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*Service Learning in Agricultural Education*

## Using Service Learning to Build our Communities

by John C. Ewing

The FFA Motto states very plainly that our members of the organization are “Living to Serve”. I believe our students of agricultural education have been serving in their communities for decades, and will continue to do so for many years to come. However, I believe we are now becoming more aware of how this service to our community can be “taken to the next level”, and truly make connections for all involved. Has there always been benefit to conducting community service? Sure. However, as you will see in several of the articles in this issue, there is much more to be gained by taking what may have started as a community service project and turning it into a service learning project. Your students have so much to gain through any type of service, but why not take the extra time and energy to make it a truly impactful learning experience for all that are involved?

When I began teaching high school agriculture, I had been exposed to the importance of conducting community service with my students. As a student teacher, I was required to conduct some type of community service project with my students. At that time, I didn’t realize that what we were doing was service learning. Now, don’t get me wrong, I had no idea that we were conducting service learning, and yes, I know that we were missing parts of the overall model. However, the project of

working with my high school students to teach “bike safety” to the elementary students went beyond the basic definition of community service. Yes, some of the student teachers that were conducting projects may have been more agriculturally focused, but most were true community service projects, rather than service learning.

When our students participate in community events, they are growing as citizens of that community. I know we all conduct programs that allow our students to become involved in various community activities; inside and outside of the schools where we teach. However, I believe that this issue’s theme of Service Learning will push many of us to rethink how we engage with the community through our programming. As I edited this issue, I began to get excited about the possibilities for improvements in community engagement within our current teacher preparation program at Penn State. One example, where our team has seen opportunity for growth in the past, is a project that we title: “Community-based Unit of Instruction”. As I read the current articles, it became more and more clear that what we are asking our students to engage in is Service Learning. However, we have never fully presented this assignment in that context.

With the breadth and depth of information that the theme editors pulled together for this issue, I believe my students, and any educator that reads this full issue,

will gain a better understanding of utilizing service learning to improve their students’ learning and their community’s well being. As you read the articles, I hope that you are able to glean insights that will encourage you to improve your students’ learning experience through service learning.

Again, the theme editors have compiled a great issue for you that is packed full of relevant information for the novice or the expert. If you are new to service learning, there are some great articles that provide insight/definitions of service learning. These articles, along with quality examples of others’ experiences, will help ease you in to service learning opportunities. If you are more of a service learning expert, don’t despair. There are articles that will challenge you to reflect on how you are currently implementing service learning in your program. With this in mind, enjoy the July/August 2016 issue of the *Agricultural Education Magazine*.



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**Theme:**

***Service Learning in Agricultural Education***

**Editor Comments:**

Using Service Learning to Build our Communities.....2  
*by John C. Ewing*

**Theme Editor Comments:**

Service Learning in Agricultural Education:  
 Learning Near and Far ..... 4  
*by Courtney Meyers and Gaea Hock*

**Theme Articles:**

Service Learning: The Duct Tape of the FFA Advisor Toolbox ..... 6  
*by Stefonie Sebastian*

Service Learning Impacts and Application in  
 Agricultural Education..... 9  
*by Lane Woodward and Rick Rudd*

The Food for Thought Project:  
 Growing Gardeners and Stronger Ties with the Community ..... 12  
*by Tinesha Woods-Wells and Megan M. Seibel*

Service Learning: “Friends” Make it Real..... 15  
*by Joy Morgan*

Developing Teamwork and Team Leadership Skills through Service  
 Learning ..... 18  
*by Laura Lemons and Jennifer Strong*

Service Learning: An Active and Innovative Learning Strategy for To-  
 day’s Workforce ..... 20  
*by David Agole, Meghan Tanner, and Connie D. Baggett*

Idaho FFA is Living to Serve at State FFA Events ..... 22  
*by Jaysa Fillmore*

Using “Critical Service Learning” to Open Students’ Eyes..... 25  
*by Richie Roberts, M. Craig Edwards, and Jon W. Ramsey*

Subject Index-Volume 88 July/August 2015 - May/June 2016.....28  
 Author Index - Volume 88 July/August 2015 - May/June 2016.....31

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Articles and photographs should be submitted to the Editor or Theme Editor. Items to be considered for publication should be submitted at least 90 days prior to the publication date of the intended issue. All submissions will be acknowledged by the Theme Editor and/or the Editor. No items are returned unless accompanied by a written request. Articles should be approximately four double spaced pages in length (1500 words). Information about the author(s) should be included at the end of the article. Photos and/or drawings appropriate for the “theme issue” are welcomed. Photos/drawings should be submitted in an electronic format (jpg or tiff format preferred – minimum 300 dpi). Do not imbed photos/drawings in the Word document. A recent photograph (jpg or tiff format preferred– minimum 300 dpi) of all authors should accompany the article unless photographs are on file with the Editor. Articles in the *Magazine* may be reproduced without permission but should be acknowledged.

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## *Service Learning in Agricultural Education: Learning Near and Far*

by Courtney Meyers and Gaea Hock

**M**icroscopes and telescopes perform similar yet very distinct purposes. They both allow the user to study objects that are beyond the human eye's capability alone. Microscopes allow closer examination of specimens while telescopes allow the user to focus on objects in the distance. Selecting the correct tool will provide someone with a wealth of information. It is in this same vein that using service learning as a pedagogical approach to a topic can allow students to better understand what is directly in front of them (the microscope) while also bringing clarity to concepts that seem distant and undefined (the telescope).

Service learning connects what students learn in the classroom to experiences with community partners. Through this active engagement, students and community partners cooperate to address felt needs in a mutually-beneficial relationship.

Students in the classroom may learn about concepts and topics, but service learning allows them to see how those ideas play out in the distance – the real world. This pedagogy helps students look at the broader issues impacting their community and discover how the lessons have application beyond lectures and textbooks.

I (Courtney) have been using service learning in my college classes since I began teaching at Texas Tech University in 2008. It is the only way I could imagine teaching one of my classes that helps students develop their public relations writing skills. In this course, students work with community partners to create written materials that can be used to help the organization meet its strategic goals.

As a former high school agriculture teacher, I (Gaea) looked for ways my students could serve their community. This service usually connected with course content (e.g. landscaping projects), but now I recognize how I could have made the connection stronger. As a college professor, I utilized service learning in my Development of Youth Programs course to more fully engage students in the content and take ownership of their learning.

While we have our own history using service learning, the authors in this issue have contributed articles that provide a wealth of knowledge and experience integrating this form of active learning.

Service learning is often confused with other forms of participatory learning such as volunteerism and internships. Sebastian clarifies what service learning means by distinguishing it from

other similar terms. The author also provides specific ways to integrate service learning in agriculture classes and FFA activities while maintaining the quality of this instructional technique.

Woodward and Rudd discuss what makes service learning opportunities truly successful – equal attention must be paid to the service and the learning. These authors also point out the need for reflection, which is a significant aspect of service learning. In our experience, reflection can be accomplished in a number of ways from in-class discussions to written papers to group presentations. What is important is requiring students to make the effort to connect what they are learning in the class to their experiences with the community partner. This discovery process typically helps students identify how the academic concepts are present in the real world. Doing good reflection would allow students to put down the microscope, look through the telescope, and come back to the microscope to make meaning of the service learning experience.

The next article in this issue from Woods-Wells and Seibel highlights the Food for Thought project, which does an excellent job of helping students understand how the concepts they learn in the classroom have broader applications in the community. The authors also discuss learning ac-

tivities that are appropriate for the various ages of students in the project. This example demonstrates how service learning can promote civic awareness and community engagement.

In another example of connecting the classroom to a community partner, Morgan describes the impact of using service learning in a college class to help future agricultural education instructors learn how to teach students with special needs. This course provides an effective and powerful example of the reciprocity service learning can provide and the long-lasting positive impacts for both the college students and the individuals they served.

Agriculture programs have tremendous success in the development of students' leadership skills. Lemons and Strong's article discusses how service learning can be used to encourage effective team leadership. The advice provided from these professors at two universities can be implemented to make team service-learning projects more successful for all those involved.

Agole, Tanner, and Baggett provide an article identifying the soft skills or "employability skills" students gain while completing service-learning projects. The authors found that the time students spent on their projects allowed them to practice interpersonal communication and leadership skills. These are certainly important skills for all students to gain and service learning provides

valuable opportunities to practice and hone these skills.

Fillmore addresses how FFA chapters can help students learn what the "Living to Serve" part of the FFA Motto really means. This article provides a look at one powerful service activity in Idaho and identifies a number of volunteer opportunities. Agriculture teachers should strive to find ways to help students make connections between what they are learning in the classroom and the organized service activity.

Finally, Roberts, Edwards, and Ramsey call for service learning to take a more critical examination of social justice issues in the community. Once instructors are comfortable integrating service learning in their classes, this article provides steps one can take to "open students' eyes" to sensitive community issues. As we prepare students to contribute to society, exposing them to the complex process of identifying and addressing issues will make them better equipped to make a positive difference.

