

Reflections on Service-Learning Experiences in Agroecology



Dr. Michelle Schroeder-Moreno

Dept. of Crop & Soil Sciences, NC State
Agroecology & Sustainable Food Systems Major Director &
Asst. Director of Educational Programs,
Center for Environmental Farming Systems (CEFS)

Start with Why- Holistic Benefits

Students

- Extend classroom learning in real-world applications.
- Learn more about local/community issues
- Connect with community groups for internship, career path
- Develop communication skills, work with diverse groups
- Develop a sense of civic engagement, personal growth

Community

- Gain additional resources and support from university
- Educate students & university about community issues
- Build/solidify relationships with university
- Inject new energy, enthusiasm & perspectives in organization work

Faculty

- Promote active learning, engage students with diverse learning styles
- Increase student learning and engagement in class
- Foster new relationships with community and other engaged faculty
- Boost course enrollment by attracting engaged students

So Why Isn't Everyone Doing Service-Learning?

- It takes additional faculty time to establish & maintain relationships with community partners
- Need to understand & balance community group's needs with student learning
- Challenges with assessing student impacts and learning
- Reality check- not all students will love service-learning



Service-Learning Integrated into Agroecology Curriculum

Why service-learning with community gardens?

- Helps students actively engage with course material and understand food insecurity in their community.
- Hands-on production experience.
- Assist community partner and encourage students to volunteer after course.
- Integrate service-learning in the Agroecology curriculum

Introduction to Agroecology (CS 230)

- Large course (75 students/ fall semester + online)
- Diverse students from various majors
- Many with no experience gardening or working with community.

Advanced Agroecology (CS 430)

- Small course with lab
- Upper level class
- Previous service-learning
- Opportunities to apply course knowledge and work with community partners.

My Why for Service-Learning – Introduction to Agroecology (CS 230)

SL Course learning objectives:

- Demonstrate ability to communicate and apply agroecology knowledge in a real-world situation through working in the community.
- Gain awareness of civic engagement and how to apply classroom knowledge to community service.

Short term service learning experience (4 hrs/semester) with multiple ways of assessing student learning.

Opportunity for Scholarship: What are impacts on students from short service-learning community engagement?

Community Partner: Inter-Faith Food Shuttle Teaching Farm and Community Garden Programs



Students work as a class with IFFS Teaching Farm to double dig



Students work with youth to paint benches on Mayview community garden, CS 230 student highlighted in IFFS video

(<https://youtu.be/3MRfNqim0Hs>)

CS 230 Service-Learning- Planning and Process of Assessment

Service-Learning Assignment Details:

1. Meet with IFFS community partner
2. Students volunteer at community for 4 hrs/ semester
3. Pre- and post survey (*Likert Survey)
4. Reflective writings (3)-
Modified from "DEAL"

Ash,& Clayton, 2009. Journal of Applied Learning in Higher Education 1: 25-48.

Writing 1-Pre-Activity

Describe initial perceptions of activity and knowledge of food insecurity



Writing 2-Describe

Describe experience- who, what, when, where



Writing 3-Examine

Academic knowledge applied?



Writing 3-Articulated Learning

What did I learn? Why is this important? What will I do with this knowledge?

Service-Learning Nuggets- Lessons Learned



Develop clear expectations (& course learning objectives) for students and means of evaluation of service-learning.



Develop relationships and activities that are mutually beneficial for students and community partners.



