

An Exploratory Intrinsic Case Study of Food Insecurity Events in Positive Youth Development Organizations

Introduction/Need for Research

Food security is defined as “access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life” (USDA ERS, 2019). In 2018, more than 11% of U.S. households experienced food insecurity during the year (USDA ERS, 2019). In the state of [], this statistic is 12.8 %. However, in the most food insecure counties in the state (which are rural)-one in three children experience food insecurity (Cafer, Chapman, Freeman & Rikoon, 2016). These statistics are concerning, considering that the costs of food insecurity are not only physical and economic, but also social and psychological (Cafer, Chapman, Freeman & Rikoon, 2016). [] is a coalition agricultural groups that work together and promote the growth of [] agriculture. One project they coordinate is the Drive to Feed Kids. The goals of this project are to pack meals, collect perishable goods, and raise funds to help [] children who face food insecurity. [] 4-H and FFA members are involved with meal packing events and food drives that contribute to this project. The amount of food being packed or donated at these events is being reported, along with the number of youth participating. However, it is not known to what extent youth have agency in these events. Furthermore, it is not known how or if participating in these events impacts youths’ knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about food insecurity has not been explored. This research addresses AAAE Research Priority 4: How can teaching, research, and extension programs in agricultural leadership, education, and communication address complex interdisciplinary issues (ie. food insecurity)?

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The theoretical framework for this project is experiential learning theory, which states that content is made meaningful when hands-on, real world experiences are incorporated into learning which consists of four phases: a). Concrete experience, b). Reflective Observation, c), Abstract Conceptualization, and d). Active Experimentation (Kolb, 1984). It is also informed by Hart’s Ladder of Participation (Hart, 1992). The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory intrinsic case study is to describe how high school youth are participating in meal packing events and food drives through 4-H and FFA. Objectives as are follows: 1.) Explore how food insecurity drives and events are envisioned, planned, and mobilized in positive youth development organizations. 2.) Explore how meal packing events and food drives carried out by 4-H and FFA impact members’ understanding of and attitudes about food insecurity. Data included: a).semi-structured focus group interviews with youth officers on the state level of the Missouri 4-H and FFA programs b).semi-structured focus group interviews with youth meal packing participants at three different high schools and three different 4-H clubs c).document review of marketing materials, facebook pages, and websites d).field observations of food insecurity events, and e).individual interviews with adult leaders of 4-H clubs and FFA advisers. Researchers used the constant comparative method for data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Trustworthiness was established through triangulation of data sources, comparison of emerging themes and subthemes, member-checking, bracketing, and maintaining a continuous coding audit trail. Credibility was be addressed through peer debriefing and investigator triangulation at various stages in the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings

Theme 1.) *Meal packing events and food drives are adult-driven.* In several of the chapters and clubs, the idea to start a meal packing event was initiated by a group of youth who had witnessed a similar event on a state-wide or national level. However, even in these organizations, adults tended to “take charge” of details and decisions after the high school youth helped to establish initial goals and a plan of action.

- *“Well our officer team came up with the idea, and set goals and created a plan of action for the event. Then Miss Jones kind of took over all the details.”*
- *“The advisers set most of it up, but they also like to talk to us about it. We just hear about it whenever they’re stressed”.*

Theme 2.) *Concrete experience stands alone.* Youth participation centers on the concrete experience of packing meals or bringing canned goods to a meeting, while excluding reflection and conceptualization of food insecurity. Participating youth were able to recount what happened during local food insecurity events, but could not reflect upon what they took away from the event.

- *“So we had measuring cups and we would measure a certain amount of mac and cheese into the bag and then seal it and send it down the line.”*
- *You don't think you're doing that much work, but the job is done in like... an hour, two hours, right?*

Theme 3.) *Emphasis is placed on showing others outside of the organization what youth are doing.* Youth participants explain that they “have fun” at meal packing events and food drives, and leave with “a warm feeling”. They are excited to show others in the community and the state what they have done. They like the positive attention they receive from serving, and make sure to mention that community service is an important thing to put on their resumes.

- *“I thought it was overall just really positive how everyone came together that day and how everyone reacted when they found out what we did. That was great!”*
- *“This is just one simple thing you put on your applications and stuff like that...like, to show what you’ve done in the community”.* . .

Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

This case study speaks loudly that three of the four phases of Kolb’s experiential learning model are being left behind. When events designed to address food insecurity occur without opportunities for conceptualization, reflection, or application, young people in positive youth development organizations miss out on gaining deeper knowledge and understanding of food insecurity. Intentionality is required to help ensure that young people involved in positive youth development programs are given opportunities to participate in addressing food insecurity at the highest level possible, thus developing agency. Adult leaders should strive to be joint decision makers with capable and motivated high school youth and assist as they generate ideas and operationalize events. Further research should be conducted to identify methods that are effective at helping to develop understanding and empathy about food insecurity in high school youth involved in positive youth development organizations such as 4-H and FFA.

References

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