One final note, whether you are a service learning pro or novice, we want to encourage you to consider the community partner's perspective. Service learning should be reciprocal; your students should gain as much from the experience as the community partner. While it is easier to gather feedback from your students, you should also communicate regularly with your partners to ensure they are receiving valuable service. This communication will

identify what is working well and where adjustments are needed.

Using a microscope allows students to closely examine what is easily controlled directly in front of them while a telescope brings clarity to seemingly distant happenings that may be in their future. As we introduce students to the classroom concepts, service learning helps them make important connections to broader issues and problems they may address somewhere down the road.



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# Service Learning: The Duct Tape of the FFA Advisor Toolbox

by Stefanie Sebastian

**A**n essential item of every toolbox is duct tape. It can fix or enhance almost anything. Service learning, like duct tape, is a flexible tool that can be adapted to meet the needs of students, teachers and communities. FFA advisors can be stretched thin when juggling academic standards and FFA activities such as CDEs, AgriScience Fair projects and SAEs. The resourcefulness of using duct tape is the same that is shown by FFA advisors utilizing service-learning projects to connect classroom and FFA activities.

## What is service learning?

Before diving into ways that service learning can connect classroom learning and FFA activities, we need to spend time creating a shared language. A common misconception is that service learning is the same as community service, which can also be referred to as volunteerism. Even though they are both impactful experiences for participants and communities, service learning and community service have distinct differences. For example, service learning occurs over the course of a semester or year, makes learning more hands-on, includes intentional and structured reflection, and creates reciprocal partnerships. FFA members holding a canned food drive is community service.

A horticulture class utilizing greenhouse and/or garden space to grow fresh vegetables to be donated to families in need is service learning. There is a time and a place for each experience and as a teacher, first and foremost, you need to utilize service learning as a teaching strategy.

Service learning emphasizes both service and the learning goals in such a way that both occur and are enriched by each other. Projects provide a meaningful way of applying the leadership and educational skills learned in the classroom and through FFA to meet an identified community issue. “At its best, service-learning goes beyond volunteerism because it increases students’ personal involvement in academic and civic life” (Allen, 2003, p. 51).

This brings me to another important topic of distinction when creating our common language: service learning versus experiential learning (may also be referred to as problem-based learning). Again, both are impactful but the differences are important to understand. At its simplest, all service-learning projects are experiential learning; however, not all experiential learning is service

learning. The key difference is that to be a service-learning project, you must address an identified community need, which is not true for all experiential learning.

## Quality Matters!

When developing and implementing a service-learning project, there are key elements that are critical for success, thus setting it apart from community service and experiential learning. The National Youth Leadership Council (2008) has identified eight K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice, which are: meaningful service, link to curriculum, reflection, diversity, youth voice, partnerships, progress monitoring, and duration and intensity. Refer to Figure 1 for additional information on each of the K-12 Service-Learning Standards. In addition, Figure 2 includes information on the similarities and differences between Community Service, Service Learning and Experiential

Figure 1: K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice (National Youth Leadership Council)

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Meaningful Service</b><br>Service-learning actively engages participants in age appropriate and personally relevant service activities that meet an authentic community need.  | <b>Link to Curriculum</b><br>Service-learning is intentionally used as an instructional strategy to meet learning goals and/or content standards.                  |
| <b>Reflection</b><br>Service-learning incorporates multiple challenging reflection activities that are ongoing and that prompt deep thinking and analysis about oneself and one's relationship to the project and/or society.                   | <b>Diversity</b><br>Service-learning promotes understanding of diversity and mutual respect among all participants.  |
| <b>Youth Voice</b><br>Service-learning provides youth with a strong voice in planning, implementing and evaluating service-learning experiences with guidance from adults.  | <b>Partnerships</b><br>Service-learning partnerships are collaborative, mutually beneficial and address community needs.   |
| <b>Evaluation (Progress Monitoring)</b><br>Service-learning engages participants in an ongoing process to assess the quality of implementation and progress toward meeting specified goals and uses results for improvement and sustainability. | <b>Duration and Intensity</b><br>Service-learning has sufficient duration and intensity to address community needs and meet specified outcomes and learning goals. |

Figure 2: Similarities and differences of service-learning, community service and experiential learning

|                                    | Service-Learning                        | Community-Service   | Experiential Learning                                     |
|------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| <b>Meaningful Service</b>          | Focus on meeting a community need       | Meets a need  | Focus is not meeting a community need                     |
| <b>Link to Curriculum</b>          | Intentionally tied to academics         | NOT tied to academics                                     | Intentionally tied to academics                           |
| <b>Youth Voice</b>                 | Youth Voice present                     | Often planned by agency                                   | Some Youth Voice present                                  |
| <b>Partnerships</b>                | Completed as a group-partnerships vital | Completed as an individual or group-partnerships optional | Completed as an individual or group-partnerships optional |
| <b>Reflection &amp; Evaluation</b> | Structured reflection/evaluation        | No structured reflection/evaluation                       | Structured reflection/evaluation                          |
| <b>Duration &amp; Intensity</b>    | Occurs over semester or year            | Often occurs only once                                    | May happen once or over the course of time                |

Learning broken down by seven of the eight standards.

You are probably thinking, ugh... more standards. However, just like duct tape, these elements are flexible and may look different depending on the project. For instance, an important piece to meaningful service is that activities are age appropriate. Do high school (and even most middle school) FFA members have the ability to do more than collect cans to fight hunger? The answer is a resounding, “YES, they do!” As an agriculture instructor, you need to ask yourself if there are links to curriculum to create an experiential learning opportunity. What are you teaching students in horticulture or animal science classes (among others) that could be used to raise fresh food sources to be donated? What CDEs could be used to sharpen the students’ skills and move the project forward? By ensuring you have age-appropriate activities and links to curriculum, you make the experience more impactful for you, the students and the community.

### Service Learning in Action

Now that we have an understanding of service learning, I want to walk through a high quality example that may inspire you to use the method to help meet your academic and FFA objectives. I want to be sure to note that with any new skill or teaching method, the more you engage in the process, the easier it becomes. When you first decide to use service learning it may take time to streamline activities into one cohesive project. Some agriculture instructors may decide that they only want to cherry pick a few FFA activities to incorporate. The beauty of service learning, and duct tape, is that you can use it to the extent that you need.

For this example, your FFA chapter is inspired to incorporate the issue of hunger in this year’s Program of Activities, so you can help National FFA donate 3.5 million meals to local communities through the FFA Hunger Heroes Challenge. This is where you, as the agriculture instructor and FFA advisor, need to step back and decide what tool may help you weave this into your school

year, without running you into the ground with extra work. Service learning is your answer! After some brainstorming, you decide it could fit into your curriculum, but with the space and resources available, you give the chapter an option to focus on laying hens or broilers. As a side note, this is a great opportunity for youth voice, one of the service-learning standards. Youth voice does not mean having students make every decision; it often means providing them choices and letting them decide, because each option provides the community with a fresh protein source.

Working with the FFA members, you have them contact local food banks to see if there is a need for fresh eggs or chicken meat to be distributed. With the price of eggs rising, the food bank would be happy to accept donations and so the decision is made to move forward.

With the project decided, it is time to strategize the classes and FFA activities that could be involved. One of the benefits of service learning is that it is a powerful tool for all students at all levels. Activities can be broken down by abilities to allow diverse learners to be successful. For example, daily activities of feeding the laying hens and collecting and counting eggs could be great for agriculture classrooms with special education students. Below is a list of possible activities your agriculture classes and FFA chapter could participate in:

- Ag Mechanics class can build the chicken coops.

- FFA members work on prepared public speaking to recruit community partners.
- Animal Science class can take the lead on raising the animals.
- FFA members develop feed trials for AgriScience Fair projects.
- Use the laying hens for Poultry Evaluation CDE.
- Over the summer months, a few students continue to care for the laying hens and utilize the project as their SAE.
- To ensure sustainability of the project you decide that you need to sell a fourth of the eggs. Therefore, the Agriculture Communications CDE team creates and executes marketing plans.
- All of the activities can be included in national chapter award applications.

Let's do the same brainstorming for a service-learning project focused on recycling and composting to reduce waste and increase production from the school garden.

- Ag Mechanics class can build compost bins.
- Environmental Science class can take the lead investigating what can and cannot be composted and recycled and the logistics of the project.
- The prepared public

speaking members can give presentations to students, teachers and staff to implement the composting and recycling. The environmental and natural resources CDE team could also be involved.

- Horticulture class takes the lead on the school garden.
- Multiple AgriScience Fair projects can be created based on the variety of composting methods such as comparing homemade and commercial composting techniques. In addition, projects can explore production in the school garden with or without the use of compost.
- SAEs from the project can include: start a farm recyclable hauling business for local farmers, start a leaf collection business, sell compost to local community gardeners and conduct water quality testing in relation to pollution to name a few.

