Better”, and continuous professional development will make that happen.

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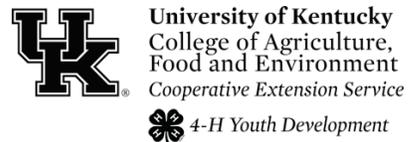
Appendix A

Making the Best Better:

Assessing the Professional Development Needs of Kentucky 4-H Agents

A Comprehensive Needs Assessment

Summary



Making the Best Better:  
Assessing the Professional Development Needs of Kentucky 4-H Agents

## **Executive Summary**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to assess the professional development needs of University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension 4-H Youth Development Agents. The central research question was “What are the professional development needs of Kentucky Extension 4-H Agents?” There were two focus areas for this study. The first was to assess what Kentucky 4-H Agents have been receiving in professional development, how they react after attending these professional development sessions, and if the current structure of primarily traditional in-person professional development sessions were meeting their professional development needs (McCawley, 2009). The second was to assess what mode of professional development sessions would best meet the needs of Kentucky Extension 4-H Agents and be most effective, engaging, and accessible (McCawley, 2009).

### **Findings**

The participants realize the importance professional development plays in their roles as 4-H Youth Development Agents. There is also an understanding that professional development is continuing and must be intentional. The major categories of professional development mentioned by participants included state-supported, associations, advanced degree programs, in-services, and supervisor-initiated. State-supported professional development were those presented or coordinated by state subject-matter specialists. These included the 4-H Series, a three-day conference-style series of sessions held each December; Youth Development Institute, a year-long experience focusing on positive youth development; Volunteer Administration Academy, a year-long experience focusing on working with volunteers; Professional Associations, which agents

may join on their own, but must pay any membership fees out-of-pocket. There were three major associations mentioned: the Kentucky Association of Extension 4-H Agents, National Association of Extension 4-H Agents, and Epsilon Sigma Phi, a joint-program association. A couple participants are currently working on their doctorates and have focused on their classes as professional development.

The overwhelming majority of in-services attended by the participants had been face-to-face, direct instruction. None of the participants mentioned reading peer-reviewed research articles as professional development. None of the participants mentioned viewing educational videos as professional development. There seemed to be a mindset that professional development is only what counts for credit hours. When asked what specific professional development they perceived in the next five years, five major categories were found. The first was curriculum. The participants want updated information as it applies to the seven core curriculum areas. There were four mentioned specifically: workforce preparation, college/career readiness, citizenship, and STEAM (personal communication, 2016). The next category mentioned was programs. These were 4-H programs in the state not directly related to a curriculum. The programs mentioned were 4-H summer camp, teens, and urban youth. A third category mentioned was community issues and included the topics of drug misuse and abuse and state and national trends affecting youth. The fourth category was the integration of technology into 4-H programming. The fifth category was not expected, but occurred multiple times during the interviews. Participants want professional development around the issues the new Assistant Director sees as the new direction for the Kentucky 4-H Program.

The types of professional development mentioned as having the most meaning to participants were grouped into three categories: multi-session, single-session, and external. Participants mentioned two multi-session professional development options, the Volunteer Administration Academy and the Youth Development Institute. Both of these sessions occur over a 12-month period and have multiple sessions required for participants. The reasons given for the VAA were it was “challenging”, “built confidence”, “included multi-generations”, and built “rapport” (personal communications, 2016). The reasons given for the YDI were that it “offered a variety of experiences”, “included peer discussion”, was “advanced”, and the capstone was “tough and challenging” (personal communications, 2016). The next category was single-session and included Outdoor Health, National Youth Science Day, and Camp Updates. The reasons given for OH were that it was “interdisciplinary”, “structured yet flexible”, and “relevant” (personal communications, 2016). The reasons given for NYSC were that it was “hands-on”, “relevant”, and “adaptable to county-use” (personal communications, 2016). The next single-session mentioned was the Camp Updates. 4-H Camping is a mainstay in Kentucky 4-H. Reasons given were that the sessions included “smaller groups” and “two-way communication” (personal communications, 2016). The third category mentioned was external professional development. This included a session not developed by subject matter specialists in Kentucky 4-H, Common Measures. The reasons given for CM were that it was “interesting”, “necessary”, and “engaging” (personal communications, 2016).

**Recommendations**

A Comprehensive Needs Assessment must include multiple levels. In this study, the recommendations are for the State and County level employees. State level employees include the Assistant Director for 4-H and the Subject Matter Specialists. The County-level employees include 4-H Agents.

**For State-Level Personnel**

- 1) Create a consistent definition of what professional development means, and the different, acceptable types of professional development (for-credit and not-for-credit).
- 2) Develop professional development sessions that include a variety of presentation methods, i.e. web-based, face-to-face, blended, or flipped classrooms.
- 3) Explore different forms of online professional development, i.e. single-session, multi-session, tweet-up, Communities of Practice.
- 4) Develop a Guiding Document explaining the importance of professional development for 4-H Agents.
- 5) Develop a Guiding Document explaining the relationship of professional development to evaluation of 4-H Agents.
- 6) Develop professional development sessions that are hands-on, engaging, and follow the 4-H practice of learning by doing.
- 7) Develop professional development sessions that integrate technology.
- 8) Develop professional development sessions which allow for self-study. For example, a journal review of an appropriate topic.

- 9) Develop varying levels of professional development sessions, including basic and advanced.
- 10) Allow professional development sessions to be added during the program year as issues arise.

**For Extension 4-H Agents**

- 1) Keep in contact with direct supervisors about professional development expectations.
- 2) Explore different presentation modes of professional development, i.e. web-based, face-to-face, self-study.
- 3) As new Agents, discuss professional development plans with mentors.
- 4) Agents choose the professional development sessions that interests them.
- 5) Agents choose the professional development sessions to meet the needs of the county program.
- 6) Agents become local experts based on professional development.

Appendix B.

Stamper Capstone Interview Protocol Sheet

Making the Best Better: 4-H Agent Professional Development Online

Interview Protocol Sheet

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Region of the Agent:

Sex:

Race/Ethnicity:

Tenure as an Agent:

Description of the Site:

Making the Best Better:

4-H Agent Professional Development Online



5) Based on your experiences, or lack of experiences with online professional development, is there a need for a structured online professional development system for Kentucky 4-H Agents?

6) Are there other comments or ideas you would like to add concerning professional development of Kentucky 4-H Agents?

Example of Professional Development Transcript

KERS In-Service Training Transcript

University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension

2016 In-Service Training Transcript for Stamper, Charles E

TRAINING ID	TRAINING DATE(S)	HOURS	TITLE	ATTENDANCE
10003390	12/6/2016	2	Opening Session/Annual Camp Update for All Agents Attending Camp in 2017	Attendance Confirmed
10003395	12/6/2016	2	Work It Out! Exploring Career Readiness in Kentucky 4-H (4-H Core: FCS—Workforce Prep)	Attendance Confirmed
10003396	12/7/2016	2	Work It Out! Exploring Career Readiness in Kentucky 4-H (4-H Core: FCS—Workforce Prep)	Attendance Confirmed
10003406	12/7/2016	3	You Are Needed! Exploring Citizenship in KY 4-H (4-H Core: Leadership)	Attendance Confirmed
10003409	12/7/2016	1	Midway Session/Addressing the Needs of LGBTQ Youth in 4-H (Youth Development)	Attendance Confirmed
10003416	12/8/2016	3	FRED: Fathers (Or Families) Reading Every Day" (4-H Core: FCS—Family Life)	Attendance Confirmed
10003418	12/8/2016	1	Closing Session with Dr. Mark Mains	Attendance Confirmed
Total Hours Earned:		14		

Stamper KERS In-Service Training Transcript.html[1/23/2017 2:28:52 AM]

## Agent Interview Transcripts

**Transcript for Agent 1.**

C: Alright. Good morning, XXXX. How are you? (Clears throat)

D: Good morning, Mr. Stamper. How are you?

C: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. The reasons I asked you were: you meet the parameters of the study. I asked for 4-H Agents who had worked a minimum of three years, were currently working as a county-based 4-H Agent, and were in good standing in the position.

You are also aware that I am completing this study as part of my doctorate and this is my capstone research study. The other reason I am conducting this study is because we have a new director of Kentucky, as you know, Dr. Mark Mains. Dr. Mains is interested in finding out what Agents feel about our current professional development system. The findings will be presented to him when it is complete.

I am conducting the study, and I will be the only person seeing the video interview. I will be following the protocol you see in the Consent form you were sent prior to today. Any identifying information will be removed.

