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- 2) Blazing new trails of leadership: Youth role and context of leadership activities focusing in civic engagement
- 3) Research Presentation
- 4) This national study examined the context of FFA chapter leadership activities and the members' role in community leadership activities. It is recommended leadership activities should be further enhanced to help youth gain skills that help them better understand self, interact with others, function effectively in groups, and provide leadership within the community. Future research should further analyze member gender, years of membership, officer experience, and leadership experiences related to role and context of activities.
- 5) In the event the paper is not accepted, I chose not to submit it as a poster.
- 6) Robin Peiter Horstmeier is an Assistant Professor of Agricultural Education in the Department of Community and Leadership Development in the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture.
- 6) Paper Attached

Introduction

Leadership skills and behaviors of members in youth organizations have been widely examined. Specifically, much research has been conducted investigating the National FFA Organization. These studies have examined either the degree to which youth have acquired particular leadership life skills or the level within the organization at which the members have participated in leadership activities. Little attention has been paid to either the conceptual role that the young person plays in the day-to-day functioning of society or the context in which the leadership behaviors are performed. Research has suggested that the most effective leadership development programs engage young people in meaningful ways as they work as partners with adults in addressing real world situations.

As a premier youth leadership organization, FFA has prepared future leaders for local, state and national activities. In fact, the FFA mission states "The National FFA Organization is dedicated to making a positive difference in the lives of young people by developing their

potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education” (National FFA, 2005).

It is well documented that participation in FFA enhances leadership abilities. Researchers have found a positive relationship between leadership skills scores and FFA participation. Further, Brannon, Holley and Key (1989) found Vocational Agriculture and the FFA had an impact on the success of many community leaders. These community leaders who had participated in vocational agriculture felt their leadership activities were effective in developing their leadership skills, contributed to their success, and have been of value to their careers regardless of their occupations (Brannon, Holley & Key, 1989). Scales and Leffert (1999) stated that youth organizations provide opportunities for success, a sense of belonging and safety, activities that are challenging, interaction and support from adults, leadership opportunities, and other interactions that contribute to the positive development and resiliency of youth.

Peiter Horstmeier and Nall (2008) examined youth leadership development opportunities in chapter activities for rural FFA members. Using a national, random multi-stage sampling technique, the researchers were able to generalize findings to the entire rural FFA chapter population. It was recommended that FFA chapter leadership development activities must continue to focus on the community. However, emphasis should be given to help young people gain skills that help them better understand self and interact with others. National FFA programs should be incorporated that emphasize effectively working in group and provide leadership within the community. This may be accomplished through chapter leadership activities such as civic engagement (Peiter Horstmeier & Nall, 2008).

Context of Leadership Activities

Ayres (1987) identified four key developmental phases through which individuals engaged in a leadership curriculum should progress (Figure 2.) First individuals must develop an expanded knowledge of self, that is, who they are, what they believe, and how they function. Next they move toward mastering skills necessary to work effectively with others. In the next phase, individuals refine their skills by working with groups or organizations. The final phase focuses on leadership within the context of communities, systems, and society. As the arena in which leadership is being practiced continues to broaden, individuals must use knowledge and skills learned at previous levels to be effective in the new context.

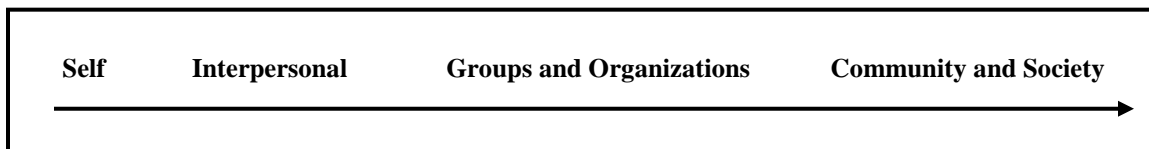


Figure 1. Context of Leadership Activity

Similarly, Austin (1996) offered a leadership model which focused on developing knowledge and skills first at the individual level, emphasizing that “before we can contribute to a larger effort, it is imperative that we understand ourselves” (p. 118). However, group

development included both the knowledge and skill related to interpersonal communication and interactions, as well as, the ability to participate in and understand group development, working together to achieve goals, and dealing with conflict. The third level in this model of leadership development focuses on community, recognizing that the ultimate goal of individual and group development is to serve the common good beyond the individual or organization.

