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Growing the Youth of Tomorrow: Applying Leadership Skills in a Hands-On Effort for Food Security

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Title (no more than 15 words):

Growing the Youth of Tomorrow: Applying Leadership Skills in a Hands-On Effort for Food Security

Relevance (one or more strands):

Project GROWL (Growing Real Opportunities in Work and Life) is an after-school, weekend, and summer program focused on providing Title 1 families and communities with urban garden education. The curriculum has been developed to enhance personal and professional development skills, while incorporating agricultural and environmental sciences. This proposal relates to Strand 2: Heart because of the work related to student leadership skills, decision making, and goal setting skills.

****Description (30-60 words, objectives, topics, target audience)**:**

The objective of the poster presentation is to highlight the development of student leadership and goal setting skills through 4-H. The collaborative effort with local school systems and the County Extension Offices provides a strong foundation to pursue student growth outside of the classroom. This presentation benefits school officials and community partners.

Summary (250-350 words, take home learning opportunities):

Project GROWL is a collaboration with two school districts and the Georgia Cooperative Extension Service. Students in the 7th grade are recruited through the school to join Project GROWL. The first cohort was established during the 2015-2016 school year and a new cohort has been recruited each year since. The participants in Project GROWL have a unique

curriculum that enhances leadership skills through 4-H. Participants can attend county, district, and state level 4-H events, while also attending trips that encourage urban gardening education. They attend community garden tours, research labs, and markets to learn more about the agricultural industry. During these trips, they also participate in workshops that help with goal setting and decision making. As representatives for their Project GROWL 4-H Club, their leadership skills are put into action during after-school meetings, as delegates at 4-H events, and in the community. The Project GROWL 4-H Club also attends to their own community garden that is open to the surrounding community. This presentation will start by modeling the goal setting curriculum, which can be used in other learning environments, then by introducing practical ways to incorporate leadership skills in after-school programs. The conclusion will examine how the urban community garden, tended by Project GROWL Club Members, enhances these skills and strategies that can be used in other programs.

Evidence (known research and promising practices):

Putting Theory into Practice: A relatively new idea centered around the development of the future was theorized in the late 1980's by a transitioning professor (Snyder, 2010). Hope Theory is broken into three components – goals, willpower, and way power (Snyder, 2010, pp. 5). Goals happen the moment you think about the future and consist of “any objects, experiences, or outcomes, that we imagine and desire in our minds” (Snyder, 2010, pp. 5). Willpower takes goal setting to the next level. This is the motivating factor that occurs within us that pushes us to achieve the goals set. The plan that is developed from the goals and willpower makes up the way power. By forming willpower and way power to achieve these goals, hope is created. The lack of either yields low results and the changing of goals also requires the altering of willpower. Snyder

(1995, pp. 355) has used the term *agency* in his work to describe willpower and *pathways* in place of way power.

Hope Theory has also been used to shape the educational lives of younger students within South Africa, France, and North Carolina. In South Africa, literacy tests and hope scales were used in comparison for primary school students (Pillay, 2017). It was determined that a significant positive relationship exists between hope and literacy (Pillay, 2017). The students who set measurable goals for themselves achieved higher on literacy tests than their peers (Pillay, 2017). It was found that simpler goals in the beginning of programming helps build students willpower which started a trajectory for way power.

Researchers in France conducted a similar study within the school system with an emphasis on physical education classes (Delas et al, 2017). A total of 2016 students participated in this one-year study and three measures of hope were recorded: Trait Hope, assessed through the Dispositional Hope Scale; State Hope, assessed through the State Hope Scale; and Perceived Ability, assessed through the Specific Perceived Ability Questionnaire (Delas et al, 2017). This research confirmed what other research studies in this field has found, but this research focused on youth development. Not only did their goals enhance performance in the physical education classes, in relation to sports, it also increased the quality of that performance (Delas et al, 2017). A major finding for this study was that State Hope, and the corresponding State Hope Scale, was a stronger predictor of the domains compared to the Dispositional Hope Scale (Delas et al, 2017, pp. 204).

In North Carolina, a faculty member at the university level and a local school educator teamed together to determine how hope can be applied in supporting students as they transition into and out of middle school (Akos et al, 2016). This research takes the theory presented and

puts it into practice by using the middle school educators as support roles. As their basis, they relied on previous research that found that students with high hope at younger ages had higher levels of satisfaction later in life (Gilman et al, 2006). Akos et al (2016) suggests that a strong emphasis on goal-setting during a student's transition to middle school will help them adjust to the new changes.

Their middle school time could also be used to develop willpower and way power skills, so they are able to improve as they transition into high school. High school brings more organizational and academic challenges that student need to overcome before graduation (Akos et al, 2016, pp. 16). By applying Hope Theory, students set goals for themselves which can help them overcome these challenges. Akos et al (2016) asserts that students are able to think with hope as they develop socially and emotionally (pp. 17). By addressing hope during this transition, students will be better prepared to transition into future life journeys.

Project GROWL applies goal-setting activities throughout the year during after-school meetings and weekend trips during the 7th grade year. During the transition summer, students are able to learn more about leadership roles and skills through the summer programming. They apply these skills during their 8th grade year by holding leadership roles within the club. Both the goal setting skills and leadership skills better prepare students for their next transition into high school. During their 9th grade year, participants are able to apply for Certified Teen Leader Training, attend more in-depth leadership workshops and conferences, and apply these skills by teaching the curriculum to their younger cohort members. The garden also becomes a place to acquire leadership skills and decision-making skills, as students have to decide what to plant and when,

make decisions on how to prepare and maintain the garden, and work together to harvest and prepare their crops.

Format (Poster, including visual aids and handouts):

Poster presentation with visual aid (poster) and possible handouts.

Biographical sketch (each presenter):

Chasity James is the Program Evaluator for the Project GROWL 4-H Club.

Gwendolyn Williams is the 4-H Extension Agent in Clayton County.

Casey Mull is a Public Service Associate for 4-H and Youth in the Georgia 4-H State Office.