As the examples show, service learning should not be used as a stand-alone project. Duct tape was created to make things stronger and the same can be said for service-learning projects. These projects allow students to use content knowledge and leadership skills in a real-world setting, which deepens the learning experience. FFA members who have been engaged in service-learning projects funded through National FFA grant programs have reported increasing

their communication skills and self-confidence while also improving awareness of their education and career paths (Slavkin, 2015). Most importantly, service learning is an adaptable tool that all agriculture teachers should keep in their toolbox to meet the demands of curriculum and FFA programming.

For more information and resources on service-learning you can visit National FFA's Living to Serve website at [www.FFA.org/livingtoserve](http://www.FFA.org/livingtoserve).

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# Service Learning Impacts and Application in Agricultural Education

by Lane Woodward and Rick Rudd

Living to serve has long been a central principle in agricultural education. From painting numbers on rural mail boxes to packaging meals for the homeless, we have a deep commitment to service. While serving school, community, and the agricultural industry is commendable, we need to be purposefully tuned in to the learning from service that should occur for students of agricultural education. Service learning is a great way to meet both the service and learning goals of our programs.

Agricultural education is an excellent platform to provide service-oriented projects for students, but not all service learning experiences are created equal. Celio, Durlak, and Dymnicki, (2011) identified the following as student gains from service learning:

1. Positive attitude toward self
2. Positive attitudes toward school and learning
3. Increased civic engagement
4. Social skill development
5. Increased academic performance.

To achieve the outcomes, service learning must be planned and executed well by the agriculture teacher.

Most FFA advisors around the country include some type of community service activity into the Program of Activities (POA) for their local FFA chapter. This POA then transfers into the National Chapter application that can be submitted in order to receive national recognition and a star rating. Some FFA advisors have mastered the art of implementing the “three-component model” (National FFA Organization, 2016), making FFA a critical component of the agricultural education classroom as a whole. The agricultural education model allows for the easy implementation of service learning; however, some agriculture programs fall short in both the planning and execution of the learning event, failing to achieve the desired results. The correct implementation of “service-learning is the result of collaboration between community, educational institution, and learner to engage and produce mutual outcome” (Kalles & Ryan, 2015, p. 134).

Service learning can be a great vehicle to connect the school with the community, but only when the learning is intentionally designed (Kalles & Ryan, 2015). By intentionally designing the learning experience, the student and community can both benefit. The question is, how do we design the experience? Kalles and Ryan (2015) identified the three major components of a service-learning experience as the community, partnership, and

reflection. The piece most often overlooked is reflection, one of the identifying characteristics of experiential learning. Kolb’s experiential learning cycle, as discussed in Petkus (2000), provides a powerful framework for service learning by including the following: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Petkus, 2000).

## Positive attitude toward self

Kolb’s reflection component in the experiential learning cycle is what makes this attitude shift a reality. Students experience the actual event and then reflect upon that event in order to make meaning of what happened. This

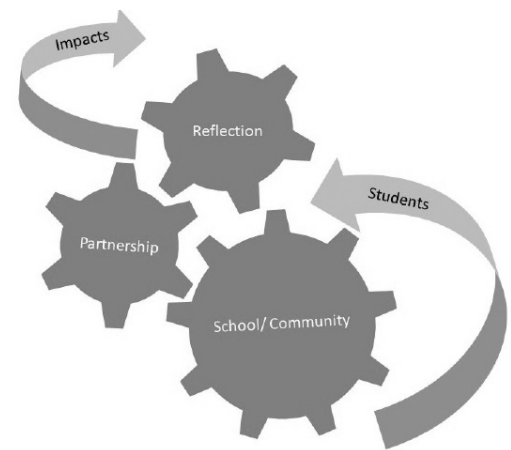


Figure 1: The three components of service learning work together as a system of gears. If one gear is not turning the students entering the experience do not exit with the anticipated impacts. All parts must be moving at the same rate to allow for students to complete the experience and benefit from the results.

reflection allows for a positive attitude shift, which leads to increased academic performance. When students experience higher self-efficacy and self-esteem, they perform better in an academic setting (Schunk, 1991).

### **Positive attitudes toward school and learning**

Making connections between the classroom and the real world can help students see the value in learning and provide a boost for their attitude toward school and learning. Learning becomes useful in successful service learning programs, creating a more favorable attitude toward learning in general. Real-world application of what they have learned can demonstrate the true value of education in their lives.

### **Increased civic engagement**

One goal educators share is to provide students with the background to function in society. Part of that is supporting citizenship, which means being an active part of the community. The partnership created between

the school and the community in service learning is where the civic engagement gain occurs. Many times the students in agriculture classrooms are accustomed to receiving service but not necessarily being able to provide the service. Having students take an active role within the community creates a tangible experience to help them understand and experience the process and recognize the importance of becoming civically engaged.

### **Social skill development**

Another shared goal of teachers is social skill development, and for any student, this is an ongoing process. Every interaction a student is exposed to either develops or activates a social skill to practice. I found that often during a service event my students were pushed outside of their comfort zone forcing them to develop socially. For example, partnering with a retirement community allows students to interact with members of an older generation, which may at first be uncomfortable for the students. Providing students with these activities

allows for real-world application.

### **Increased academic performance**

Making cognitive connections between what is learned in the classroom and what is accomplished in service learning can increase retention of knowledge gained in

instruction, increase applications for the learning, lead to inferences in future learning, and contribute to connections between existing knowledge and future learning. This increased cognitive activity can lead to increases in academic performance not only in the agriculture classroom, but also in other subjects.

Now that we have identified the five impacts students in service learning most readily experience, how do we ensure that our service learning experiences will produce the same results? It is easy to recognize that in order for service-learning to occur, a partnership must be formed between the school and the community. For students to learn from the experiences created from these partnerships, a time for reflection must occur in the learning environment. Celio et al. (2011) suggested educators allow students a voice in planning and implementation followed by teacher-guided reflection. The organizational structure of a local FFA chapter allows the dividing of members into committees and completing a POA, which provides students the opportunity to complete all three tasks (planning, implementing, and evaluation) while the advisor provides guidance and any other assistance required to make the ideas created come to life.

Because a well-rounded agriculture education classroom ties FFA with classroom instruction it is second nature to tie activities to standards and curriculum. To achieve greater academic performance and create improved learning, the service learning experience should be aligned with



*Students participating in a community cleanup at a community recreation complex.*

academic and program curricula as well as outline clear student goals and objectives linked to the aligned curricula (Celio et al., 2011). Graduation requirements and high stakes testing have made connecting school sponsored events with curriculum a necessity for the agriculture program, school, school district, and for the student to gain approval to hold a school sponsored activity.

For the experience to positively influence civic engagement, the program must develop community partnerships. These partnerships should include input from both the school and the community to ensure the project is improving or helping the community (Celio et al., 2011). This partnership should include open communication to guarantee the service of the students directly impacts the community and is needed. When the service is filling a gap or an area of need in the community, the partnership is strengthened and allows for project sustainability (Celio et al., 2011).



*Student applying a new coat of paint to one of the restrooms at a community park.*

Overall, service learning experiences are great ways to positively impact students while meeting the Agricultural Education mission statement regarding students making informed decisions while providing leadership development, personal growth, and career success (National FFA, 2016). It is important to remember that for a service learning experience to make a meaningful impact with a student, it must include the community, partnership, and reflection. Without reflection the educational impacts can be lost. Reflection needs to be included and students should be an active part of planning that leads to the implementation. The agriculture teacher holds the key to success by providing students with the freedom to take charge and become part of their community. Remember, “education is not something that happens to you it is something you are a part of in every aspect of learning” (Kalles, & Ryan, 2015, p. 136).

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## *The Food for Thought Project: Growing Gardeners and Stronger Ties with the Community*

by Tinesha Woods-Wells  
and Megan M. Seibel

Picky eaters, skewed concepts of food, nutrition deficits, and low activity levels have become far more the norm than the exception for kids these days, resulting in community-wide health and wellness concerns. This is demonstrated with the following questions and responses written by middle school students who participated in the Roanoke City Public Schools (RCPS) Plus summer program in 2015.

- What does being healthy really mean? “working out, eating veggies & fruits”, “...drink some water sometime”.
- What can eating the right food do for me? “It can keep you from getting fat and getting sick”, “if you eat smaller portions its better”, “you can eat junk food but like you have to eat regular food also because you need protien [sic]”, “it... leave my teeth clean”
- What nutrients do I need to be healthy? “...fruit and vegetables”, “you need wheat, dairy, and grain.”
- What is a diet? “Diets are just eating lesser”, “A diet is when you don’t eat junk food, fat, and sugar for a long or short time.” Persuasiveness in support of community school gardens. “... teachers can show you how to put the seeds in, and be healthy”, “...I rather have are

fresh[sic] food that I made than have stuff from the gov and I don’t know what they do to it...they spray crap on your fruit and vegs we eat.”