Have you had the opportunity to review the consent form I provided?

D: Alright. Okay. I will print off the form and sign/date it. I will scan it in and send it back to you as a document.

C: Thanks, XXXX. Now we will move into to the protocol questions.

C: I know this answer, but how many years have you been a 4-H Agent?

D: 25. (chuckles)

C: 25 years, and one month...almost.

C: What race/ethnicity would you assign yourself?

D: White.

C: And gender?

D: Female.

C: And you are currently an Agent in what county?

D: XXXX County.

C: And you have been there for how long?

D: Twenty years. I moved to XXXX County from XXXX County. I was a 4-H Agent there for five years.

C: Thanks.

C: Okay. Next question. Please explain what the term Professional Development means to you as a 4-H Agent in Kentucky.

D: I feel it is a term that relates to continuing education. It can help me as a professional and a 4-H Youth Development Agent. I feel it is essential, obviously, to keep up with the trends and latest issues arising related to the youth in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. And those can vary across the counties of the state, based on geographical areas that we live in and the needs of our communities. I take the term to mean ways for me to grow as

a professional and continue my development in order to provide educational programming to the people in XXXX County.

C: Okay. Great.

D: Is that good enough? (☺)

C: Yes. Plus, when we are finished with the questions, I will give you the opportunity to go back and give any updated answers you might have.

C: The next question goes forward based on your first answers about professional development and becoming a more educated Agent. Think about the last two years. Can you please describe some of the professional development sessions you have attended?

D: Yeah... (Laughs) I'll try. In fact, I was looking that up because I cannot always remember like I should. Uh, since 2014... (lost power source)...I guess that includes our Series In-services we have each year. In December, as part of our professional development. Our ESP State Meeting, which is held every spring, and also the National ESP meeting. I didn't go this year, but did last year. I attended the National 4-H Agents meeting, not this year, but in 2015. I attended both State Association meetings the last two years. Actually we hosted the meeting this year. And, then the Youth Development Institute that I was a member of the last year. And then there were some additional in-services I attended, but I would have to go back and review them. I can't recall them right now. (Seems overloaded in tone)

C: So, do you feel like you were overloaded with in-services? Overall, do you feel the in-services have helped you?

D: Yes. Definitely. Looking back, the top two that stick out in my mind were the ESP meeting we had here last spring. We had a lady come in and present. She was amazing. And I guess the YDI. It stands out. What was it...thirty-some hours? It lasted over a year and was intense.

C: Fifty-five hours.

D: How many?

C: Fifty-five.

D: Well, that was a bit overwhelming. Not the sessions, but the time out of the office. It was what was going on in my life during the time that added to the stress. You know the challenges I have had with my husband (health) the last 18 months.

C: So, were all those in-services face-to-face, Dana? Or were some over the web? Or online? What was the method?

D: Most of them...I would say 90% of them were face-to-face. I did a couple of ESP sessions online. They were about an hour or so each. I think we had a 4-H Camp session online for about an hour, but most have been face-to-face.

C: So, let's move on to the next question. Looking at the training, or professional development you have already attended, and seeing you are in the midst of the first year of the new plan of work...In XXXX County, what professional development do you see yourself needing in the next 3-5 years.

D: Hmm...I think training around this whole drug epidemic situation is important. It just isn't a rural issue anymore. I think finding ways to relate our programming to that issue

and keeping us as part of that network in our community...to educate youth on finding alternatives to using drugs and alcohol. I think that is a big one. At least here in our community. I am now, starting back in September, doing 4-H with third grades. That is a new thing for me. I am doing The Leader In Me. I think I had mentioned that to you at Series. I am having to create lessons from that material for a younger audience. That has been a learning curve for me. In addition to this new program, I am also doing Health Rocks now. It is a great program. I don't think it was intended to hit 250 kids at one time, and that is what I'm doing. So, I am having to adjust those lessons as well. These are being requested by the schools here in XXXX County, because they see the Cooperative Extension Service as a collaborator offering research-based information. I think staying abreast of those topics are important. I think a program that I have not paid as much attention to in the last two years is my teen program. I would like to grow that program. I know there has to be a model program out there that would engage these teens. Some model of an engaging teen program. And I don't just think that is for XXXX County, but all of Kentucky. It really is a struggle to keep teens involved. I have focused a lot on community service in the previous years. I think we are losing kids between fifth grade and high school. We're missing them. There are so many other opportunities for them out there. Yep, those are the areas I perceive I will need training on.

C: Great. Thanks.

D: Sure.

C: So, thinking about the training you have received and the training you perceive you will need, what would be the most effective mode of presentation? Or multiple modes?

D: For me there is a main one. I am a hands-on learner. I can't just sit and read something...I can, but I don't enjoy that...and I don't want to go and be read to, I want some engagement. A lot of time we get these curriculum pieces and guides, and like the Health Rocks curriculum, it has the lessons made out for you, but you still may have to adapt them. No offense, but sometimes administration and specialists are so disconnected at times they don't really know what we need. They will say, "Well, this is what you need."

Well, they don't know. You don't know what is needed until you've been here.

I'm a hands-on person. I didn't mention this, but we have a district retreat each year. And I get so much out of sitting around with other Agents and discussing what programs they are doing. It beats sitting in an in-service and listening about theory and ages & stages. You know, once you have learned about ages & stages let's move on. We know what that is. Theory is great, but do you think my third graders are gonna worry about theory? No. They want lessons that I can go in and teach. I feel that sometimes that can be a hang-up.

C: Okay. Let's keep going. With 25 years of experience as a 4-H Agent and have seen the many changes in education over the years, how would you describe a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Environment?

D: Well, obviously it has to be engaging. Look around. Technology is everywhere. You don't even have to touch it. You can just look at Siri and say "Hey, Siri". I think we must be able to use the technology we have available. But, then I think about 4-H Camp, one of the most successful programs we have. Why? Because there is no technology. And that

is not a bad thing. It gets us back to the basics. I don't think we need to lose sight of that. I think we must have a balance. We must have a multi-faceted environment.

C: So, do you think there is a difference in the needs of youth and adults in a learning environment?

D: Yes, I do. Some adults are not tech-savvy. Some are. Some parents try to stay abreast of technology so they will know what their kids are doing.

C: I agree. So, let's go on to the next question. What has been the most meaningful professional development you have attended in the last two years, and what made it the most meaningful to you?

D: (Pause) Well, I think YDI was pretty meaningful just because we got such a wide variety of topics that covered professional development and how we can incorporate different avenues into our teaching or what we need to look for...Or dealing with clientele we are not used to dealing with personally or professionally. And learning from my peers about programming has been pretty meaningful. Just like Joyce Doyle. She gave everybody a little flashlight and incorporated it into her lesson. There are lots of ways we can incorporate what we learned over the last year.

C: Great. So, at this point I would like to give you the opportunity to go back and give additional thoughts to any question we have discussed so far.

D: (Pause) I'm thinking.

C: No hurry. Take your time.

D: No. There isn't anything I would add right now. Maybe later, but not now.

C: Well, that is fine. Please feel free to contact me if you have additional thoughts you would like to share. So, the last question I would like to ask is this: Do you have any suggestions how our current professional development could be improved in the future?

D: I would tell new 4-H Agents not to go too fast. We go from teaching five-year-olds to high school students all in one day. I'm not a master at teaching. I know enough to be dangerous. New Agents get overwhelmed at the job because they see it as Mt. Everest. And the expectations for Agents professionally are so different. Each District Director has their own expectation for 4-H Agents. That can be confusing for Agents to decide what professional development to take. You can't compare apples to oranges, so how can we have a fair evaluation system, which we are evaluated on professional development, when there is no consistency. Does that answer your question?

C: Absolutely. So, now let me explain the next steps of the study. I will take the recording of our discussion and transcribe what was said into text. Then when I have completed each interview, I will conduct a thematic analysis of the interviews. I will then write up the analysis. If, for some reason I cannot understand a comment I have transcribed, I will contact you for clarification. Is that okay?

D: Yep. Call me or email me.

C: Okay. Well, that concludes our interview. Please go ahead and sign the consent form and send it to me as soon as possible.

D: I'll do it right now.

C: Thanks.

\*Interview ends at this point. Forty minutes long.

**Transcript for Agent 2.**

C: Good afternoon, XXXX!

C: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. The reasons I asked you were: you meet the parameters of the study. I asked for 4-H Agents who had worked a minimum of three years, were currently working as a county-based 4-H Agent, and were in good standing in the position.