In 2004, the National FFA Organization introduced a national leadership curriculum, LifeKnowledge. This curriculum’s foundation is the 16 Precepts of National FFA Essential Learnings (Figure 1). These precepts focus around four key areas building on the area of Me, We, Do, and Serve. Developed by leadership experts, teacher educators, agricultural education teachers and agriculture industry leaders, these align very closely to the Ayres Context of Leadership Activities Theory (1987).

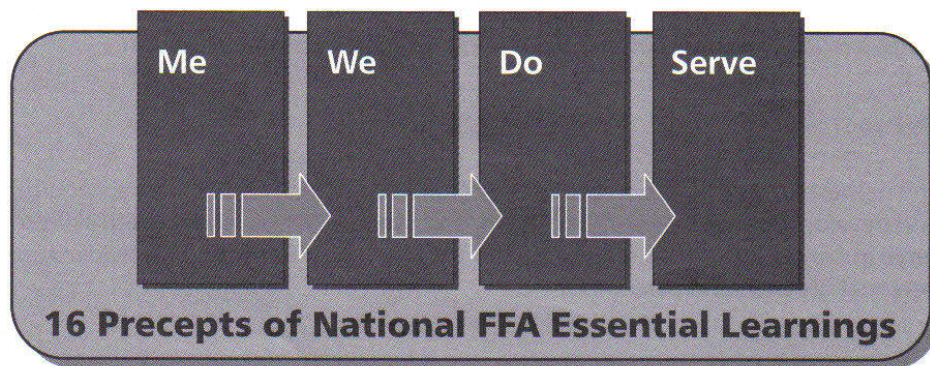


Figure 2. Precepts of the National FFA Essential Learnings.

Role of Youth in Society

Lofquist (1989) developed what he termed a “spectrum of attitudes” that adults may hold regarding the role of young people in society. The left side of his continuum (Figure 1.) represents an attitude where young people are viewed as “objects,” being told what to do because the adult “knows what’s best” for the youth. As “recipients,” young people participate in learning experiences that adults see as “being good for them.” However, the real contributions of young people are seen as being deferred until some later date and learning experiences are seen as practice for later life. When youth are viewed as “resources”, actions of young people have present value to the community and there is an attitude of respect focusing on building self-esteem and being productive. The Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development (2001) later added a characterization of youth as “partners” to Lofquist’s original continuum. As partners, youth share leadership and decision-making roles with adults.

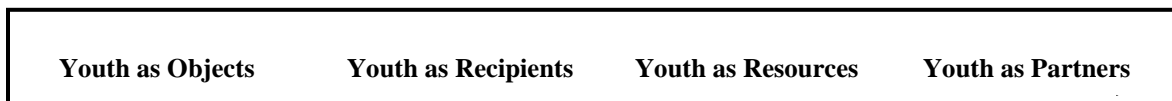


Figure 3. A Spectrum of Adult Attitudes toward Youth

The view that adults take toward young people tends to shape the nature of the leadership programs they design. In some programs, leadership is taught through formal routines that emphasize command and compliance. The leader is *in charge* and followers are objects to be directed. In other programs, youth run club meetings and organize events as practice for more significant roles in the community later in life. In these instances youth are recipients of programs designed by well-meaning adults. When programs involve young people as resources, youth grow, gaining knowledge, skills and building self-esteem from their involvement in service learning activities such as food drives and community clean-up campaigns while performing needed functions within their community. More recently, youth have been engaged as full partners with adults in making decisions and taking actions aimed at producing sustainable and vibrant communities.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The Theoretical Framework of this study is based merging the two leadership theories of Lofquist (1989) and Ayers (1987) as created by Peiter, Rennekamp and Nall (2005). Lofquist’s theory focuses on the interaction between youth and adults in youth leadership organizations. These interactions are identified by youth viewed as objects, recipients, resources, and partners. Ayers’ (1987) theory examines the context of leadership activity of the organization, activities focusing on developing self, interpersonal, groups, and community. This conceptual map displays the relationship between the context of chapter leadership activities and youth leadership member role and is displayed in Figure 4.