Student reflection is key before and after activity

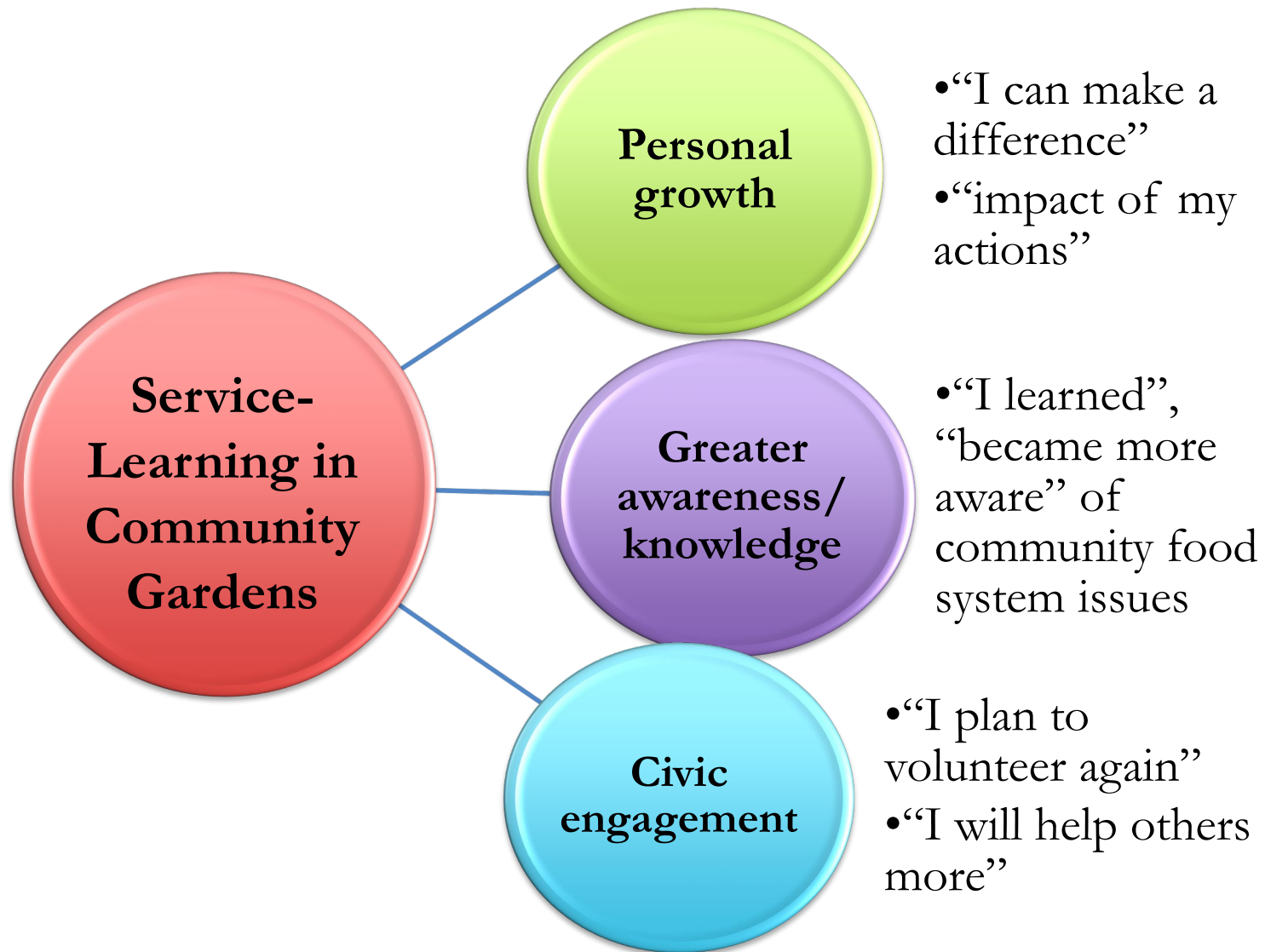


Shorter service-learning experiences are also valuable and can be integrated in larger classes

Articulated Learning Reflective Writing- Example

- “I learned that I could put someone else first for once, that I didn’t have to sleep in on my Saturdays and benefit someone else. **I went into this service learning project with a bad attitude. I talked about how unfair it was for my professor to “force” us to do manual labor and give back to the community. With this learning project I realized that even though I go to school full-time and work almost 35 hours per week, I can still make time to help others. I am going to try to make an attempt to help others more...and maybe if I do that it might benefit me in the long run**”

Articulated Learning Findings from Service-Learning



One Community Partner: The Inter-Faith Food Shuttle

Non-Traditional Food Bank

- Food bank focused on perishable foods
- Creates **innovative solutions and systems** to address the problems of hunger and food insecurity in our community
- Serves over **200 programs & agencies in 7 NC counties**
- Recovers and redistributes **+7 million pounds of food/year**
- **Teaching Farm & Community Garden Program-** program students worked with