You are also aware that I am completing this study as part of my doctorate and this is my capstone research study. The other reason I am conducting this study is because we have a new director of Kentucky, as you know, Dr. Mark Mains. Dr. Mains is interested in finding out what Agents feel about our current professional development system. The findings will be presented to him when it is complete.

I am conducting the study, and I will be the only person seeing the video interview. I will be following the protocol you see in the Consent form you were sent prior to today. Any identifying information will be removed.

Have you had the opportunity to review the consent form I provided?

D: Yes.

C: Okay. First I need to ask you some demographic questions.

D: Okay.

C: What sex or gender do you assign yourself?

D: Male.

C: And what race/ethnicity do you assign yourself?

D: White.

C: And how long have you been a 4-H Agent?

D: Nine years. Nine years as of last week.

C: Great. So 7.5 years in XXXX County and how long in XXXX?

D: 1.5

C: Wow. It doesn't seem that long.

D: No, it doesn't!

C: Well, Let's go ahead and get started with the first question. Based on your experience as 4-H Agent, how would you describe or define professional development?

D: Well, it's...it's...it's difficult to put one definition out for professional development. What I think is that it is any type of formal or informal setting to help me personally or professionally. It just needs to help my programming. That means I do not necessarily think it has to be an in-service. Maybe it is a program I do not have in my county, but am interested in, so I will go observe another county. It's not just attending national meetings, state meetings, or in-services. Professional development can be anything experiential learning about programming.

C: Alright. Let's piggy-back on your definition of professional development. What professional development have you been to, with a 4-H focus, over the past two years?

D: As far as the types...hmm...I just lost my train of thought...sorry. There are in-services of course, throughout the year. Not just at the Series. But, I consider talking with my colleagues about the programs they're doing, and the ones that works and the ones

that didn't. Also, some of the things I have done on my own. In addition to in-services and state and national meetings. I have just completed a post-graduate certificate in non-profit administration. So, I learned a lot from that, that I can use in my daily tasks. If I don't keep myself engaged inside and outside of work, then I could lose my touch and get burned out even easier.

C: So, are you a member of your state associations?

D: Well, that's an interesting situation. I attend the national and state meetings as a non-member. It's either do that, or scrape to pay my daughter's daycare bill for a month.

C: Absolutely. I understand that. So, thinking about the professional development you have attended in the past two years, and the new plan of work that you have just implemented. What professional development do you foresee needing in the next 3-5 years?

D: I'm going to take this question in a few different ways. I think, as for my programs and my plan of work, there are some new things that I am looking forward to. For instance, the workforce prep work that we are doing, revising it to meet today's needs. That and career exploration. Those are big pushes right now in this county by all the schools. And the college-readiness topics. The FAFSA training you did was exactly what we needed, and I'll need to take that one again! I'm looking forward to the new citizenship curriculum as well. We have needed that for a while. I don't want to be lectured to, I want to have experiential learning. We get lectured to enough. We need more hands-on sessions. I'm interested in seeing that aspect. To be honest, I've been

burned out for the last 6-months in my career. I am interested in hearing about Dr. Mains' 100-day plan.

C: Well, I'm sorry to hear that you have that feeling. Maybe this interview will help you take the next step to getting out of that feeling!

C: The next question carries on with the last. Thinking of the professional development you have attended the last year, what presentation mode has been the most effective for you?

D: I did look back at what I had attended. I think we need to go toward more self-guidance. Maybe talking with us for a few minutes with new material, then giving us a few minutes to think, or meditate about it, then discuss it. Sometimes it is disheartening when things are beat down and the same things covered over and over. I would suggest self-directed learning is what we need. I want them to trust me as a professional.

C: So, you're thinking along the lines of blended learning?

D: Absolutely. I couldn't remember the term. That is exactly it. Or maybe a flipped-classroom model for some professional development.

C: So, thinking about your preferred presentation mode, how would you describe the 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning environment?

D: So, are you asking me what I am seeing now as opposed to what I would like to see?

C: Yes. Both.

D: Okay. I see a good trend right now in the way of blended learning. I like that. Because it fits in with my clubs, my after-school clubs, my community clubs. Or even school-

enrichment. So, if more kids become aware of what we offer. I think if we look at interdisciplinary work that is where we need to go. As a learning environment across the state, we need to work on how to integrate programs. But, those of us in urban settings need different materials. We are also working more with Private Schools, Home-Schools, or Latin Schools. You see more interdisciplinary work. We have to change to remain relevant. Project based learning helps kids learn on their own, instead of me saying it and then them regurgitating it back to me.

C: Okay, let's go on to the next question. I have broken this one down into two parts. The first part is, What has been the most meaningful professional development for you in the past two years, and the second part is, What made it the most meaningful to you?

D: Okay. Sure. Is it okay for me to use names, of the presenters?

C: Yes. That is fine.

D: Well, we had a training right before I transferred. Jennifer [Tackett] had one at Pennyrile Forest that was health-related, but was also outdoor-related. We had a backpack excursion. It wasn't anything big, we just went around some of the local trails in the Forest. It was a really interdisciplinary. We hit several different aspects, or core areas. I like structure but this was flexible. If we saw something on the trail, we would stop and ask and the trail guide, a forester who went with us, would answer the questions. Then she [Jennifer] would ask us how we could integrate what we learned into our programs, and we had excellent group discussions. I thought that open-ended discussion was great. I also think another one is the National Youth Science Day training done by Torey [Earle].

He took the information given to him by National 4-H and made it relevant to what we were offering here in Kentucky. He made it more inclusive. I think it is very beneficial.

C: Okay. Let's look at the questions we have already covered. Are there any other comments you would like to add before we go on? I want to make sure I give you the chance to add all your thoughts.

D: I think one of the things we are seeing now with new agents are mentors telling agents to go visit other programs, but that it is alright for their programs to not look just like the programs you observed. Especially in core training. Have them participate in hands-on learning. They also need to walk through the simple things we do in the office.

C: Okay. The last question is broken down into two parts. The first part is this: If you were given the opportunity to offer suggestions on how to strengthen the current professional development system, what would you say?

D: Umm... in addition to our core areas, I think we need to offer a more diverse set of training. We have a lot of agents who are burned out right now and don't want to have any more professional development. I don't think some of our administrators, not all of them, do not understand what happens at the county level. We need training in topics like stress management, time management, work-home balance. I would benefit from that. That would help us so much in retention. We need to look beyond programs and be more flexible.

C: The next part of that question is, what suggestions you would give new agents about professional development?

D: That you aren't going to be able to defeat Rome in one day. You're not going to be able to take over the world. This is a process. Take advantages of you opportunities. Take in-services, read journals, visit other programs. Just don't think you can do it all in one day. Or you will be burned out fast.

C: Well, XXXX. I want to thank you again for participating.

C: So, now let me explain the next steps of the study. I will take the recording of our discussion and transcribe what was said into text. Then when I have completed each interview, I will conduct a thematic analysis of the interviews. I will then write up the analysis. If, for some reason I cannot understand a comment I have transcribed, I will contact you for clarification. Is that okay?

D: Yep. Call me or email me.

C: Okay. Well, that concludes our interview. Please go ahead and sign the consent form and send it to me as soon as possible.

\*Interview lasted 45 minutes.

**Transcript for Agent 3.**

(Horrible Audio) (Lots of feedback on computer)

C: Good morning, XXXX.

E: Good morning. I'm sorry I had to reschedule.

C: No. That is fine. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. The reasons I asked you were: you meet the parameters of the study. I asked for 4-H Agents who had worked a minimum of three years, were currently working as a county-based 4-H Agent, and were in good standing in the position.

You are also aware that I am completing this study as part of my doctorate and this is my capstone research study. The other reason I am conducting this study is because we have a new director of Kentucky, as you know, Dr. Mark Mains. Dr. Mains is interested in finding out what Agents feel about our current professional development system. The findings will be presented to him when it is complete.

I am conducting the study, and I will be the only person seeing the video interview. I will be following the protocol you see in the Consent form you were sent prior to today. Any identifying information will be removed.

Have you had the opportunity to review the consent form I provided?

C: Okay. I'm excited to hear your thoughts. Let's get started. First off, how long have you been a 4-H Agent?

E: Uh... Ten years and three months.

C: Okay. Have you spent all ten years in XXXX County?

E: Yes.

C: And what race/ethnicity would you describe yourself as?

E: Caucasian. White.

C: And what sex/gender would you assign yourself?

E: Male.

C: Okay. Let's get started with our questions. (Insert text about qualifications for taking part in the study)

E: Yes. I understand. I was looking forward to this.