The replies, which were provided by a mix of rising seventh, eighth, and ninth graders beg the question: Where does an understanding of food, nutrition, and a healthy lifestyle begin? This provided justification for the Food for Thought (FFT) project, which has existed since 2011 as a pilot program. At its core, FFT is a collaborative community effort to address the silent epidemic of hunger, poor health, obesity and poverty in our children. Its structure is unique in that it is a public-private partnership between Roanoke City, Roanoke City Public Schools, Virginia Western Community College, and local organizations. As an educational venture, FFT is designed to teach youth about stewardship,

sustainability, and the connection between food, health, and the environment using an outdoor learning center and classroom instruction in either quarter- or semester-long formats depending on grade level. To that end, the project educates the 190 students it currently serves about where food comes from, basic food preparation skills, and how to make healthy, environmentally sound choices for themselves and their communities.

The inspiration behind the FFT project can be attributed to Alice Water’s Edible Schoolyard in Berkley, California. Similar to that mission, FFT seeks to engage students in various aspects of the farm-to-table movement using a community garden that is strategically located at James Madison Middle School (JMMS) within close proximity to Fishburn Park Elementary School and Virginia Western Community College. The project’s initial investor believed that in the vein of garden-



ing and farming, “All you need is dirt to be tilled up and have some nutrition to start the whole process.” Having far exceeded this expectation, the garden now boasts a technologically savvy underground infrastructure (fiber-optic cable, electricity, and water) that will be enhanced by a high tech outdoor learning center, corresponding outdoor classrooms



and an amphitheater in the next phase. The hope is that the garden will serve as a replicable model for the remaining middle schools in RCPS and throughout Virginia.

In the spirit of building community, the garden serves as a means for promoting social justice and the well-being of individuals, as well as the collective community. Accordingly, the garden’s location affords it not only the opportunity to be an educational vessel, but also a resource by groups external to the school. These factors lend themselves to raised awareness and highlighting the regional relevance of matters such as childhood obesity, personal wellness, economic viability, and sustaining a healthy, educated workforce.

As mentioned above, stakeholders spanning K-12, college, business, and the community were convened to explore FFT as a means for addressing commu-

nity problems such as workforce development issues, economic viability for the region, and the rising costs of healthcare. Further, stakeholders found the high percentage, approximately 71%, of free and reduced lunch in RCPS to be heart-wrenching. According to one of the project’s managers, the idea of the community garden as a means to “grow healthy, edu-

cated workers” was both exciting and inspiring. So, these individuals rallied around the idea, as she expressed it, of “connecting kids to their world and their future” by encouraging them to study the environment, food sources, and the impact of their daily decisions, while creating a bridge to higher education.

In the spirit of building community, the garden serves as a means for promoting social justice and the well-being of individuals, as well as the collective community.

### Curriculum

From a teaching and learning perspective, a master gardener, Anna Bebe Sachs, designed and teaches the FFT curriculum. Special care was taken to create a program specific to Southwest Virginia’s regional biosphere and, of course, in alignment with the

Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs) and STEM-H education. The curriculum takes a cross-disciplinary, hands-on approach in the integration of sciences, agriculture, math, and health and nutrition. Classroom components are further enhanced by field trips to working farms, service projects, and guest speakers.

More specifically, the program is offered as the most popular elective at JMMS where sixth graders have the option of taking it for nine weeks while seventh and eighth graders opt for a semester-long enrollment. One third of the time is spent on ecology, one third on agriculture, and the last third on nutrition. Sixth graders focus mainly on creating book jackets, which allows them to use higher-ordered thinking skills such as analyzing and creating for reading and descriptive writing about gardening concepts. These book jackets summarized their learning in a way that was both attractive and descriptive. Seventh graders deal with concepts such as planting depths, horizons of soil, the effect of sugar in the

body, understanding proteins, ecology in regard to weather patterns, and why oceans matter. Eighth graders dive into the microbiology in each horizon, companion planting, crop rotation, planting for yield, and delineating between vegetables and grain varieties like corn.

From a cross-disciplinary perspective, the curriculum explores mathematics through the integration of fractions, ratios, proportions, and decimals. Using the four-square writing method, the students respond to journal prompts and write in accordance with the English department's rubrics. As far as history goes, sixth graders explore growing a "Three Sisters" garden; seventh graders explore the Victory Gardens of World War II; and eighth graders delve into food security in terms of civics and culture with a tie to current events. Thus, in a world where kids have become extremely picky eaters, yet maintain a skewed concept of food, the FFT curriculum and community garden offers a well-rounded educational launch for growing a healthy, educated workforce.

### Recommendations to Others

An early intention of FFT was and continues to be modeling and replication. With this in mind, there are lessons learned that may benefit the instigation and implementation of similar programs for other agriculture teachers. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Consider potential locations for the community/classroom garden, keeping in mind the importance of a viable water source, the regional ecosystem, growing seasons, and year-round management of the garden. Examine the concept of the garden from a social context and devise an understanding of it as both a student space and an after

school community space. Additionally, teacher quality and qualifications are important to the overall project success.

- Take the time to clarify the vision and mission for the community garden. This clarification needs to include a clear assignment and delineation of roles, ownership, and accountability. Additionally, prior to breaking ground, all necessary funds, philanthropy dollars, fundraising and contractual agreements should be secured upfront. The ideal way to ensure the aforementioned would be via a structured business plan.
- Examine various sources of data and leverage the expertise various stakeholders offer such as your K-12 district, community colleges, extension departments, and business partners. Challenges will arise; hence, planning for the unexpected is key to the implementation and sustainability of the garden. Use Q&A and brainstorming sessions with project and community partners to identify potential challenges and obstacles and potential solutions.
- Maintain open lines of communication with all stakeholders, including the community. Position the garden for regular showcasing to encourage continued engagement and stimulate steady resources as needed.

The concept of a community garden is one that attracts the

interest and altruism of diverse individuals at various levels. Many share the sentiments of the parent liaison who expressed being a "huge fan of nutrition... eating well...no fast foods" and believe that such a school program encourages students to think about their future and developing healthy habits. Accordingly, launching a school-based, community garden provides an excellent opportunity to continue the farm-to-table movement and foster strong ties within the community.



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## Service Learning: “Friends” Make it Real

by Joy Morgan

As I began to plan what I should incorporate in my “Teaching Diverse Learners” course at North Carolina State University, I considered many different topics and approaches. One of these, service learning, engages students in an experiential setting while promoting student learning, student development, and community engagement (Bringle & Hatcher, 2000; Markus, Howard, & King, 1993; Sax & Astin, 1997). “Yes!” I exclaimed as I thought about how this could be implemented into the “Teaching Diverse Learners” course. This was exactly what I had been looking for as a way to establish a hands-on project that would also promote community engagement.

### Why Service Learning?

After surveying Agricultural Education graduates from our department, feedback showed that preservice teachers needed more training related to working with students who required modifications or had special learning needs. To meet this need, a course was designed to help prepare preservice teachers with the knowledge and skill sets needed to be successful when teaching diverse populations. Within the class section of the course, preservice teachers are exposed to the history and education of diverse populations, while emphasizing the planning and

facilitation of teaching strategies to assist those with special learning needs in the agriculture classroom. In hopes of providing preservice teachers with a hands-on experience, I sought partners who would allow college students the opportunity to teach agriculture-based lessons to individuals with special needs during the lab setting. After contacting many programs and groups, I selected two organizations that best met the objectives of the course and provided the welcoming feeling that was needed for the inexperienced preservice teachers.

The Reality Center in Durham, North Carolina, is a program designed for teens and adults with and without developmental disabilities. In addition to the Reality Center, preservice teachers also visit Governor Morehead School for the Blind, in Raleigh, North Carolina, to work with students who have visual impairments. The Reality Center uses the term “friends” to refer to the participants, and we have adopted the use of that term, as well, for both locations. This term creates an inclusive, safe environment where everyone is a friend. Friends at both locations present a range in needs and disabilities allowing our preservice agricul-

tural education teachers to gain valuable experience in modifying lesson plans and activities. This setting combines community engagement with student development that contribute to valuable learning for future teachers.

### How It Works

Prior to the first visit, it is extremely important to provide training for our preservice teachers and discuss their concerns and fears related to working with students with special needs. For many college students, this is their first experience working with a friend who is blind or has a low-incidence disability. Teaching a friend who is completely blind about the parts of the flower can be a daunting task, but preservice teachers quickly learn how to teach using senses other than sight. After each lab, preservice teachers completed a journal entry reflecting on the activities and the experience. These reflections included overall thoughts, A-HA! moments, and improvements needed for future lessons.





During the first visit, as the instructor, I led the group through the agriculture-based lesson displaying the format of how future lessons should be planned. After the first visit, preservice teachers were divided into groups and assigned a lab session where they

around what has been donated to the program. Some of the completed activities included: building a compost bin out of pallets, making bird feeders, planting vegetable and flower gardens, building raised beds, and making ice cream. All lessons included an

For many college students, this is their first experience working with a friend who is blind or has a low-incidence disability.

were the “teacher” in charge of developing and teaching a lesson to our friends. Those preservice teachers who were not teaching at the time, served as helpers and assist our friends in completing the lesson and activity. Materials for activities were donated from various individuals and community groups or paid for through departmental funds. Preservice teachers were challenged to keep the costs to a minimum (\$30/lab) and provide something for the friends to take home or something that will benefit the location. Often activities were designed

interest approach, use of questioning, and a hands-on activity similar to what a typical high school or middle school agriculture lesson would include.