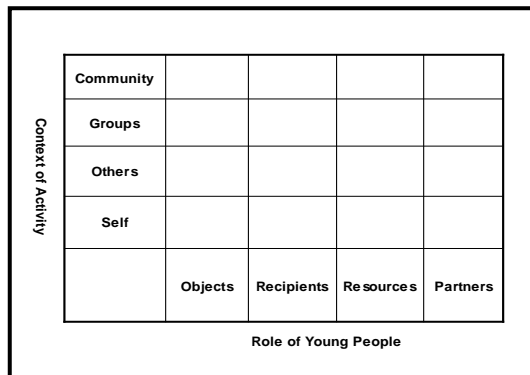


Figure 4. Conceptual Map for Theoretical Framework

Purpose/Objectives

The purpose of this study is to describe the leadership activities and youth-adult interactions of rural FFA members who participated in civic engagement leadership activities. Specific objectives of the study include:

- 1) Describe the personal characteristics of rural FFA members participating in civic engagement leadership activities.
- 2) Examine the context of chapter leadership activities after participation in civic engagement activities.

- 3) Describe the role of FFA members with youth-adult interactions at the chapter level after participation in civic engagement activities.
- 4) Analyze the strength between FFA member role and the context of chapter leadership activities.

Procedures

The population of this descriptive study was rural members of the National FFA Organization. For the purposes of this study, *rural* members were identified as those living in geographic region containing no city or town larger than ten thousand residents. All FFA chapters receiving a Civic Engagement Project Grant from the National FFA Organization in the 2006-2007 academic year were the sample ($N = 15$). The frame for this study was obtained from the National FFA Organization.

The FFA Leadership Questionnaire (Peiter, Rennekamp, & Nall, 2005) was utilized by the researchers to collect data for youth participation in leadership activities. The context of youth activities were identified by developing statements which reflect the potential roles FFA members engage in as they develop leadership skills moving from personal development to interpersonal development to organizational and group development to ultimately engaging in community and societal leadership (Ayers, 1987). Roles of youth in adult-youth relationships through leadership activities were also examined. Questions were developed which reflected the role in which FFA members were engaged through leadership activities which viewed them as objects, recipients, resources, and/or partners (Lofquist, 1989).

The instrument is based on a matrix integrating the context of leadership development in relationship to the roles of youth in the leadership activities conducted by FFA chapters. Four questions were developed in each cell for each of the 16 celled matrix. Each question related specifically to the member role and context of activity. For example, a cell 1 statement representing Self and Objects was “In my FFA Chapter...New members must participate in initiation activities.” In contrast, cell 16 represents Community and Partners. A specific statement in this cell read “In my FFA Chapter...Members work side by side with local citizens in planning, conducting and evaluating meaningful community projects.” Four statements were developed for each cell in the role-context matrix describing FFA leadership activities in the paired levels in the role-context matrix. A total of sixty-four questions were developed in this instrument, corresponding to the sixteen quadrants of the role-context matrix.

Each question began with the statement, “In my FFA Chapter...” and through responses FFA members measured their current state of leadership activities. Responses were measured using a four point Likert-type scale, based on 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree.

Validity and reliability of the *FFA Leadership Questionnaire* was established. Content and face validity of the instrument was established using a panel of experts. These experts were in the field of leadership development, current agricultural education teachers serving on the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE) Board of Directors, University Extension staff, agricultural education pre-service teachers, and former FFA members. The

instrument was pilot tested with high school FFA members not included in the random sample. Reliability was established using Chronbach's Alpha and was reported for each construct specializing in leadership context of activity and member role. Scores included: Objects ($\alpha = .71$), Recipients ($\alpha = .85$), Resources ($\alpha = .88$), Partners ($\alpha = .86$), Self ($\alpha = .72$), Interpersonal ($\alpha = .88$), Groups ($\alpha = .88$), and Community ($\alpha = .88$).

Dillman (2000) research design method was incorporated; with 15 FFA chapter advisors were notified of the opportunity to participate prior to the first mailing. Chapter advisor(s) were contacted and permission was granted by advisor, high school/middle school administrator, and member parents. Follow-up contacts were made with non-respondent FFA chapters. Each advisor administered the survey instrument to every FFA member in the chapter. This process resulted in 604 respondents from 12 FFA chapters with an 80% response rate. Early and late respondents were compared with no differences found. Research data were analyzed using SPSS 14.0 and descriptive statistics of frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were reported.

Findings

The first objective focused on the personal characteristics of rural FFA members (Table 1). Over half of the respondents were male ($n = 337$, 55.8%) and 44.2% ($n = 267$) were female. Of those who reported ethnicity, over ninety percent ($n = 539$, 90.4%) were White, Non-Hispanic. Four percent ($n = 26$) were Black, 1.8% ($n = 11$) reported their ethnicity as Hispanic, 1.2% ($n = 7$) indicated Asian, and 2.2% ($n = 13$) of respondents reported their ethnicity as Native American.