C: Great. Our first question is: How would you describe or explain what the term professional development means to you as a Kentucky 4-H Agent?

E: Well, the first thing that pops into my head is the professional development association that I am a member of. KAE4-HA. That would be the first thing that pops into my head when I think of professional development. Uh...I guess it's because that is where I have most of my intentional professional development. A lot of the other has been picked up on the job, but the association is where I have gotten the most as I intentionally try to develop myself.

C: Awesome. So, how would you define professional development beyond the association?

E: Uh...That's a tough question. I'm not sure I know exactly how to define it. It's kind of like, "You know it when you see it, or experience it, but it's hard to put exactly what it is on paper."

C: Think of it in your words. I'm looking for Elijah's definition. Not one you may have learned.

E: Okay. It has to be intentional. And you have to be actively involved. You have to have the goal of developing yourself professionally. Chuck, this is a tough question. I've never really thought about what professional development is defined as. To me it means networking...having a support system...maybe not knowing the answer, but knowing where I can go find the answers that I need to know. That's part of professional development. That's about it, really.

C: At the end of the interview, I will give you the opportunity to go back and give me any additional thoughts you might have for the questions.

E: Okay. Good.

C: I like the term you used, intentional. Going on with that thought, can you describe the different professional development sessions you have attended the last two years?

E: Uh, I've attended the Series of in-series, I consider that professional development. I've also attended the NAE4-HA meeting, and the State Association meetings. Other than those, I've really only attended a few other in-services over the past two years. That's been the most of my professional development. Actually, that's been the pattern over my career.

C: Were most of those face-to-face, online, or blended?

E: Just about all of them were face-to-face. I have been involved in some online training sessions. I also, I should have said this before, have been involved in learning circles, wait that's not what we call them...

C: Professional learning communities?

E: Communities of Practice. Yes, I am involved in the Youth Development Research CoP. I probably sat in on three of those meetings this past year. We really have had some good discussions online, but they are a little above my head sometime. But, I enjoy taking part in them to learn more about youth development. I have also been involved in committees. And I've got a lot out of that. Just by being a part of the group has helped me learn a lot about scholarly research.

C: Thinking about the professional development sessions you have attended, and considering you are now in the first year of the new four-year plan of work, what professional development topics or issues do you feel you will need in the next 3-5 years?

E: Hmm...that's another tough question. I'll be honest. I'll look through the in-service catalogue and see some in-services that apply to me, but a lot of it I'm just not interested in or I've already been through it. Hmm.. I don't know where I need professional development. I'm also in school right now (working on Ph.D.) and I consider coursework professional development.

C: So, how far are you away from completing your doctorate?

E: Well, I'm still in the draft portion of my writing. I'm getting close.

C: Great! (Audio Trouble) I can't wait to see your study. Considering the professional development sessions you have attended, what has been the most effective presentation mode?

E: I like online for some topics, but I also see the value of face-to-face. Not all the time because of the presentation, but because of the side conversations during the sessions or after the sessions. Both modes have value, but it depends on the topic being discussed.

C: So, let's go a little further. How would you define the most effective learning environment in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? (Audio Trouble).

E: I think we need to incorporate as many different forms of technology as possible. But I also believe face-to-face is important. We deal with so many people, kids and adults, every day. We have to know how to communicate in that way. Plus, our programs are based on hands-on-learning. We can't be afraid of trying new ways of presenting our information. I really like the CoPs. I think we could do more with those.

C: Okay, the next question is: what has been the most meaningful professional development session you have attended the past two years, and I'd like for you to follow up and explain why it was the most meaningful?

E: Uhh...I guess the best workshop I went to was at the National meeting. The workshop was on implementing common measures. I don't think our state has gone very far with that. But I got a lot out of that. Just listening to why they were doing it, problems with measurement. It was beneficial to me because I was interested in it. It may not have been very beneficial, but I enjoyed learning about it. I love learning about what other states are doing and bring that information back to Kentucky.

C: Great. Now, take a look at the questions again. Are there other comments or thoughts you would like to add now?

E: Yes, I want to clear up a comment I made. I think college courses are professional development. I look back at the classes I've taken at Western and it meant more to me when I could apply the information to my job. So, I think professional development is best when you can apply what you learn to what you're doing on the job.

C: Great. The next question is broken into two parts. How would you make our current system more effective? And what suggestions would you give new Agents about professional development?

E: Uhh...The only thing I would think needs changed is the process of how in-services get placed into the catalogue. And I know some Agents don't think the professional development sessions don't count for anything. Especially in the evaluation process. I don't think the system is broken and needs fixed, I just think the process needs to be reviewed and make it relevant to our positions.

C: What comments about professional development would you give new agents?

E: My first comment would be for them to get involved in their professional development association. I will tell you, if it wasn't for the association, I don't think I would still be here. My county is very remote. I don't have a lot of peers my age that are around me. If I didn't have that support stem, I'm not sure I would be here. It made me get out and get to know people. Whether it's going to Issues Conference or Teen Conference, it makes it easier if you know the people you are going to be there with. I think that is very

important. I've been to meetings before and I've not known anyone and it made the meeting horrible and seem like it went on forever. Does that make sense?

C: Absolutely. Elijah, thanks for being part of the study. So, now let me explain the next steps of the study. I will take the recording of our discussion and transcribe what was said into text. Then when I have completed each interview, I will conduct a thematic analysis of the interviews. I will then write up the analysis. If, for some reason I cannot understand a comment I have transcribed, I will contact you for clarification. Is that okay?

E: Yep. Call me or email me.

C: Okay. Well, that concludes our interview. Please go ahead and sign the consent form and send it to me as soon as possible.

\*Interview lasted 60 minutes, but due to technical troubles.

**Transcript for Agent 4.**

C: After three tries via Lync, we switched to Zoom.

C: Hey, XXXX. Can you hear me now?

J: Yes, I'm here. I can hear and see you, too.

C: Awesome! We are recording!

C: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. The reasons I asked you were: you meet the parameters of the study. I asked for 4-H Agents who had worked a minimum of three years, were currently working as a county-based 4-H Agent, and were in good standing in the position.

You are also aware that I am completing this study as part of my doctorate and this is my capstone research study. The other reason I am conducting this study is because we have a new director of Kentucky, as you know, Dr. Mark Mains. Dr. Mains is interested in finding out what Agents feel about our current professional development system. The findings will be presented to him when it is complete.

I am conducting the study, and I will be the only person seeing the video interview. I will be following the protocol you see in the Consent form you were sent prior to today. Any identifying information will be removed.

Have you had the opportunity to review the consent form I provided?

J: Yes.

C: First, I need to ask you some demographic questions. How many years have you been an agent in Kentucky?

J: I just finished 12 years.

C: And all of those in XXXX County?

J: Yes.

C: Great. What sex would you assign yourself?

J: Male, I hope. (Laughs)

C: And what race/ethnicity would you assign yourself?

J: White. Caucasian.

C: Okay. First question. Can you please describe or define what the term professional development means to you as a Kentucky 4-H Agent?

J: I think professional development is an opportunity to earn education and also earn credentials, like the Youth Development Institute, like how we're getting a certificate to further our career. Different learning experiences like conferences, in-services, and institutes. I think it's ongoing and should last your entire career. It should focus on keeping you up-to-date with what's going on in the world. Staying relevant with what is actually happening and how we can integrate 4-H into our communities. I have been here for 13 years and things are currently changing. That is why professional development is so important.

C: Great. Now that you are thinking about the definition of professional development, can you describe for me the different professional development types, or sessions you have attend over the last two years?

J: Hmm. Of course, the Youth Development Institute. That was two days each session. The Cluster of in-services over the past two years. Those were three days each. Over my career I have taken individual sessions, but these have been more in a series of days. Is that what you're looking for?

C: Yes. Are you involved in your professional association?

J: Yes, I attend the State meetings. I also have attended the Tri-State Diversity Conference the last two years.

C: What about ESP?

J: I have been, but not in the last two years.

C: Okay. How would you describe the presentation mode of the sessions you have attended? Face-to-face? Direct instruction? Self-Study? Online?

J: The majority have been face-to-face. That is because the Youth Development Institute was mostly face-to-face. I have participated in online sessions, too.

C: So, thinking about the plan of work you are now implementing and the professional development you have received, what professional development do you perceive needing in the next 3-5 years as a 4-H Agent?

