

Facilitating the Teaching Intern and Cooperating Teacher Relationship Utilizing StrengthsQuest

Brandie Disberger
Kansas State University
301 Umberger Hall
Manhattan, KS 66506
785/532-1175
bdis@ksu.edu

R. Bud McKendree
Kansas State University
301 Umberger Hall
Manhattan KS 66506
785/532-5736
rmckendree@ksu.edu

Facilitating the Teaching Intern and Cooperating Teacher Relationship Utilizing StrengthsQuest

Introduction and Need for Innovation

In teacher education programs the most impactful experience most students have is their culminating experience as a teaching intern. Researchers have suggested the teaching internship experience can have significant impact on the intern's decision to enter the teaching field after graduation (Byler & Byler, 1984). Perhaps the greatest challenge facing the agricultural education profession is the inability to provide enough teachers to fill the school based agricultural education programs. As stated in the National Supply and Demand Study (Foster, Lawver and Smith, 2014), 183 non-licensed individuals were hired to teach in school based agriculture programs for the 2014-15 school year nationwide. Thus it is even more important that teaching interns have a positive experience, and one possible factor in that experience is their relationship with their cooperating teacher (Kasperbauer & Roberts, 2007). If we can make the teaching intern/cooperating teacher relationship positive from the start, the teaching efficacy of the student teacher could be increased (Edgar, Roberts, & Murphy, 2011) and thus possibly increasing the number of teachers entering the teaching profession impacting the teacher shortage.

At Kansas State University emphasis has been placed on building the intern/coop teacher relationship prior to the beginning of the internship semester. All interns and cooperating teachers are provided codes to complete the StrengthsFinder survey during the semester prior to student teaching. The teaching interns are provided instruction regarding StrengthsQuest and trained on how to teach with their strengths in the classroom. In addition, the interns experience a second training alongside their cooperating teachers. The program focuses on how to use your strengths to become an effective teacher. Examples and scenarios seek to explain how each individual may accomplish a similar task differently, but equally effective. How the task is performed is unique to each person and feedback and evaluating effectiveness in the classroom should be based on the result, not the method. This program utilizes a *low cost* tool to create a more *positive* teaching intern/cooperating teacher relationship.

In Kansas, there is a critical shortage of agricultural education teachers, but a very high percentage of interns seek teaching positions after graduation. This program was created through a relationship with the Kansas State University School of Leadership Studies. Benefits of this program include re-connecting the seniors with the strengths tool, providing additional professional development to teachers, and demonstrating to the profession the commitment to innovative teaching and learning. After implementing this program for five years there has been increased satisfaction by the interns concerning their relationship with their cooperating teacher, as they have noted on weekly journals.

Methodology

Kansas State University is a StrengthsQuest University where all freshmen are provided a StrengthsFinder code at enrollment. However, this program was implemented over the last five years and it was not until last year that agricultural education interns had previous experience with Strengths prior to the final year of their Agricultural Education Program. During the first week of the semester prior to completing their teaching internship each student is provided a

StrengthsFinder test code and asked to complete the online survey tool. In addition, each cooperating teacher is also provided a code by the university. Interns and cooperating teachers complete the online survey and send a results summary to the university coordinator. The agriculture education faculty coordinator gathers this data and creates a chart plotting each of the intern's strengths alongside the strengths of their peers and a second document plotting the intern's strengths alongside the strengths of their cooperating teacher(s).

Timeline of events:

August	Each intern and cooperating teacher for the spring semester is provided a StrengthsFinder code to take the online survey tool. Upon completion, a summary of the results (their top 5 strengths) are sent to the faculty coordinator.
September	A certified StrengthsQuest trainer is invited to the AGED 500 Leadership and Professional Development course as a guest lecturer to help the future interns further explore their strengths and explore how identifying their strengths can help them be strong peer teams for later course work.
December	During the Teaching Intern/Cooperating Teacher training, the trainer is again invited to facilitate Strengths utilization
January-May	Teaching Interns respond to a weekly journal that asks how they feel about their internship along with other talking points.

Kansas State University is fortunate to be identified as a “Strengths” campus that has financial and personnel resources to aid in this program that other Universities may not have. However, if there was a desire to implement this program University Faculty could gain the needed background knowledge to train interns and cooperating teachers by reviewing available resources.

Results

Over the last five years, 62 Cooperating Teacher/Teaching Intern pairs have completed the StrengthsQuest program prior to the student teaching experience. This experience opens up the conversation between the teachers about how they are similar and different. This is an important conversation to have before they begin teaching together and realize that they may teach the same concepts in different ways, and as long as they are effective, they can learn from each other.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

Identifying an individual who will coordinate the program is key to success. A point person is needed to collect the StrengthsFinder codes, distribute codes to teaching interns and cooperating teachers, plot the data and obtain a trainer or obtain the experience to conduct the two training sessions. This program takes approximately 10 hours to plan and execute including the time spent conducting the two trainings. In addition, it is recommended to have each University Faculty who is working with the interns and cooperating teachers to also complete the StrengthsFinder survey.

Costs

A code that can be purchased from www.strengthsquest.com for \$9.99 each is needed for each teaching intern, cooperating teacher and agricultural education faculty.

References

- Byler, B. L., & Byler, L. F. (1984). Analysis of student teacher morale before and after student teaching. *Journal of the American Association of Teacher Educators in Agriculture*, 25(3), 22-28.
- Edgar, D. W., Roberts, T. G., & Murphy, T. H. (2011). Exploring relationships between teaching efficacy and student teacher- cooperating teacher relationships. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 52(1), 9-18. doi:10.5032/jae.2011.01009
- Foster, D. D., Lawver, R. G., & Smith, A. R. (2014). National Agricultural Education Supply and Demand Study, 2014 Executive Summary. Retrieved from http://aaaonline.org/supply_demand/supplyanddemand.php
- Kasperbauer, H. J., & Roberts, T. G. (2007). Influence of the relationship between the student teacher and cooperating teacher on student teacher's decision to enter teaching. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 48(1), 8-19.