

Developing Entrepreneurial Youth in Resource-Depleted Communities

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Need for Innovation Idea

The Appalachia region of Kentucky is recognized as the highest distressed area of the Appalachian Region Commission (Thorne, Tickamyer & Thorne, 2004). Haaga (2004) reported Kentucky as the lowest state of the 13-state region in college completion (13.7%) and the highest for high school dropout (37.5%). Therefore, there is an identified need to improve the educational motivation of Appalachian youth.

According to Durden and Ellis (2003), student motivation improves significantly when content is delivered in a uniquely empowering way, leading to improved attendance and high academic performance. Further research posits that community-based organizations (CBOs) are one way to positively reach at-risk youth by giving them a sense of personal value and optimism through community-school structured partnerships (McLaughlin, 2000). Additionally, the ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner (2009) details human development as dependent on the interaction of the environment within nested structures. Bronfenbrenner suggests human development and behavior can be changed, changing the culture of society and environment as well. These theories combined describe our method of creating an engaging project in order to heighten the competence of adolescent students and adults to work together to become effective change agents in their community.

How It Works

The University of Kentucky is implementing a community-based organization approach to assist the poorest counties in the Appalachian region – all of which are in the poorest counties in the nation (Census Bureau, 2010). The CBO approach entails secondary agricultural education students enrolled in an agri-business management course to partner with the selected agricultural business within their community. The project entails a three-year plan of implementation.

Year one begins in the summer of 2016. The project leadership team develops an agri-marketing curriculum, with the assistance of a curriculum panel. In addition, a representative from the Kentucky Department of Education, Division of Career and Technical Education is included to ensure the curriculum is aligned with current educational standards. The research team will meet with the Kentucky Association of Agricultural Educators (KAAE) and the Kentucky Small Business Development Center (KSBD) to determine one school and one community agri-business in each of the five selected areas who are deemed best fit for the project. The project leadership team, with the assistance of these two organizations, will host selected business owners and agricultural education teachers for a two-day workshop on the implementation of the agri-marketing curriculum, ending the year in spring of 2017.

During the second year, teachers will implement the agri-marketing curriculum in their secondary courses during their school year. Each school will have approximately 25 students in the agri-business course, resulting around 125 students participating in the project. Participating students will work in groups of three to evaluate, develop, and deliver an agricultural business marketing plan for the selected agri-business in their community upon completion of the curriculum. Students visit their school's partnered agri-business at least twice during the duration of the project to work on their business plans. Student groups will present their drafted business marketing plans to the agribusiness owners in which they will provide feedback in developing a final plan proposal at the end of the course. The cooperating agribusiness owner then selects one plan from the class for implementation during project year three. The use of social media in the

curriculum enables the project leadership team to monitor the concepts students have learned throughout the curriculum. To wrap up the second year of the project, the KSBDC will provide each agri-business with a stipend to hire the students of the selected marketing plan to implement the plan of action over the summer as a paid internship in the spring of 2018.

The final year consists of selected agri-businesses, working with the project leadership team, to continue implementing the ideas and strategies adopted from the students' business plan. Schools are also encouraged to send the selected plan to compete in the state's FFA Marketing Plan Career Development Event in June of 2018. Dissemination of project results occurs this year, along with work on process and outcome evaluation from the data collection process. Feedback from participating teachers, students, and the agri-business owners will be collected and used to assess impressions on learning experiences, perceptions on the effectiveness of the curriculum experiences, and student engagement and entrepreneurial experience.

Results to Date/Implications

In 2016, the innovative project received a three-year USDA-NIFA grant valued slightly over \$134,000 for full implementation. Today, the curriculum is being developed and a professional development for the already selected teachers and agri-business owners is set for the summer of 2017. Teachers have begun to recruit students for course enrollment and curriculum integration. Each school and community agribusiness has agreed to participate in the project that seeks to improve the humbling unemployment rate that each county endures. A graduate student was hired to assist with the implementation and point of contact for teachers and businesses.

Future Plans

It is the desire of the project leadership team to further evaluate the agri-marketing curriculum by expanding the study throughout the United States with a 5-year federal School to Work grant allocation. Upon completion of the research studies of the curriculum, an interactive and electronic textbook will be drafted that assists secondary classroom teachers with the necessary content knowledge and activities to be utilized within all agricultural classrooms. With collaborations among the KSBDC, the National FFA Organization, and the National Association of Agricultural Educators (NAAE), it is the overall desire that professional development workshops can assist teachers across the nation in developing interactive methods to teach entrepreneurship that aids the communities in which their programs arise.

Cost/Resources Needed

The budget is approximately divided as follows: personnel \$58,960 (44%), workshop supplies \$1,340 (1%), university travel \$4,020 (3%), participant support \$30,820 (23%). Salary is included for university faculty and staff to ensure the overarching goal and all objectives is achieved. Funding is requested for travel so the leadership team can visit schools to observe the implementation of the program and go to conferences and meetings to disseminate findings. Funds are requested to support the teachers and students as well as the business within their counties. This funding includes stipends for teachers and business owners, which will support participation; travel for busses so students can collaborate with local business partners; stipends for summer internships so students can work alongside business owners; and a material stipend for business owners so they can implement students' business plans. As required, \$26,800 (20%) of the budget is going to each of the community partners, NAAE, and KSBDC.

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