J: Well, curriculum-wise I would say STEM-related topics. We're just getting started in a new Lego robotics initiative here in XXXX County. And, so SET is important. As an Agent, I also need more youth development and youth development theory. I also need educational theory. Things [topics] like that because my background is in business and not education. I need to continue learning about teaching and youth development. I need

more information on the Ages & Stages of youth and how to integrate that into my programs. Those would be my major focus.

C: Continuing on what type of presentation modes do you prefer?

J: I'm a face-to-face learner. I don't like the online stuff. I know there isn't a lot of difference when you're sitting there. I'm a hands-on learner. Face-to-face. I love the Clusters. I love to be in large-group discussions. I need to get engaged. That is what I prefer. I understand with budget-cuts we have to find alternative ways, but face-to-face is what I prefer.

C: Awesome. So, how would you describe the optimal learning environment for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

J: Like I said, face-to-face. Hands-on. It seems the 4-H model is what other groups are looking at now. I think we've been ahead of the curve for a long time and the career readiness push is great. For a long time, college was the push for everyone, but they're [educators] are realizing being career-ready is important. The use of technology is also important now more than ever. The world is becoming more and more connected because of the internet. We don't want to be left behind.

C: Great thoughts. So, the next question is broken into two parts. The first part is, what has been the most meaningful professional development you have attended in the last two years? And the second part is what made it the most meaningful?

J: Well, definitely the Youth Development Institute as a whole. I have also enjoyed Ken Culp's presentations over the past year. He has really adapted his material to what agents are facing in counties today. That has been a change. But, overall, the Institute (YDI)

really engaged me. It energized me. I needed to go deeper than regular in-services and it did! The topics were relevant. The capstone was tough, but it made me think about how I need to run my program in XXXX County.

C: Awesome. Okay, XXXX. Let's review the questions we have already gone over. Are there additional comments you would like to add before we go on?

J: No. Is there something I'm not saying that I should?

C: Absolutely not. I want this to be from your heart and mind.

J: No. I'm good.

C: Okay. The last question also has two parts. I will ask one at a time. The first question is, if you were given the chance to make suggestions how to strengthen our current professional development system, what would you give?

J: Well, I think the Cluster of In-services has been a positive. The sessions are hands-on, we're there for three days, so we can get them in. I love the group setting. We're all there, hopefully engaged, focused on 4-H. I really don't see anything I would change right now, other than being able to add in-services along the year if needed. Sometimes it seems like we cannot do that.

C: Thanks. The second part of the question is, what suggestions would you give new agents about professional development?

J: I would say diversify. Try and learn things you don't know a whole lot about. Of course, continue to learn more about the things you are interested in and good at, but also learn new things and explore.

C: That is good stuff, Joe. Thanks. Well, that is it.

C: Absolutely. So, now let me explain the next steps of the study. I will take the recording of our discussion and transcribe what was said into text. Then when I have completed each interview, I will conduct a thematic analysis of the interviews. I will then write up the analysis. If, for some reason I cannot understand a comment I have transcribed, I will contact you for clarification. Is that okay?

J: Absolutely. Thanks, Chuck.

\*Interview lasted 45 minutes, but had to switch from Skype to Zoom because iMacs are not as compatible with Skype.

**Transcript for Agent 5.**

C: Good morning, XXXX.

K: Good morning (Laughs).

C: Thanks for agreeing to take part in the study.

K: My pleasure.

C: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. The reasons I asked you were: you meet the parameters of the study. I asked for 4-H Agents who had worked a minimum of three years, were currently working as a county-based 4-H Agent, and were in good standing in the position.

You are also aware that I am completing this study as part of my doctorate and this is my capstone research study. The other reason I am conducting this study is because we have a new director of Kentucky, as you know, Dr. Mark Mains. Dr. Mains is interested in finding out what Agents feel about our current professional development system. The findings will be presented to him when it is complete.

I am conducting the study, and I will be the only person seeing the video interview. I will be following the protocol you see in the Consent form you were sent prior to today. Any identifying information will be removed.

Have you had the opportunity to review the consent form I provided?

K: Yessir.

C: Okay, let's go ahead and get started. I had sent you a copy of the questions a little while ago. I wanted you to be able to see them, but I do not like to send them a long time before because I want your answers from the heart and not from a script.

K: Absolutely.

C: We'll get started. I will need to ask some informational questions first. How long have you been a 4-H Agent?

K: 5.5 years.

C: And have you been in your current county the entire time?

K: Yes, I have (XXXX County).

C: What sex/gender do you assign yourself?

K: Female.

C: And what race/ethnicity do you assign yourself?

K: White, or Caucasian.

C: Thanks. Okay. Now, we will get into our discussion questions. As an Agent with 5.5 years of experience, how would you describe or define the term professional development?

K: Umm...Professional guidance. Getting training when we need it. To keep us professionally sound, if you will. Specific training to make sure we continue to do our jobs well. Like our Cluster of In-services (Series) we will be having next week. Lync trainings, conferences, and workshops.

C: Great. Okay, let's piggy-back on the first question. Describe the professional development sessions that you have attended in the last two years.

K: Oh, goodness. I'd say the Cluster of In-services we have had in December the last two years. Since we have three 4-H Agents here in XXXX County, which determines what type of in-services I attend. Anything in SET, Science, Engineering, and Technology, Communications, or Leadership are topics I attend. When I look at the In-service Catalogue I look at the descriptions to make sure it is what I need. I also attended the National Day of Science training last year that was held outside the time of the Cluster. Torey Earle did that one and it was really good.

C: What about your professional development associations? Are you a member of those?

K: No, sir. I am not. Not yet.

C: You mentioned Lync trainings. So, you have also taken trainings online and not just face-to-face?

K: Yes, I have taken some trainings by Lync.

C: Great. So, thinking about your new plan of work that you have just begun to implement this year, and seeing the needs of the youth in XXXX County, what professional development do you foresee needing in the next 3-5 years?

K: Okay. Definitely, just updated information. I know the State Office is working diligently to get updated curriculum. That type of thing. Training on keeping us informed with new trends and programs. Leadership, Communications, Citizenship. Those types of

programs. Not new topics so much as new ways and ideas of how to present those programs to clientele here in the county.

C: Great. Continuing on. As an Agent with 5.5 years of experience under your belt, what do you think is the most effective style of presentation for professional development presenters?

K: Honestly, technology. Lync, webinars.. I don't personally prefer those types of sessions. I like sessions that are hands-on. I like to go to a session so I can be present. I learn better that way. Plus, I like to see and discuss how the other Agents will be using the new information. But, if we're discussing effectiveness and new budgets go into effect, we will have to do more online. I think more Agents would be interested in sessions online since they can sit at their desks and not go anywhere. I think we still need hands-on training.

C: So, you're not opposed to online professional development if the topic were appropriate?

K: Correct.

C: Awesome. So, thinking about your preferences, how would you describe the optimum learning environment? In your words, what is the 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning environment?

K: Umm... A lot of resources. A variety of resources. Whether it be iPads, or books, or curriculum. I do everything hands-on, so like I don't do a lot of PowerPoints or presentations (using screens) because I know the attention span of children. So, I am in the classroom with them. If we're using iPads, I'm still doing hands-on lessons with them. We have to be able to integrate technology, because they're (4-H'ers) are so in-

tune with that today. So, a variety of different delivery modes is necessary because kids learn in different ways.

C: Alright. Think about the professional development you have had in the past two years, what has been the meaningful professional development session you have been to, and to follow up with that, what made it be the most meaningful?

K: Geez, Chuck. That's hard. Can I only say one? (laughs) I have two that come to mind distinctively.

C: Absolutely tell me both.

K: The National Youth Science Day that Torey Earle led on Motion last year is one. The other one was the Hissing Cockroaches in the Classroom session. We had it during the Cluster last year. They were both very much hands-on and we actually did the activities in the booklet. There was also an app that we got to support the books. Torey was good about explaining the activities and making it relate to what we do in the county. And when Blake (Newton) did the Hissing Cockroach workshop we were actually using the cockroaches in the activities, which was really fun. We could see what we were doing, so we could adapt what we were doing if we needed to back in the county.

C: Wonderful. So, at this point, I want to give you the opportunity to look back at the questions. Are there any other comments you would like to add now that we have been through them?

K: I'm good.

C: Okay, so I have one more question, but I break it down into two parts. First, what suggestions would you give that would make the current professional development system for 4-H Agents more effective?

K: Are you talking about professional development for 4-H Agents as a whole?

C: Yes.