In terms of level of education, one-third of FFA members were high school freshman (34.8%). Approximately one-fourth of the respondents were sophomores ($n = 149$, 24.7%), 19.7% ($n = 119$) were juniors, 13.6% ($n = 82$) reported their grade as seniors, and 7.3% ($n = 44$) of the respondents were middle school students. Over four out of 10 members ($n = 210$, 42.7%) were first year members of FFA, and 30.0% ($n = 181$) were second year members. Almost fourteen percent have been members for three years ($n = 84$, 13.9%), over one-tenth ($n = 67$, 11.9%) have been members for four years, 1.2% ($n = 7$) have been FFA members for five years, and 1.2% ($n = 7$) were six year members of FFA. In terms of leadership positions in the FFA, only 17.6% ($n = 104$) of the respondents reported serving as a chapter officer, while over eighty percent ($n = 487$, 84.2%) have not held an office in their FFA chapter. When members were asked if they consider themselves to be a chapter leader, 61.4% ($n = 361$) reported they did not consider themselves to be a leader in the FFA chapter.

The second objective described the context (Self, Interpersonal, Groups, Community) in which leadership activities are performed (Table 2). FFA members viewed leadership activities focusing on personal development (self) as the greatest ($M = 3.25$) context in which leadership activities are performed. Members viewed activities resulting in interpersonal development ($M = 3.11$) as the second highest, and leadership activities resulting in skills related to group development ($M = 3.08$) followed. Leadership activities focusing on community development were perceived as area of least involvement ($M = 3.03$) by FFA members involved in civic engagement activities.

Table 1

Personal Characteristics of Rural FFA Members

	<i>Rural FFA Members (n = 604)</i>	
	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Gender (n = 604)		
Male	337	55.8
Female	267	44.2
Ethnicity (n = 596)		
White, Non-Hispanic	539	90.4
Black, Non-Hispanic	26	4.4
Native American	13	2.2
Hispanic	11	1.8
Asian	7	1.2
Grade in School (n = 604)		
Middle School	44	7.3
Freshman	210	34.8
Sophomore	149	24.7
Junior	119	19.7
Senior	82	13.6
Years in FFA (n = 604)		
1	258	42.7
2	181	30.0
3	84	13.9
4	67	11.1
5	7	1.2
6	7	1.2
Chapter Officer (n = 591)		
Yes	104	17.6
No	487	82.4
Chapter Leader (n = 588)		
Yes	227	38.6
No	361	61.4

The most frequent area was in agreement ($f = 4533, 51.30\%$) for leadership activities in the context of self development. The least frequent agreement by respondents was also in self development, with respondents strongly disagreeing with statements in this area ($f = 225, 2.55\%$)

Table 2

Context in which Leadership Activities are Performed

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Total		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%		
Self	225	2.55	655	7.41	4533	51.30	3423	38.74	8836	100	3.25	.38
Interpersonal	344	3.93	1129	12.90	4435	50.66	2846	32.51	8754	100	3.11	.42
Groups	449	5.23	1050	12.25	4315	50.36	2755	32.15	8569	100	3.08	.39
Community	294	3.68	1274	15.93	4205	52.58	2224	27.81	7997	100	3.03	.48

1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly Agree

The third objective described the role of youth (Objects, Recipients, Resources, Partners) in leadership activities (Table 3). FFA members involved in civic engagement leadership activities viewed themselves as partners ($M = 3.21$) in youth-adult relationships to a greater degree than any of the other roles. Youth saw their role as resources ($M = 3.17$) in chapter leadership activities. FFA members identified their role in leadership activities as recipients ($M = 3.06$) and objects ($M = 3.04$) less than they viewed their role as partners and resources. FFA members had the greatest agreement in that they were treated as partners ($f = 4685$, 54.52%) by adults. The least agreement was for members strongly disagreeing with partnership ($f = 190$, 2.21%) in the youth-adult partnership.