#### **Benefits to the Students**

As an instructor, I personally feel it is part of my responsibility to help change perspectives and expand the viewpoints of my students. Preservice teachers build leadership skills and recognize community involvement when they create lesson plans, projects, and activities that incorporate components outside the agricultural education curricu-

lum. Below are several examples of quotes directly from preservice teacher’s reflections. As you read these quotes, you can see that preservice teachers gained more from this project than any lecture could provide:

- “No one ‘friend’ is similar. They all have a variety of strengths, gifts, talents, and knowledge. Realizing this made me think about all the great things these students could do in a classroom. It would be such a joy to teach them.”
- “The service-learning project has helped me realize the importance of teaching everyone not just the average and above average students because every student can be taught, you just have to adjust your teaching methods to fit each student. With this project, I have gained valuable skills to allow me to teach a variety of people in a variety of ways.”
- “These experiences that could not have been gained in the classroom allowed me to turn some of my biggest fears into something that I found to be heartwarming and fun. I now feel prepared to step out and be a better teacher.”
- “I was very nervous about talking and these kids came up and were really excited. It sort of made me think how I should be





more like that. On our last day when we left the Reality Center, all the friends were sad. It made me feel like I made a difference and learned a lot at the same time.”

- “The service learning project confirmed my desire to be an Agricultural Educator and make sure each student in my classroom was given the opportunity to learn.”

### Giving Back to the Community

This semester, our college Dean accompanied us on one of our trips and asked how I measured the success of the service-learning project. After going through the different measures such as pre- and post-surveys, journal reflections, tests, and modifications to lesson plans, I then said, “Look around..... what do you see? You see smiling faces, diverse groups working together, and a true sense of engagement. That is success to me.” As educators, we are called to provide more than instruction on a topic. We must also help develop citizens who understand the importance of giving back.

Words cannot express how much influence service-learning projects can have on your students. My agricultural education students realized that the relationships built through teaching were genuine, but most importantly, these preservice teachers will take the extra time needed to think about the modifications needed for each student, or friend, not

because it is a requirement, but because they care. This project consistently re-energizes not only the students, but also myself as an instructor when I read the final reports from students and see the smiles. As one preservice teacher stated, “I would highly recommend any student to participate in a service-learning project because the opportunity and knowledge you gain from it is priceless.”

### Final Thoughts

By taking a look at your curriculum and finding local partnerships in your community, service learning can be incorporated with strategic planning. The majority of the time was spent on training, reserving transportation, and picking up supplies. If you are unable to incorporate this directly into your curriculum, there is always the option of a Service Learning SAE project for students who would like to combine learning and community engagement.

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# *Developing Teamwork and Team Leadership Skills through Service Learning*

by *Laura Lemons and Jennifer Strong*

**A**s agricultural educators, we take pride in imploring innovative teaching methods that push our students beyond their self-perceived boundaries. We use our unique multi-faceted structure of classroom, supervised agriculture experience program, and student organization to help students develop those “soft skills” that are so sought after by employers. Our unique structure allows us to develop those skills, more aptly categorized as leadership skills, in our students on a personal level, but also allows them to learn how to function as an effective team member. It is the integration of experiential learning in team-based situations that makes our profession stand out among the core academic areas.

Inside and outside of the classroom, teamwork has become an increasingly popular method of work. Teachers as well as business leaders have found that although team-based structures take more time to complete a project, their synergy and mental diversity reaps significant and sustainable results. Not surprisingly, researchers and practitioners alike have found teamwork is not something that can be learned simply through reading and studying, but is rather a set of skills that must be developed through practice. Fortunately for agricultural educators, the FFA Career and Leadership Develop-

ment event structure requires the application of teamwork among our FFA participants. But how can we incorporate that experience of working and leading in a team into our classroom instruction to make it a more robust and real-world simulation? Service-learning projects can provide the opportunity to integrate team leadership skills, experiential learning, and personal leadership skills while simultaneously reaching course and lesson objectives.

Team leadership skills include those skills that make us more effective as a team member. In a true team, there is not just one identified leader. All members of the team perform leader and follower roles. This is what truly changes a group into a team. One of the core skills students should understand is the development process for a team. There are several models of team development to choose from when teaching students about teams, but one of the most functional is the Tuckman Model. Tuckman’s model says that teams form, storm, norm, perform, and adjourn. Within these stages, team members must get to know one another and start building team cohesion, understand and perform conflict management techniques, encourage motivation among team members, be conscious of group-think, engage in problem solving while completing their task, and evaluate and celebrate their results. It is fundamental that students participating in teams recog-

nize the importance of the stages of development and are capable of facilitating appropriate team development so they can be successful. Team leaders are expected to do all of this while also managing diversity among team members, balancing power and social influence, and encouraging creativity within the team as they strive to accomplish their goals.

Service learning can be a particularly useful and effective teaching tool for a variety of skills in agricultural education. In addition to any technical skill you may wish to teach through a service-learning project, you can easily incorporate team leadership lessons to complement and enhance your students’ development. When considering a service-learning project for team leadership development, you must first consider whether or not the project is appropriate for teamwork. Minimally, the project should be substantial enough to provide ample work for all students to participate. It is essential that the tasks involved in the project are highly interdependent, requiring students to work together. If not, your team will easily fall back into a group mentality where it becomes a group of individuals just working in close proximity to one another.

In addition, assessments and evaluations should align with clear learning objectives and reflect the combined emphasis on the technical task as well as students’ teamwork. Remember that

the experiential learning model involves three additional components besides the experience to complete the learning cycle. Your instruction must focus on guiding students to reflect on their experiences in their teams, articulate their learning from those experiences, and apply that learning to future situations. This reflection is what turns a service project into service learning.

Finally, teachers must adequately prepare to support students through a service learning project. The following are practical tips for implementing service-learning projects to develop students' team leadership skills:

Service learning is more than just community service. Projects must be designed so that students are able to learn and practice leadership skills. The amount and type of work must require students to work together in order to accomplish their goals. When appropriate, place students into teams where their individual strengths and abilities will force them to work together and add to the holistic team experience.

Foster strong relationships with community partners. Students are learning. They will make mistakes. Community partners must understand these students are learning, not performing simple community service. They must be willing and able to support the students throughout the project. Giving students the responsibility of communicating with the community partner allows the partner to get to know the students as people, not just worker bees.

Provide ample structure in the beginning to help students build

cohesion in their teams. One fundamental understanding of teamwork is that teams use most of their time developing their team relations and only a small portion of their time completing the task. Help students prevent overlooking the necessary team development steps by assigning specific tasks. Some examples include requiring them to spend social time together without working on their project, guiding them in identifying individual team members' role and responsibilities, articulating positive team norms, practicing open communication, and writing a team contract. We recommend including a termination clause that outlines specific measures teams must take in order to fire a team member as well as the consequences of being fired.

Service-learning projects must be given as much time as possible to develop. Student teams can be expected to encounter Tuckman's stages of team development (forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning). Even though your students may be familiar with each other, learning to work together in a team will be challenging and take time. The actual work of the project should not be rushed, imposing upon the team's development. The full semester or year should be utilized to allow for maximum learning and application.

Finally, recognize all learning. Some of our most impactful learning occurs when we fall short of reaching our goals. It is important to remember that the ultimate objective is developing students' abilities to effectively lead and work in teams. Small accomplishments toward the project goals should be celebrated in addition

to the ultimate outcome, whether or not it achieves the stated goal. Personal and team evaluation on the process as well as the outcome is imperative. Be sure to share student learning with the community partners and team projects with your program stakeholders.

Giving our students the opportunity to apply team leadership knowledge and skills beyond contest season will enhance their abilities to work in a team. Service-learning projects can expose students to a more realistic work situation where they must apply and reflect on what they know and work with different people to be successful. These projects also come with the benefits of engaging the community and creating positive exposure for agricultural education programs. If implemented with ample preparation, service-learning projects can provide students otherwise unattainable experience in developing valuable leadership and teamwork skills.



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# *Service Learning: An Active and Innovative Learning Strategy for Today's Workforce*

by David Agole, Meghan Tanner,  
and Connie D. Baggett

**S**ervice learning is an innovative strategy that is rapidly expanding experience for learners in higher education institutions across the United States. It has become a popular teaching strategy at all levels of education (Bowen, 2010; Celio, Durlak & Dymnicki, 2011). Service learning is a volunteer experience that contributes to the betterment of peoples' lives by meeting their needs, and in return yields positive outcomes for the student involved. One student said, "Ser-



*Maryam Felemban's service learning in a faith organization*

vice learning as a volunteer practice is the best thing to do for others, but also the best thing to do for oneself." Therefore, service learning links students' learning with organizations and the community for mutual benefit (Greenwood, 2015). Service learning promotes community engagement and development of morals for

interactions suitable for work (Waldner, McGorry & Widener, 2012; Greenwood, 2015). However, in order for service learning to achieve tangible outcomes, it needs to be organized with structured activities that are rewarding to the needs and interests of the organization and/or community.