K: Okay. Let's talk about the Resource Guide. (laughs) So, a lot of what I have mentioned today is on there already, but a lot is not. Plus, a lot of the links to resources are broken. You go to a link and there nothing there, or you go to a page and the link won't be correct. And, we cannot even find some of them. (laughs) Shooting Sports is under Natural Resources. Why would you put it under there? Anything we do as professional development, or to support our professional development needs to go on there. As you know, with being a former 4-H Agent, there is a lot for us to remember, and a lot of curriculum we have to choose from, and we don't want it all in paper form because we want to be able to find it when we need it. So, if it's put on there and updated it helps. It gets frustrating when we get on there and we look for something and we cannot find it, or the link is broken. Or, it hasn't been updated in 10+ years or so...

C: I appreciate that answer. The second part of the question is this, how would you give suggestions about professional development to new/newer 4-H Agents?

K: Definitely get involved. Find professional development around topics they are interested in. Always check on KERS for trainings. Like Mark's (Mains) email said this morning, the catalogue is being updated monthly. Go to the trainings. Don't feel guilty.

Bring back what you learn and incorporate it in your county. And not get overwhelmed. It is easy for a new agent to do that.

C: Absolutely. So, now let me explain the next steps of the study. I will take the recording of our discussion and transcribe what was said into text. Then when I have completed each interview, I will conduct a thematic analysis of the interviews. I will then write up the analysis. If, for some reason I cannot understand a comment I have transcribed, I will contact you for clarification. Is that okay?

K: Absolutely.

C: Great. Thanks!

**Transcript for Agent 6.**

C: Good morning, XXXX. I have to be professional now! (Laughs after all the connection troubles). Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview. I am excited about your participation for two reasons. First, because you have a few years under your belt, but still are experienced. And second, because you recently changed county positions.

Q: I'm glad to take part.

C: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. The reasons I asked you were: you meet the parameters of the study. I asked for 4-H Agents who had worked a minimum of three years, were currently working as a county-based 4-H Agent, and were in good standing in the position.

You are also aware that I am completing this study as part of my doctorate and this is my capstone research study. The other reason I am conducting this study is because we have a new director of Kentucky, as you know, Dr. Mark Mains. Dr. Mains is interested in finding out what Agents feel about our current professional development system. The findings will be presented to him when it is complete.

I am conducting the study, and I will be the only person seeing the video interview. I will be following the protocol you see in the Consent form you were sent prior to today. Any identifying information will be removed.

Have you had the opportunity to review the consent form I provided?

Q: Yes, I have no questions.

C: So, I do have some questions concerning demographics before we begin, if that is okay.

Q: Sure.

C: How many years of tenure do you have as a Kentucky 4-H Agent?

Q: Umm.. Three and a half. A little over three. Yes, I started in XXXX County and just recently transferred to XXXX County.

C: Great.

Q: But, actually, I have closer to five years of experience in Extension. I was a 4-H intern for two summers and then I worked in the Office of Diversity for 3-4 months. But, it counts toward my experience.

C: Alright. What sex would you assign yourself?

Q: Uh.. Female.

C: Okay. And what race or ethnicity would you identify yourself with?

Q: Black.

C: Awesome. We are ready to begin. I've explained the purpose of the study. The first question deals with terminology. How would you define or describe the term professional development as it relates to you as a Kentucky 4-H Agent?

Q: The opportunity. Any opportunity for me to develop my skills, or my skills set to better the youth in the community, the volunteers in the community, or work with my fellow agents. So, any opportunity to better myself as an agent in any aspect of the job,

because as agents we are constantly learning things, and professional development is at the core of that. If we do not have a strong professional development core, then everything kind of falls apart. It is education: the more we learn, the more we can teach. If we're not learning anything, then we can't teach anything.

C: Great. So, going forward with that question. Give me an overall description of what types of professional development sessions you have attended over the past two years that have a 4-H theme.

Q: I've attended the Portable Forensics, the Task Force Sessions on Urban Youth and Urban Communities. These were through NAE4-HA. I've attended the Style Engineers workshops. I've just attended the True Colors professional development, so I can work with others in the county and understand and relate to different people. And also helping youth to begin working with differently personalities. I've attended quite a few actually. I try to make sure they are all dealing with the Family & Consumer Sciences, because that is the program areas I am working with her in the county. So, for instance, any professional development on fashion or design. Like how to teach the kids the science behind fashion design and technology of fashion. I also have gone to sessions on volunteerism as well. I am currently going through the VAA right now, and I consider that professional development. I am learning a lot about working with volunteers. I went from one county to another with a completely different dynamic. I also attend the MANNRS, minorities in agriculture, natural resources, and related sciences conference so I can work with youth from different backgrounds.

C: You mentioned attending MANNRS and NAE4-HA. Do you also attend the 4-H Series sessions?

Q: Oh, yes. And I also attend KAE4-HA meetings.

C: Okay. Thanks. Now, of the professional development sessions you have attended, would you say the majority of them have been face-to-face, direct instruction, or web-based?

Q: I would say the majority would be face-to-face, because I am a hands-on person, and those are the types of sessions I prefer. I like sessions where I have something to look at as a visual aid, and materials I can touch. I feel it is more personal that way. When it is online or web-based, and you are at your desk in your office, you have to understand, your office doesn't stop just because you say you are in a training, you still get phone calls that come through. There are some any distractions. It is really difficult to focus on what you're supposed to be doing when there are so many distractions. It's just the nature of the beast. I know there a lot of agents who prefer online training because they don't have to travel so much, but not me. I may have to walk away from my computer, then walk back. But, most of mine are face-to-face. Now, I do make sure the sessions I attend deal with what I need. I don't want to drive four hours one way and not get anything out of the training.

C: This is good stuff. So, based on what you have attended in the past two years, and now that you have been in the new position for a while, what professional development sessions do you perceive you will be needing in the next three to five years?

Q: Umm... I wish there was more training on working with urban communities and environments. As an agent coming from a rural to an urban county it is very different. I have hit the ground running, but it would be nice to have training on how to make

programs work in urban settings. I won't say it is easier, but it is different getting programs started in urban environments. It would be nice to have these opportunities in the state and not have to go to a national meeting to get the training.

C: Good idea. So, let's continue with that train of thought. So, what are the most effective presentation modes for professional development sessions?

Q: I think because of the nature of the job, we do better when you give us something to do. Something where we have to use our hands. We need to get up and move around. When we're sitting, we're just like kids. (Laughs) 4-H agents work with kids, so we're kinds like kids, and if you have us sit and just talk to us we get really bored. But if we are engaged, moving around and doing stuff, we get more out of it. The title may have gotten our attention, but the presentation is what keeps us engaged. I think that is the strongest presentation mode. But, there are agents who enjoy web or online training. The most important thing is for agents to feel their time is being used in the best way it can be.

C: Good thoughts! So, as we are moving into 2017, how would you describe the 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning environment for agents?

Q: I think there must be a variety. Each agent has a favorite presentation style, according to their interest and learning style. I do think when there is a choice, they can choose what fits their needs. Like the Series in December. There are different sessions with different presentation modes. The ideal environment allows for choice and has a variety of teaching tools.

C: So, thinking about the professional development you have attended over the past two years, what has been the most meaningful professional development you have attended?

I'd like to follow that up with what made it the most meaningful to you?

Q: I would say the VAA (Volunteer Administration Academy). Because it has challenged me the most. I always knew I could work with volunteers, but in Extension when you first come in and people have trained you in one way, but after you have worked for a while you realize you have been told wrong. That happens a lot. VAA has strengthened my confidence in working with volunteers. How does a volunteer from [this] generation approach certain situations? I see that experience as most meaningful because I can see a difference in how I interact with volunteers. And people.

C: Great. Now that we have gone through the first part of the questions, are there additional comments you would like to add to any of the earlier questions?

Q: Umm..I would say also say as an agent who has come into a different office, VAA has also helped me build rapport with the volunteers in this new county. It has also helped me understand my new co-workers, too. I would also add to the question on learning environment.

C: Yes.

Q: Technology is a really big thing. And so, having technology included in professional development is important. Agents love apps, so maybe having an app in some sessions. Agents can use the lesson more if there is a combination of hands-on and technology. They can take it back and use it in the county.

C: The last question is broken down into two parts. First, if you could offer suggestions on how to improve, I don't want to say fix, the current professional development system, what would you offer?

Q: Humm.. I think having more variety in the programs being offered would help. There's a lot of times, there's not a lot to sign up for that interests you. I would like having more sessions in the state instead of going across the country. Also, having incentives for agents to attend is important. Explain why professional is so important to agents. Tenured agents sometimes don't see professional development as important. Sometimes the numbers is an issue, I understand. Also, we need to listen to agents. Agents need to know who to talk to bring ideas to about professional development they may have seen or participated in somewhere else. That would mean stronger communication between agents and specialists. It seems not all specialists are involved in professional development. Those are what I would hope to see.