Table 3

Role of Youth in Leadership Activities

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Total		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%		
Objects	480	4.87	1269	12.86	5302	53.75	2814	28.53	9865	100	3.06	.38
Recipients	419	5.11	1306	15.95	3969	48.46	2496	30.78	8190	100	3.04	.38
Resources	223	2.63	857	10.10	4507	53.13	2896	34.14	8483	100	3.17	.40
Partners	190	2.21	676	7.87	4685	54.52	3042	35.40	8593	100	3.21	.41

1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly Agree

Objective four described the intersection of FFA member role to the context of the chapter leadership activities. Figure 5 displays how FFA members perceived their role in leadership activities related to the context of the chapter leadership activities. Members identified their leadership activities focused on group development (chapter level) and their member role as an object ($M = 3.59$). When members responded to survey statements regarding the role and context of their leadership involvement, they indicated the lowest agreement was in chapter leadership activities focusing on others and resources role-context matrix ($M = 2.84$).

Context of Activity	Community	2.94	2.99	3.11	3.12
	Groups	3.59	2.98	3.23	3.17
	Others	3.30	3.21	2.84	3.08
	Self	3.14	3.30	3.28	3.07
		Objects	Recipients	Resources	Partners
Role of Young People					

1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly Agree

Figure 5. Matrix Showing Intersection of Role and Context

FFA members responded to statements which identified the relationship between the roles of youth in youth-adult partnerships within the context of FFA chapter leadership activities (Table 4). Frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were expressed for each group of statements in the role-context matrix.

FFA members perceived their role and context as objects and group ($M = 3.59$). This indicates that in the objects and groups role-context matrix, members viewed activities which focused on the role of members as objects (adults tell youth to do the activity because it is good for them) in the context of leadership development activities ranging within group development (committee work). The greatest celled percentage was in the partners and groups role-context matrix cell ($f = 1223, 57.55\%$).

FFA members involved with civic engagement leadership projects responded they had the least agreement with statements indicating their role was recipients and others in the context of group development ($M = 2.84$). The lowest cell with the least percentage in the role-context matrix was in role of partners (youth and adults are treated equally) and the leadership context of self development. Respondents reported they strongly strong disagreed ($f = 24, 1.09\%$) with the statement the least of the other 15 role-matrix cells.

Standard deviations showing the least variance was in the role-context matrix cell of objects and groups ($SD = 1.4$). It should be noted this is consistent with the mean scores reported in Figure 5.

Table 4

Role of Members and Context of Leadership Activities in Civic Engagement FFA Chapters

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree		Total		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>F</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%		
Objects/ Self	122	5.59	238	10.90	1044	47.8	780	35.71	2184	100	3.14	.54
Objects/ Others	61	2.71	281	12.49	1011	44.95	896	39.84	2249	100	3.21	.54
Objects/ Groups	226	10.39	358	16.45	892	40.99	700	32.17	2176	100	3.59	1.4
Objects/ Community	71	3.57	392	19.73	1086	54.66	438	22.04	1987	100	2.94	.59
Recipients/ Self	45	2.04	160	7.24	1078	48.76	928	41.97	2211	100	3.30	.50
Recipients/ Others	166	8.75	409	21.51	859	45.19	467	24.57	1901	100	2.84	.61
Recipients/ Groups	138	6.42	365	16.98	1026	47.74	620	28.85	2149	100	2.98	.48
Recipients/ Community	70	3.63	372	19.28	1006	52.15	481	24.95	1929	100	2.99	.60
Resources/ Self	34	1.52	139	6.22	1214	54.32	848	37.94	2235	100	3.28	.49
Resources/ Others	70	3.42	269	13.14	1104	53.93	604	29.51	2047	100	3.08	.55
Resources/ Groups	36	1.70	151	7.13	1174	55.40	758	35.77	2119	100	3.23	.51
Resources/ Community	83	3.99	298	14.31	1015	48.75	686	32.95	2082	100	3.11	.53
Partners/ Self	24	1.09	118	5.35	1197	54.26	867	39.30	2206	100	3.30	.46
Partners/ Others	47	2.08	170	7.51	1168	51.59	879	38.83	2264	100	3.26	.52
Partners/ Groups	49	2.31	176	8.28	1223	57.55	677	31.86	2125	100	3.17	.52
Partners/ Community	70	3.50	212	10.61	1098	54.93	619	30.97	1999	100	3.12	.57

1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, 4=Strongly Agree

Conclusions//Implications

Respondents tend to be white males, high school freshmen with one year in FFA. In addition, few hold a chapter office (less than 20% are officers at the local level), and members do not view themselves as a leader in the chapter.