## **Service learning as an active practice**

At Pennsylvania State University, service learning constitutes one of the major components of a level-two course, AEE 201 Interpersonal Skills for Tomorrow's Leaders, taught in the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education. This course introduces students to fundamental leadership theories while engaging them in service learning and exposing them to diverse perspectives in order to develop their leadership skills. The purpose of this course is to aid students in becoming capable leaders, while developing their interpersonal skills that will help them succeed in their professional lives. Universities and colleges produce graduates to meet the knowledge and skill gap in the world of work. However, workforce education and training institutions often neglect to develop leadership and interpersonal skills, which are keys for organizations to achieve high productivity of goods and services.

The course is offered every semester because of its high demand with the minimum student enrollment being 35 students. Students are given the opportunity to scan the community for organizations they would like to partner with for service learning. Most students choose organizations that pursue activities unrelated to their majors. Students have conducted service-learning projects with non-profit, public, and private organizations. This is because the basic principles taught in the course are leadership and interpersonal skills, which can be learned in any organization regardless of its compatibility with the student's major. Each student identifies an organization of his/her choice, interviews a leader, completes self-assessments based on their own reflections of their skills, and shares their experiences with the class.

The students spend a minimum of 15 hours at the organization based on the flexible arrangement and schedules of each individual. In a plenary meeting, each student makes a presentation of their service learning experience based on the personal objectives, activities carried out, and reflection on the key lessons learned from the service learning practicum. Students are required to document and share their positive and negative experiences. Therefore, service learning is a core component of the AEE 201 course, contributing to 40 percent of the course requirements.



*Mahdi Almaslami planting tree seedlings at Penn State Arboretum.*

Interpersonal skills are an aggregate of competencies, values, and attitudes. People are required to work well and interact well with others in any environment to facilitate the performance of activities, tasks and assignments. Interpersonal skills are developed through learning at formal and informal levels and include self-esteem; interpersonal communication; developing teamwork skills; problem solving and decision making; enhancing ethical behavior; resolving conflicts with other people; motivating and helping others to develop and grow; and cross-cultural relations and diversity.

In formal learning, interpersonal skills tend to be neglected despite being the core of people's performance in any environment.



*Bernie Mowry cleaning dog pens during her service-learning project.*

These interpersonal skills are taught practically with a focus on daily situations at school, home, teams, class, organizations or any environment in which individuals interact.

In an attempt to make teaching and learning relevant to the needs of the community and the world of work, teachers should use service learning because it takes learning to the community where students will go to work. Students need to be taught how to constructively interact with other people in any environment to develop positive attitudes toward other people with respect to cultural diversities, while working together to achieve the highest productivity in groups, organizations, and the community. Therefore, secondary schools need to adopt service learning as hands-on teaching and learning practices to address holistic learning that focuses on cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains of learning.

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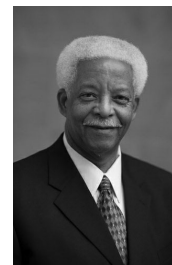
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## *Idaho FFA is Living to Serve at State FFA Events*

by Jaysa Fillmore

**W**e all know the FFA motto- “Learning to Do, Doing to Learn, Earning to Live, Living to Serve.” Agriculture teachers are very proficient at helping their students put the first three phrases into action, but that last one sometimes eludes us. Sure, we can coordinate a highway clean-up project or donate some leftover greenhouse stock to the senior center, but how do we truly help students realize what it means to be “Living to Serve”? How do we get students excited about service and help them put that into action? The Idaho FFA Association has made an effort in the past two years to get students amped up about service and help them learn something along the way.

In 2015, the Idaho FFA Association hosted the National FFA Officer Team during their annual Experience State Week. During this event, the Association planned a special conference for chapter, district, and state FFA leaders called Rise Above. During this conference, the National FFA Officer team was able to hone their workshop presentations and Idaho FFA members were able to learn from them in return. Instead of the traditional “FFA dance” that occupies time at many FFA activities, Casey Zufelt, past Idaho FFA Executive Director, and I planned a service learning project.

What started as brainstorming, “What if we could...” quickly became 8,000 pounds of bulk potatoes sorted, packed, and donated to the Idaho Food Bank. The potatoes were donated by Idaho farmers, the produce boxes were donated by a local FFA chapter, and the idea came to fruition. During this event, students were prompted to use several social media platforms to thank the donors, tag Idaho and National FFA accounts, and promote the Idaho Food Bank. Before students began, a director from the Food Bank gave the 100 FFA members in attendance an overview of the stifling need for food assistance in the state and gave FFA members actionable ideas to take back to their home chapters and districts to continue the hunger initiative once they got home.

After the Rise Above conference in January of 2015, the Idaho FFA Association knew they weren’t done when it came to large scale service projects.

The State Leadership Conference (SLC) was coming up fast so Casey and I, along with some college interns from the University of Idaho, coordinated a Day of Service event during the conference. Service projects were organized at 15 locations throughout the SLC host community of Twin Falls, Idaho, for 528 FFA members from 33 FFA chapters.

Some valuable lessons were learned that day not only by students, but also by the Association. Students learned that service could be fun and even a few hours spent were well worth it. They learned that state FFA activities were about more than just dances and competitions. They learned that state FFA activities could be a place to give of their time and gain new ideas to bring home to their own communities to work toward the goal of Living to Serve.

The Idaho FFA Association also learned that sometimes the



learning part of the service is more valuable than the actual service being completed. Sure, the inmates from the county jail could have burned weeds at the Idaho Farm and Ranch Museum, but would FFA members have heard the incredible oral history of our state's agricultural industry as told by elderly curators? Would FFA members have developed teamwork and problem solving skills and had the opportunity to use their leadership and agricultural skills in the process?

One of the service projects planned was a children's story-time held on the campus of the local community college. Flyers were passed out at local schools and soccer fields and the event was advertised on the radio, but the activity was an epic failure! There wasn't a single family that showed up. The Association learned that if you want to reach children- you have to go where the children are! Instead of just giving up on the activity, we moved it to the local Boys and Girls Club the next year and improved the experience ten-fold.

Other service projects included trail maintenance on local walking paths and hiking trails, volunteering at the food bank and Habitat Re-Store, sorting donations at the Salvation Army, painting buildings at the county historical museum and a homeless shelter, and spring landscape cleaning at the fairgrounds and hospital. Overall, the 2015 Idaho FFA Day of Service was a success and many chapters brought home the spirit of service in addition to their ideas of new and fun service learning projects



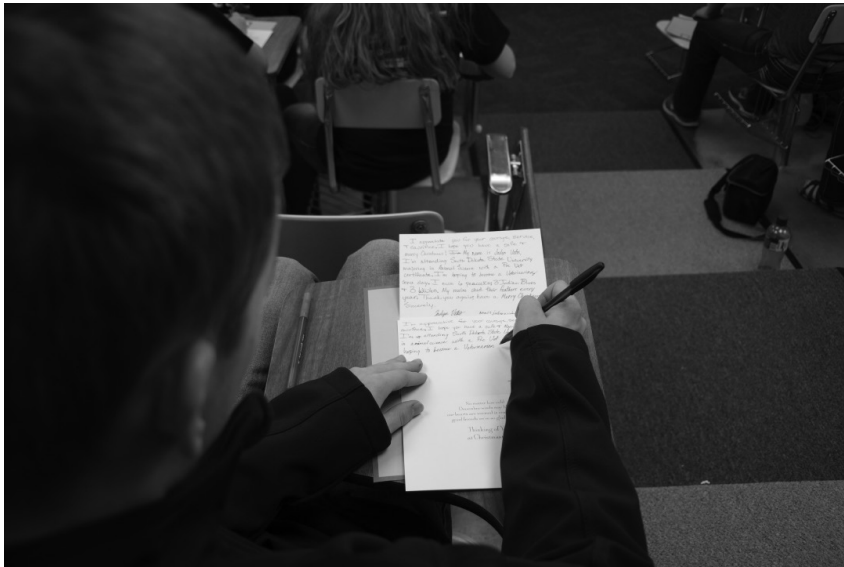
that they could complete in their home communities.

In the beginning of this effort, volunteers and agriculture teachers completed most of the work in coordinating the service learning projects. In 2016, the Idaho FFA Association had the opportunity to hire a part-time coordinator to facilitate the large service projects at state events. It was then that this effort was elevated to the next level. I was hired as the Idaho FFA Service Development Coordinator with my first task being to get rid of more FFA dances! In all seriousness, we did replace the FFA dance at the annual 212/360 conference with a service learning activity, but getting rid of the dance was not the main focus. We wanted to give the Idaho FFA

members another opportunity to be excited about service and experience what "Living to Serve" means.

Following the leadership of National FFA, the Idaho FFA Association again focused on solving hunger in Idaho. At the state's two 212/360 Conferences, speakers were brought in from the Idaho Food Bank and the United Way to enlighten FFA members about the serious problem of hunger in the state. FFA members were armed with statistics regarding hunger in their home communities and brainstormed local organizations that address that issue. FFA members were grouped into "families" and were given a weekly budget. Using that budget and a list of recent grocery

We wanted to give the Idaho FFA members another opportunity to be excited about service and experience what "Living to Serve" means.