C: Great. I'll follow that up with what would you suggest to new agents in regard to professional development?

Q: Learn as much as you can as soon as you can. To have an organization that supports professional development as much as Extension does is extremely rare, you don't see that in other places, so jump on it. For lack of a better term, you don't want to come in half-stepping. There is no excuse for not taking advantage of the professional development we are given.

C: Alright. Thanks, XXXX. Are there any other comments you want to offer?

Q: No. I'm good.

C: Absolutely. So, now let me explain the next steps of the study. I will take the recording of our discussion and transcribe what was said into text. Then when I have completed each interview, I will conduct a thematic analysis of the interviews. I will then write up the analysis. If, for some reason I cannot understand a comment I have transcribed, I will contact you for clarification. Is that okay?

Q: Sure.

C: Thanks, XXXX.

\*Time of interview: 40 minutes, after two attempts.

**Transcript for Agent 7.**

C: Thank you, XXXX, for agreeing to take part in this study.

S: I'm glad to take part.

C: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. The reasons I asked you were: you meet the parameters of the study. I asked for 4-H Agents who had worked a minimum of three years, were currently working as a county-based 4-H Agent, and were in good standing in the position.

You are also aware that I am completing this study as part of my doctorate and this is my capstone research study. The other reason I am conducting this study is because we have a new director of Kentucky, as you know, Dr. Mark Mains. Dr. Mains is interested in finding out what Agents feel about our current professional development system. The findings will be presented to him when it is complete.

I am conducting the study, and I will be the only person seeing the video interview. I will be following the protocol you see in the Consent form you were sent prior to today. Any identifying information will be removed.

Have you had the opportunity to review the consent form I provided?

S: Yes.

C: Great. Let's get started. What race/ethnicity would you assign yourself?

S: Caucasian.

C: And what sex/gender would you assign yourself?

S: Female.

C: and how long have you been a 4-H Agent in Kentucky?

S: 23 years.

C: Awesome. And, have you been in XXXX County the whole time?

S: Yes, for 23 years.

C: Let's continue with the questions. How would you explain, or describe what the term professional development means to you as a 4-H Youth Development Agent in Kentucky?

S: Hmm... Professional development to me means improving myself as a professional. Umm... Developing myself and my programs. By improving myself I will improve my work in my job. So, whether it's professional development related to my job with 4-H'ers, or supervising staff or assistants, anything that revolves around my job as an agent. That's what it means to me.

C: Great. Let's continue with the next question. Thinking about the description or definition you gave, let's think about the professional development you have attended in the past two years. Can you please describe the sessions you have attended?

S: Well, I try and take advantage of the In-Service Series and that way it knocks out a lot of in-services in the same three-day period. So, a lot of those are about new programs, new curriculum, and learning about the new curriculum and how we can implement it back in our county and how it will work for our county and for our kids in 4-H in our county. I also attended various in-services dealing with my overall work as an agent. Whether it was the mentor training, staff support training, or the Youth Development

Institute. Which plays a major role in my job, but also with overall youth development.

And then there was an in-service about insurance. As I get closer to the end of my career,

I am thinking more about in-services dealing with retirement. I guess that's what it is.

C: Are you a member of the professional development association in your state?

S: Yes, yes. I'm sorry. I do attend workshops that are offered through KAE4-HA. When we have our State or National meetings, I attend professional development workshops they offer. I also have provided workshops during these sessions.

C: Are you a member of ESP?

S: No. Not at this time.

C: Thanks. Now, thinking about the new plan of work your county has been working this year, and your work with the families in XXXX County, what professional development do you perceive needing in the next 3-5 years?

S: Umm... I definitely think more professional development around new curriculum. Even though we may have had training on the curriculum a year or two ago, we are going to need professional development in order to take that back to the county. So, any updates in our programs. Like the Camp Updates are always beneficial. I think it is always important to do face-to-face sessions on that topic. And of course, if I continue to be a mentor agent for new 4-H agents, I will need updates on that. And, with Mark (Mains) being our new Program Leader, maybe any new directions for Kentucky 4-H. Not that I think we're going to go through major changes, but in case we do, we need PD (Prof Dev) on the changes as they relate to Kentucky 4-H.

C: Great. Great. So, let's go on to the next question. What type of presentation mode have your professional development sessions been? Face-to-face? Web-based?

S: Most of them have been face-to-face. I get more out of sessions that are face-to-face. As much hands-on as possible, as much demonstration as possible. The learn-by-doing process. I just get more out of that type.

C: Is there a place for online or web-based professional development?

S: Yes, depending on the topic. The mentor training was done online, the I-9 training was also online. I think we need to limit that as the only way. But, there are some topics that can be presented effectively online.

C: Good comments. Now, let's go a step further. After 23 years of experience, and seeing the changes that have occurred in our professional development needs, how would you describe a 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning environment?

S: I am such a traditional person. Umm... I don't know if I understand the question enough.

C: Let me rephrase the question. What is the most effective environment for learning?

S: I guess that's why I believe in 4-H so much. I believe in hands-on learning and learning-by-doing is the best way for everybody. People learn more if you set them up in a way so they can do something. Whether it's role playing, making something, showing the next generation how to do something. If technology enhances the lessons and adds to it. If it works (laughs) then, yes, that's okay. I just don't know if we should substitute it in place of (hands-on learning).

C: Alright. Let's think about the last two years and the professional development sessions you have attended. What has been the most meaningful professional development session or sessions you have attended. I'd like for you to follow that up with an explanation of why you feel it was the most meaningful.

S: Umm... Probably the Camp Updates. Mainly, it was last year's (Dec 2015) because we divided up into camping groups. We were, it was broken up into smaller groups, so it was more specific to our, the group, that was meeting together. So, the Camp Director knew he was talking to the Agents camping at North Central and he knew what we did there. There were smaller groups. It was more one-on-one and specific to the facility we were attending. That has been the most meaningful to me. Anything hands-on. Even the Arts one that Jennifer (Tackett) had to break out the new curriculum, we did some of the actual projects. But the camp one was the biggest one.

C: Great. Now, take a look at the questions we have already discussed. I want to give you the chance to elaborate on any of these questions if you would like to.

S: Now, what?

C: Do you have any additional comments you want to add now?

S: Oh, no. I'm not very wordy.

C: I just want to make sure I give you the opportunity to say what you feel.

S: Oh, you have.

C: Thanks. So, if you had thoughts about the professional development system in Kentucky, what would they be?

S: That's not how I'm reading the question.

C: Oh? Okay, how are you reading the question?

S: So, I'm reading it as asking how we can improve the professional development of Kentucky 4-H Agents.

C: Okay. That sounds great. Go with that thought.

S: I think the State Office needs to be more flexible with professional development. If there are topics that come up during the year, those sessions need to be added to the system. I think it should be okay to add it whenever. It think it needs to be more flexible than it is. I also think when new curriculum is offered, Specialists need to be willing to do multiple sessions, or continued sessions throughout the year. You know, just because you offer a session one time in one year doesn't mean we (Agents) all get it and don't need additional training on it. I think it is fortunate, Chuck, that we have Specialists at the State Office who have been Agents before, but they also need to remember what it was like when they were in the county. And professional development falls into that category. As for newer agents, use your mentors to assist you when scheduling your professional develop your professional development plan. And that's all I got to say about that!

(Laughs)

C: Great! So, now let me explain the next steps of the study. I will take the recording of our discussion and transcribe what was said into text. Then when I have completed each interview, I will conduct a thematic analysis of the interviews. I will then write up the analysis. If, for some reason I cannot understand a comment I have transcribed, I will contact you for clarification. Is that okay?

S: Absolutely. So, do you have enough people to interview?

C: Yes. I was very pleased with the response.

S: It was very helpful having the questions a little beforehand. It makes it easier to think about the questions.

C: Well, thanks again, Sherri. I do appreciate.

S: No problem. I'm glad to assist.

\*Interview time: 35 minutes.

**Transcript for Agent 8.**

C: Good afternoon, XXXX. Thank you again for agreeing to take part in this study.

T: You're welcome. I've made notes. (Laughs)

C: By the way, thanks for scrubbing the Issues video. I need to find out why I couldn't do it on my iPad.

C: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. The reasons I asked you were: you meet the parameters of the study. I asked for 4-H Agents who had worked a minimum of three years, were currently working as a county-based 4-H Agent, and were in good standing in the position.