In the context of leadership activities for chapters participating in civic engagement, as FFA members moved through the continuum (activities focusing on self development, interpersonal skills, groups, and community) agreement decreased in each area. This is consistent with the National FFA study with a general population of rural FFA members (Peiter Horstmeier & Nall, 2008).

Participants in FFA chapters recognize the focus on their own personal development in leadership activities. However results from this study imply these youth have not been given the opportunity for community and group development. Because of the respondents' educational level and years of experience in FFA, researchers can not conclude chapters are not developing the higher level of leadership skills in context of groups and community.

FFA members who participate in civic engagement activities indicate they experience positive member roles in youth-adult interactions. In examining the role of youth in youth-adult interactions, FFA members view themselves as partners to a greater degree than any of the other roles. As they move through the youth-adult interaction continuum, (view youth's role as objects, resources, recipients, and partners by adults) their agreement increases. This is also consistent with findings of Peiter Horstmeier and Nall (2008).

In examining the role-context matrix, FFA members who participated in civic engagement activities identified objects and groups as the strongest relationship. Rural FFA members indicate they are treated as objects by adults in group leadership activities.

Recommendations

It is recommended chapter leadership development activities that examine member role and context of activities continue. FFA chapters should continue to design activities that engage youth as objects, recipients, resources, and partners in an age-appropriate manner. Programming emphasis should be given to assist rural youth gain skills that help them better understand community. Programming may include civic engagement, service learning, etc.

Recently, leaders with the National FFA Organizations have focused youth leadership development programming on civic engagement. Programming should continue to focus on civic engagement; however strategies must be implemented to improve the relationships between youth and adults. It is recommended that for civic engagement projects to be successful for youth leadership development, the youth-adult relationship should be one of partnership.

Professional development focusing on planning and implementation of a community civic engagement project should be conducted. Agricultural educators should be educated on the leadership development aspects and leadership outcomes of member participation in civic

engagement activities. In addition, state leaders should encourage more chapter participation in civic engagement resulting in greater youth leadership development outcomes.

Further analysis of data from this study should compare rural FFA member's gender, grade level, years of FFA membership, chapter leadership experiences, and leadership experiences in other youth organizations. Differences and similarities among specific demographic areas for member role, context of activities, and relationships within the role-context matrix should be analyzed.

This study should be replicated to evaluate FFA member perceptions of youth-adult interactions and context of leadership activities over time. In addition, it is recommended to conduct focus group interviews with chapter FFA leaders to further define and clarify the degree of involvement in member roles and the context of the leadership activities.

Further research should be conducted to examine the FFA advisors' role in developing members' leadership skills. Advisors often are the adults youth interact with in the member role. If change is to take place and move member role towards enhanced partnership in the role-context matrix, advisors' viewpoints need to be evaluated.

Discussions/Implications

Agricultural Education has prided itself on developing youth leadership through secondary agriculture programs and the FFA organization since the 20th century. Research studies have shown that participation in FFA enhances leadership abilities. Further studies in leadership education discuss how civic engagement activities contribute to youth leadership development.

The benefits of engaging young people as partners in addressing real community issues and concerns are increasingly well documented. When young people exercise leadership in real community contexts, their activities have more meaning and young people feel a stronger bond to the community in which they live. Furthermore, when leadership development activities have real consequences, they are not seen as just practice for future community roles. Community-based leadership experiences include civic engagement service learning, action research, youth organizing and youth serving on community boards.

Peiter Horstmeier (2006) recommended that FFA chapters should design activities to engage youth as objects, recipients, resources, and partners in an age-appropriate manner. Similarly leadership development activities should help young people gain skills in the context that help them better understand self, interact with others, function effectively in groups, and provide leadership within the community. Civic engagement activities are such activities. Civic engagement leadership activities can provide rural youth the opportunity for community development. As rural communities shrink due to young people migrating to larger communities, specifically these civic engagement leadership activities can engage students to develop ties and ownership within their local community.

This study analyzed the context of leadership activities and member role for chapters involved in Civic Engagement leadership activities. However, results from this study describes that the strongest relationship in member role and the context of leadership activities was in Objects and Groups. Therefore, rural FFA members participating in civic engagement leadership activities indicate that their leadership activities were chapter and adult driven. This indicates professional development with FFA advisors on youth-led partnership must occur. If civic engagement leadership activities are to be effective, we as adult leaders must provide the students to be engaged and learn leadership themselves.

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