Girls Club, and Project Rudolph where students wrote letters and cards to U.S. service members stationed overseas.

The Idaho FFA Association's efforts to helping its members Live to Serve have only just begun. We hope to keep the spirit of service alive in our state and help FFA members take the experiences and ideas from the large state activities back to their local chapters. Idaho FFA is proud to be Living to Serve!

store prices, FFA members had to figure out how to feed their whole family. They could even visit a mock food pantry and mock government assistance office where they could supplement their budget. This activity prompted "families" with large budgets to donate to the mock food pantry. Many students didn't realize that the weekly income of families in their county was so low.

After the hunger awareness activity, FFA members had the opportunity to take action and help make a difference for hungry people of Idaho. At both conferences, students made dry soup mixes from donated beans, peas, lentils, which chapters took home and donated to local food pantries. Members at the 212/360 Conference in eastern Idaho also packed 8,000 pounds of donated potatoes into five pound sacks for the Idaho Food Bank. In the end, the FFA members didn't even realize they missed out on an FFA dance.

This past April, Idaho FFA members were again given the opportunity to sign up for the Day of Service at State Leadership Conference. It was amazing to hear from FFA advisors how their students begged them to sign up for the Day of Service again because they had such a great time last year. This year, the event expanded to 20 service sites and included 550 students and advisors from 36 FFA chapters. An exciting addition to the 2016 Day of Service event was a food box packing activity funded by a National FFA State Hunger Grant. FFA members packed and delivered 600 boxes of food for the Twin Falls Salvation Army. Many of the FFA members left the Day of Service asking for details about the next Idaho FFA service project. Other new service sites included local animal rescues and shelters, a refugee service center, the local United Way book drive, the new and improved children's agriculture fair at the Boys and



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## Using “Critical Service Learning” to Open Students’ Eyes

by *Richie Roberts, M. Craig Edwards, and Jon W. Ramsey*

Practitioners of service learning have recently articulated that connecting community service to classroom objectives uniquely positions students to address social justice and equality (Reed & Butler, 2015). Others reject this claim by arguing the traditional approach to service learning is outdated and does not open students’ eyes to the many inequities of the world (Butin, 2015). Pompa (2002) explained:

Unless facilitated with great care and consciousness, “service-learning” can unwittingly become an exercise in patronization. In a society full with hierarchical structures and patriarchal philosophies, service-learning’s potential danger is for it to become the very thing it seeks to avoid. (p. 68)

Because of this threat, some educators have advocated for an alternative approach called critical service learning (Mitchell, 2015). Critical service learning encompasses the key features of service learning; however, it also extends the pedagogy’s aims by emphasizing activism as a way to promote social change while also addressing oppression, power, and privilege in communities (Butin, 2015). For example, Cipolle (2010) encouraged practitioners to use critical service learning to embolden students to “question the hidden bias and

assumptions of race, class, and gender; and work to change the social and economic system for equity and justice” (p. 5).

Despite these broad explanations, understanding the nuanced differences among the terms community service, service learning, and critical service learning remains difficult to grasp for many teachers who aspire to use the methods. This article seeks to distinguish critical service learning as a pedagogy while also describing how school-based, agricultural educators can effectively deliver critical service learning experiences.

To begin, it is important to understand that community service, service learning, and critical service learning each have an important space in our education landscape. For example, the literature demonstrates that each approach, when used appropriately, can improve student learning (Cipolle, 2010; Clayton, Bringle, & Hatcher, 2012; Niemi, Hepburn, & Chapman, 2000). However, confusion seems to exist regarding how to differentiate among these pedagogical tools. Given this lack of understanding, we have developed the following examples as a framework on which to build our discussion:

- Students testing the water quality of a local river during class are learning or concurrently applying their learning assuming water quality testing was part of the curriculum.
  - Students collecting water samples from a local river in class, analyzing the specimen, drawing conclusions, and reporting implications and recommendations to community members is service learning.
  - Students circulating petitions after conducting a class experiment and discovering that water quality issues might negatively affect the lives of citizens is critical service learning.
- As depicted in these examples, critical service learning reimagines service learning by embedding an element of activism. Therefore, students, teachers, and even community members become agents of change seeking to address complicated issues in their local communities. To reach this aim, educators must stir a critical consciousness in their students (Freire, 2003). Critical consciousness is raised when students deeply understand social issues, themselves, others, as well as their role in creating change (Cipolle, 2010).
- Students restoring a riverbank after school or during their free time are providing community service.

Advocates of critical service learning endorse several techniques to cultivate students' critical consciousness. However, perhaps the most popular method is to embed expectations for students to engage in critical conversations throughout all aspects of the experience. For example, when situations arise that illuminate inequality or the marginalization of individuals, all activity should stop and students' attention should be redirected to emphasize the issue. Then, to foster a critical dialogue and promote activism, educators should (a) clearly explain what is happening, (b) connect the matter to the larger social and historical context, (c) ask students to consider how they might be contributing to this problem, and (d) have students contemplate how they might be able to address this issue through their coursework (Butin, 2015). To move these theoretical offerings into an agriculture teacher's practice, the following section draws on Roberts', Terry's, Brown's, and Ramsey's (2016) work to feature the use of critical service learning through an illustrative case involving the National FFA Days of Service.

### **Illustrative Case – The National FFA Days of Service**

Critical service learning can be used in an array of contexts. To demonstrate this, the following example highlights its use at the National FFA Days of Service. This particular event attracts approximately 1,200 FFA members from across the United States, who hope to make a positive difference in their communities. Using this example, we attempt to establish how

school-based, agricultural educators could reimagine the event through use of critical service learning.

Boomerville FFA Advisor Ms. Brooks is a big fan of the National FFA Days of Service. It seems to be a way to bring her chapter's National FFA Convention experience full circle. However, Ms. Brooks believes she can make the event even more impactful for students. In previous years, she has randomly selected a service site. However, she now hopes to promote more student buy-in and autonomy. Therefore, in the weeks leading up to the National FFA Convention, she has students research sites to determine which ones might best emphasize their coursework while also motivating them to make a positive difference. Ultimately, the students choose a site that will allow them to build an urban garden to address food insecurity. After registering for the event, Ms. Brooks decides to make a few adjustments to her curricular plans to emphasize this issue. Therefore, the event will serve as an exciting application of student learning in her courses.

A few weeks later, as the Boomerville FFA Chapter arrives at the service site, Ms. Brooks quickly reviews the learning objectives she has taught in regard to urban gardening. She also takes a few moments to highlight the social and historical factors currently influencing current hunger and other food insecurity trends in the United States. As a result, Ms. Brooks notes that her students seem to be approaching the event with a more serious and determined outlook than in previous years.

After working to establish the garden for an hour, event coordinators announce it is time for a 15-minute break. Ms. Brooks decides to capitalize on this time to help her students understand their role in creating change. Therefore, she asks students to reflect on three questions: (a) What inequities currently exist in the United States' food system? (b) How might poor, urban citizens be oppressed by the current food system structure? and (c) How could they be contributing to this problem? As students discuss their responses, Ms. Brooks notices they seem to more deeply understand their efforts while also becoming reinvigorated and impassioned to complete the experience.

As students finish their assigned tasks a couple of hours later, Ms. Brooks decides to meet with her students for a final reflection. During this time, she listens to her students' key takeaways from the event. Then, she asks them to consider how they might be able to continue to address this issue through advocacy efforts when they return home. Ultimately, students decide to develop a public service announcement on their local radio station to educate the general public on this issue while also serving as advocates for change.

### **Conclusion**

As depicted in the case illustration, critical service learning can be applied through broad, inclusive, and justifiable contexts. As a result, this reimagined instructional method holds exciting potential to open students' eyes. For example, by stirring critical conversations through service-learning activities, educators

could use this approach to help students understand societal inequities while also promoting activism and reinforcing principles of agricultural science.

Although employing critical service learning can be uncomfortable for some educators because of its focus on social change, Schultz (2006) argued that “social justice cannot activate itself. Rather, it takes the concerted effort of interdependent stakeholders to transform social justice theory into service-learning practice” (p. 34). Therefore, creating service-learning experiences that promote advocacy and students’ voice might provide a dynamic space for agricultural education programs to instill students with a passion for social justice, engaged citizenship, and communitarianism (Etzioni, 1993).