You are also aware that I am completing this study as part of my doctorate and this is my capstone research study. The other reason I am conducting this study is because we have a new director of Kentucky, as you know, Dr. Mark Mains. Dr. Mains is interested in finding out what Agents feel about our current professional development system. The findings will be presented to him when it is complete.

I am conducting the study, and I will be the only person seeing the video interview. I will be following the protocol you see in the Consent form you were sent prior to today. Any identifying information will be removed.

Have you had the opportunity to review the consent form I provided?

T: Yes. I signed and sent it back just now.

C: Wow!

T: Was that okay?

C: Absolutely!

C: Before we begin with the interview questions, I will need to ask some demographic questions. How many years have you been a Kentucky 4-H Agent?

T: About 22 years, I think.

C: All in XXXX County?

T: The first two were in XXXX. The last 20 in XXXX.

C: What sex would you assign yourself?

T: (Laughs) Male.

C: And what race or ethnicity would you assign yourself?

T: (Still laughs) Caucasian.

C: On to our first question. Thinking from the perspective of a 4-H Agent in Kentucky, what is your definition or description of the term professional development?

T: Uh.. I think it serves the purpose of equipping the agents with the skills necessary to be successful. I think that includes specific project skills in the programs that we offer. I also think it includes professional skills 4-H agents need like time management and supervision. Other areas necessary to be successful that are not program-specific.

C: Carrying on with that definition, please think of the professional development sessions you have attended over the last two years. Can you describe the type or topics?

T: So, are you talking about sessions through KERS or the online catalogue?

C: Not necessarily, but they could be.

T: The majority of in-services I attended this past year revolved around the Cluster. The Youth Development Institute. That would be where the core came from, the Cluster. It focuses mainly on the program areas. The associations, NAE4-HA, KAE4-HA, ESP, they also tend to focus on programmatic development. They try to infuse professional development into district staff meetings and force-feed information to us. But, at the end of the day, most agents are burnt out at that point and don't want to listen to another hour training on something like supervision.

C: Next question. Of the professional development sessions you have attended, have most of them been face-to-face, direct instruction, online, self-study?

T: Probably 98% has been face-to-face. Unfortunately, it seems the 4-H [Side] has been the last to adopt online training. I have attended more training online through Agriculture than 4-H. 4-H seems to want to make us go into a room and sit for six hours.

C: Thinking about the professional development sessions you have attended over the past two years, and after implementing the first year of the new plan of work, what professional development sessions do you perceive needing in the next three to five years?

T: I think in my situation I would like to see more advance skills taught, more advanced project work. It seems like we do a whole lot of introductory trainings and teach a lot of basic skills, but I don't really have the chance to get the in-depth skills in program or project work.

C: Going on from there, what would be the most effective presentation mode for you to receive the training you need?

T: Just one?

C: No. Whatever you think is necessary.

T: I think the most effective would be web-based. I think there are so many opportunities for different topics to be presented online so I would not have to leave my county. Less money on travel. And not with four hours to and from a meeting. Self-study is another option. There is so much you (at the State Office) give us that could be given beforehand and we cover it on our own. I just wish there were more options. I understand people learn differently but we need different options. For instance, instead of having three regional meetings, why not have two regional and one online option, if the topic is appropriate.

C: Good discussion. So, how would you describe the optimum learning environment in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

T: (Pause) I think it needs to be as flexible as possible, in terms of timing. For example, online trainings could be recorded and we could watch them when we had time. We could also go back and watch them again when we needed to. eXtension has a ton of those available. We need to integrate eXtension into our professional development system.

C: Actually, I can vet those eXtension sessions. We do have a process for allowing that. Just let me know.

T: Great. Awesome.

C: Let's think back now over the past two years. What has been the most meaningful professional development you have attended? I'd like to follow that up with why it was the most meaningful?

T: Hmm. I would say...Probably, I would say the Youth Development Institute, because it went beyond the introductory level of information. It would be good to have a choice of which you needed.

C: So, think about all the questions I have asked. Are there additional comments you would like to add?

T: Well, I want to say this, but I'm not sure where it goes. I think it is ridiculous to make us attend a training just to attend the training. For example, going for three days to the Cluster of In-Service and making me take sessions I don't need is absolutely useless. I understand there are components I need to be at, but I don't think I need to attend all the days if there are entire days with sessions I don't need. It just isn't an effectively use of my time, or any professional agent's time. I wish they would crunch all the mandatory sessions in one day, then put the basic sessions on both ends. I wouldn't feel obligated to attend the entire event that way.

C: Okay. The last question is broken into two parts. The first part is, if you had the opportunity to offer suggestion as to how our current professional development system could be improved, what would you give?

T: There is a sense across the state that professional development sessions cannot be scheduled based on rising need. The timeline between suggesting an in-service topics and offering it is so long that it is difficult to address emerging issues because they weren't

nominated back in March of the following year. I wish there was a way the State [Office] could be more responsive to the [professional development] needs we have.

C: Okay, so what comments would you give new agents about professional development as they enter our field?

T: (Taps pen multiple times) (Pause) I think there are lots of ways to define professional development. However, I do not believe all professional development is created equal. So, figuring out where the most useful areas are, are hard for a new agent. Making the decision of whether you need the training or whether you just need to be there at the training. I would tell them to choose what will make you a better agent.

C: Great. Well, that concludes our interview. Thank you again, Tyrone, for participating.

C: Absolutely. So, now let me explain the next steps of the study. I will take the recording of our discussion and transcribe what was said into text. Then when I have completed each interview, I will conduct a thematic analysis of the interviews. I will then write up the analysis. If, for some reason I cannot understand a comment I have transcribed, I will contact you for clarification. Is that okay?

T: Yep. Call me or email me.

C: Okay. Well, that concludes our interview. Please go ahead and sign the consent form and send it to me as soon as possible.

\*Interview time: 35 minutes.

## Transcript for Agent 9

1) Please explain what the term professional development means to you as a 4-H Agent in

Kentucky.

Being a positive, community leader and role model for not only youth, but all around. Doing job with integrity & ethically.

2) Please describe what professional development sessions you have attended in the past two

years.

NAB4HA Annual Conference, PTH, 360 Leadership Conference, Kentucky 4-H In-Service Series, and other in-services as offered & available.

3) What professional development needs do you foresee needing in the next 3-5 years?

- \* Inspirational to keep moving forward in career.
- \* Programmatic with curriculum changes or new trends come out.
- \* Personal & leadership development.

4) What would be the most effective mode for professional development sessions for 4-H

Agents?

\* One day sessions closer to home / office areas vs mandatory multi day away. Personal attitude changes when it's PD by choice vs mandate.

5) How would you describe a 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning environment?

More will be via technology vs face-to-face but a lot can be lost with that as well. Helps on time & travel commitments but very easy to be "one call but not engaged" directly.

6) What was the most meaningful professional development session you attended during the last

2 years?

I'm not able to PD recently, but combination of PD sessions / experiences due to leadership role the last couple of years.

7) What made it meaningful to you?

Personal challenge and sense of accomplishment. Learned more regarding facilitating; ensuring all voices are heard & respected; how to deal with conflict; etc.

8) If you could suggest ways to make the current professional development system stronger,

what would they be?

Needs to find balance of mandatory time vs. choice  
 Encourage out-of-state apps / PD exchange  
 not one related to a youth trip but  
 app to visit other agents.

9) If you could make suggestions to new agents about professional development, what would

they be?

Be involved in respective  
 professional associations. Find balance  
 of new ideas + implementation. Don't  
 hesitate to ask for help and to help  
 folks early that provide accurate  
 answers.

Interviewee requested her responses be included in her own hand-writing.

## VITA

CHARLES E. STAMPER

EDUCATION

May, 1991	Bachelor of Arts Alice Lloyd College Pippa Passes, Kentucky
December, 1999	Master of Science University of Kentucky Lexington, Kentucky
Pending	Doctor of Education Morehead State University Morehead, Kentucky

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

October, 2005- Present	Extension Program Coordinator University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service Lexington, Kentucky
November, 1991- October, 2005	Extension 4-H Youth Development Agent University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service Floyd County, Kentucky
May, 1991- November, 1991	Classroom Instructor Knott County Public Schools Hindman, Kentucky

HONORS

October 2014	NACDEP Outstanding University Team Award/Southern Region
October 2004	NAE4-HA Distinguished Service Award
April 2004	KAE4-HA Distinguished Service Award
May 1999	KAE4HA Achievement in Service Award
May 1994	KAE4HA Outstanding New Agent Award

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