Service Learning in K-12 Schools: Avoiding the Canned Food Drive Mentality

Dr. Cassie Quigley
2014-2015 Service Learning Fellow
Assistant Professor
Science Education
Typical Service Learning Activities in Schools

• Canned Food Drive (or other drive...shoes, coats, etc)
• Clean up a park day
• Tree planting day
• Food label collection
• Fundraising after a catastrophe
So....what is the problem?

- Nothing is inherently wrong with this approach. Of course the parks are cleaner, food pantries that service a large number of people have more cans, etc.

- But what are we teaching children about the roots of these problems?
The Challenges of Service Learning in Schools

- Inauthentic
- “Quick Fix”
- Unrealistic
- Add-on
- Confusion between service learning and volunteerism
- Little training to support students in service learning

Some communities may not want to be the “objects” of learning for students.
What is the solution?

- Authentic, real world situations
- Long-term
- Integrated into the curriculum
- Tied to learning objectives
- Training for teachers and students
A School “Doing it Right”

- Fisher Middle School in Greenville, South Carolina
- Focus is on STEAM
- Each child takes a service learning course each year
- Service learning projects are student-generated, problem focused
Trajectory....Continuity

- 6th grade- school-focused
- 7th grade- neighborhood-focused
- 8th grade- city-focused
Training for Teachers

- Middle Grades Science MAT Program — all students take an environmental science course wherein they are trained in the principles of service learning (integrated)

- Faculty-in-Residence program at Fisher Middle School — all service learning teachers receive service learning training
Example of projects (not just from Fisher but other schools)

- School Garden
- Lunchtime options
- Recycling program
- Poverty Study
- “Save the Sea Turtle” program at the Greenville Zoo
- Creation of a skatepark Greenville City
Teachable Moments

- “Water bottle boycott”
- Mosquito spraying project

Courage doesn’t always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, "I will try again tomorrow"  
~ Mary Anne Radmacher
Questions we continually ask ourselves:

- **Students**: To what extent did service learning have an impact on the social, civic, and academic attitudes and skills of the participating students?

- **Teachers**: to what extent did the program have an impact on teaching and learning in the classroom?

- **Community**: To what extent did it increase the capacity of community based organizations, and help meet the communities’ needs?
Instead of...

Teaching what hunger is....

Why it exists... and how to solve it...

Solving Hunger with School-Based Farms

And ultimately, how to prevent it...