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# Subject Index—Volume 88

## July/August 2015 – May/June 2016

### High School Teachers Reflecting on the Past While Looking to the Future

July/August 2015

*Standing on the Shoulders of Giants: Learning from the Past to Improve the Future*

Harry N. Boone, Jr

*The Circle Model - Past, Present, and Future*

Scott Stone

*Educating All for the Betterment of Agriculture*

Sherry A. Heishman

*A “Back to the Future” Moment*

Krista Pontius

*I Became a Vocational Agriculture Teacher by Chance and by Choice*

Virgil Wilkins

*Two Brothers Views on Agriculture Education*

Dean Swafford and Dan Swafford

*The Changing Roles of a High School Agricultural Education Teacher*

William C. West

*“All I have is a \$100 bill,” and Other Reflections from an Ag Teacher*

Cory Wedel

*Agricultural Education in Greenbrier County (WV), Specifically at Lewisburg High School*

William Alvin Porterfield

*Helping Teachers Teach The “Future of Agriculture”*

Dan Swafford

*Take Two*

Lisa Summers

*“Go Confidently in the Directions of Your Dreams”*

Eleanor Porter

### State Supervisors and Teacher Educators Reflecting on the Past While Looking to the Future

Sept/Oct 2015

*Does Agricultural Education Have a Future?*

Harry N. Boone, Jr.

*Reflecting on Three Decades in State Leadership*

Nancy J. Trivette

*Some Things Never Change*

Karen C. Hutchison

*Our History Doesn't Matter Unless We Have a Future*

Matt Chaliff

*Food for Thought... Are We Still Providing Students with Life-long Knowledge and Skills?*

Stacy A. Gartin

*Reflecting on the Past While Looking to the Future*

James Knight

*Trendy or New Teaching Aids in the Future will NOT Replace the Fundamentals of Good Teaching*

John R. Crunkilton

*Modern Day Interpersonal Skills in Agricultural Education*

Taylor Cooper

*How the Three Circle Model Develops 21st Century Skills in Students*

Erin Yoest and Miranda Kane

**Teacher Educators Reflecting on the Past While  
Looking to the Future**

**Nov/Dec 2015**

*Reflections on Six Years as Editor of The Agricultural  
Education Magazine*

Harry N. Boone, Jr.

*John C. Ewing, Editor, The Agricultural Education  
Magazine (2016-2018)*

*In the Year 2040*

L. H. Newcomb

*Our Future as Influenced by Our Past*

John Hillison

*Reflecting on New Directions for Agricultural Educa-  
tion*

R. Kirby Barrick

*Pathways: Past and Future*

Robert Martin

*A Silver Mirror and a Crystal Ball - Reflecting on the  
Past While Looking to the Future*

Glenn Shinn

*Be of Good Courage*

C. H. Lane

*Which Way Vocational Agriculture?*

J. A. Lenke

*Editors 1929 – 2018*

*July-August 2016*

**New Year: New Ideas in Agricultural Education**

**Jan/Feb 2016**

*New Beginnings*

John C. Ewing

*2016: A Year of Innovation*

Laura Rice

*Here by the Owl*

Jason Bullock

*Supporting Our FFA Advisors*

Nina Crutchfield

*Harnessing the Power of Industry to Invigorate the  
Classroom*

Stacie Turnbull

*New Year, New Ideas: Let's Ignite, Inspire, and Inno-  
vate Others*

Lori Trovato

*Ancient Agriculture in Agricultural Education*

Thomas Hart

*New Perspectives on Teaching GMOs*

Michael J. Martin, Kellie Enns, and Kathleen Stewart

*Teach Local: Incorporating the Local Food Movement  
into Agricultural Education Curriculum*

Sarah LaRose

*Citizen Science--Inquiry in Action*

Darla J. Romberger

## Safety in Agricultural Education Laboratories

March/April 2016

*Student Success through Laboratory Education*

John C. Ewing

*Safety Throughout our Agriculture Education Facilities and Beyond*

Ben Swan

*Central Columbia High School Career Pathway Model and Facility Renovation*

Douglas Brown and Curtis Turner

*Safety in an Agricultural Biotechnology Facility*

John Siefert and Adam Serfass

*Aquaculture*

Tyler Cremeans

*Engaging Community Members in “creating a culture of safety” for Supervised Agricultural Experiences*

Michael Pate and Rebecca Lawver

*Preparing Students for Risk Assessment of Work Sites Used for Supervised Agricultural Experiences*

Rebecca Lawver and Michael Pate

*School Farm Safety: Avoiding or Being the Headlines*

Steve Grambril

*High School Farm Safety: Risk Management or Accident?*

Michael Maderos

*Securing STEM Dollars for CASE and Agricultural Education*

Melanie Bloom and Matthew Eddy

## Utilizing Technology in Our Programs

May/June 2016

*Reflecting on 20 Years of Technological Change*

Wendy Warner

*Eight Simple Rules to Rockin' the Tech-Ed*

Amanda Ferguson

*Utilizing Geocaching for Hands-on Learning*

Christina Slone

*More than “Words with Friends” Applications for iPad Integration into the Classroom*

Elizabeth Noblett

*Schoolology: Instructional Management for the Busy Ag Teacher*

Chad Holloman

*Prioritize, Plan, and Maintain Motivation with Trello*

Nicole Ray

*Move Feedback and Student Learning to the Forefront with Doctopus*

Nicole Ray and Robert Strong

*Padlet: A Graffiti Wall for Today's Agriculture Teacher*

Meghan Wood

*A Cross-Contextual Consideration: The Agricultural Education Profession and Free-Lance Economy:*

*How Unorthodox Ideas May Potentially Promote Growth*

Helen Barela

*Are we truly serving all? Keys to making a positive difference in the lives of ALL students*

Stacy Vincent, Quentin Tyler, and Tiffany Harper

# Author Index—Volume 88

## July/August 2015 – May/June 2016

|                                      |                                      |                                     |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Barela, Helen.....May/June 2016      | Lane, C. H.....Nov/Dec 2015          | Trivette, Nancy J.....Sept/Oct 2015 |
| Barrick, R. Kirby.....Nov/Dec 2015   | LaRose, Sarah.....Jan/Feb 2016       | Trovato, Lori.....Jan/Feb 2016      |
| Bloom, Melanie....March/April 2016   | Lawver, Rebecca...March/April 2016   | Turnball, Stacie.....Jan/Feb 2016   |
| Boone, Jr., Harry.....July/Aug 2015  | Lenke, J. A.....Nov/Dec 2015         | Turner, Curtis.....March/April 2016 |
| Sept/Oct 2015                        | Maderos, Michael..March/April 2016   | Tyler, Quentin.....May/June 2016    |
| Nov/Dec 2015                         | Martin, Michael, J.....Jan/Feb 2016  | Vincent, Stacy.....May/June 2016    |
| Brown, Douglas....March/April 2016   | Martin, Robert.....Nov/Dec 2015      | Warner, Wendy.....May/June 2016     |
| Bullock, Jason.....Jan/Feb 2016      | Newcomb, L.H.....Nov/Dec 2015        | Wedel, Cory.....July/Aug 2015       |
| Chaliff, Matt.....Sept/Oct 2015      | Noblett, Elizabeth.....May/June 2016 | West, William C.....July/Aug 2015   |
| Cooper, Taylor.....Sept/Oct 2015     | Pate, Michael.....March/April 2016   | Wilkins, Virgil.....July/Aug 2015   |
| Cremeans, Tyler....March/April 2016  | Pontius, Krista.....July/Aug 2015    | Wood, Meghan.....May/June 2016      |
| Crunkilton, John R.....Sept/Oct 2015 | Porter, Eleanor.....July/Aug 2015    | Yoest, Erin.....Sept/Oct 2015       |
| Crutchfield, Nina.....Jan/Feb 2016   | Porterfield, W. A.....July/Aug 2015  |                                     |
| Eddy, Matthew.....March/April 2016   | Ray, Nicole.....May/June 2016        |                                     |
| Enns, Kelli.....Jan/Feb 2016         | May/June 2016                        |                                     |
| Ewing, John.....Nov/Dec 2015         | Rice, Laura.....Jan/Feb 2016         |                                     |
| Jan/Feb 2016                         | Romberger, Darla.....Jan/Feb 2016    |                                     |
| March/April 2016                     | Serfass, Adam.....March/April 2016   |                                     |
| Ferguson, Amanda....May/June 2016    | Shinn, Glenn.....Nov/Dec 2015        |                                     |
| Gartin, Stacy A. ....Sept/Oct 2015   | Siefert, John.....March/April 2016   |                                     |
| Grambil, Steve.....March/April 2016  | Slone, Christina.....May/June 2016   |                                     |
| Harper, Tiffany.....May/June 2016    | Stewart, Kathleen.....Jan/Feb 2016   |                                     |
| Hart, Thomas.....Jan/Feb 2016        | Stone, Scott.....July/Aug 2015       |                                     |
| Heishman, Sherry.....July/Aug 2015   | Strong, Robert.....May/June 2016     |                                     |
| Hillison, John.....Nov/Dec 2015      | Summers, Lisa.....July/Aug 2015      |                                     |
| Holloman, Chad.....May/June 2016     | Swafford, Dan.....July/Aug 2015      |                                     |
| Hutchinson, Karen C...Sept/Oct 2015  | July/Aug 2015                        |                                     |
| Kane, Miranda.....Sept/Oct 2015      | Swafford, Dean.....July/Aug 2015     |                                     |
| Knight, James.....Sept/Oct 2015      | Swan, Ben.....March/April 2016       |                                     |

