

Enhancing Youth Education with School-Community Partnerships: An Intra-Curricular Approach to Secondary Agricultural Marketing

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Enhancing Youth Education with School-Community Partnerships: An Intra-Curricular Approach to Secondary Agricultural Marketing Need for Innovation Idea

The Appalachia region of Kentucky is recognized as the highest distressed area within the Appalachian Regional Commission (Thorne, Tickamyer & Thorne, 2004). Haaga (2004) reported Kentucky as the lowest state, of the 13-state region, in college completion (13.7%) and highest for high school dropout (37.5%). As a result, the researchers sought to develop a curriculum that could assist in this community deficiency, through agricultural education.

Durden and Ellis (2003) note student motivation improves significantly when content is delivered in a uniquely empowering way, leading to improved attendance and high academic performance. One approach to doing so is by developing positive youth and adult relationships. Hastings, Barrett, Barbuto Jr., and Bell (2010) found youth and community engagement leads to youth ownership, empowerment, and confidence. In addition, youth gained community awareness along with a change in attitudes and perceptions. Multiple studies examining the same phenomena in a variety of contexts noticed similar results (Camino & Zeldin, 2002; Jarrett, Sullivan & Watkins, 2005; Bird, Martin, Tummons & Ball, 2010). An innovative agri-marketing curriculum has since been created to utilize the idea of school-community partnerships to foster motivation, interest, and awareness of entrepreneurship opportunities for youth in resource-depleted communities of Kentucky.

How It Works

The University of Kentucky is implementing a school-community partnership approach to assist the poorest counties in the Appalachian region - all of which are in the poorest counties in the nation (Census Bureau, 2010). This approach entails secondary agricultural students enrolled in an agri-business course to partner with an agricultural business in their community.

From fall of 2016 to the summer of 2017, the project leadership team developed 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 was included to ensure the curriculum aligned with current educational standards. The project team met with the Kentucky Association of Agricultural Educators (KAAE) and the Kentucky Small Business Development Center (KSBDC) to determine five secondary agriculture programs and five community agri-businesses for curriculum implementation. These participants were selected due to unemployment and poverty rates within their county. A two-day professional training in the summer of 2017 provided teachers and businesses with materials and methodological practices needed for the curriculum. Teachers began teaching in the 2017-2018 academic year.

The agri-marketing curriculum was created to connect secondary youth with adults in their community while using an authentic context. Students will work in groups of three with their selected agri-business to develop a thorough marketing plan by the completion of the curriculum. Thus, the curriculum will explore topics essential to creating a marketing plan within nine fundamental units. Each unit builds upon the previous with frequent overlap and reference to other subjects due to the meshing nature of a marketing plan. As students complete a unit and its corresponding summative assessment, they will have prepared a portion of the marketing plan. The curriculum is anticipated to consume 85 instructional days to fully implement.

To obtain the required information needed to develop the marketing plans, students will combine their learning from classroom instruction as well as learning attained from their interactions with the community agri-business partner and SBDC representative. Students will

visit their school's partnered agri-business at least twice during the duration of the curriculum. Schools and business owners are encouraged to work together on numerous, additional occasions for students to increase their interaction with their community partners.

Regarding evaluation, the end of course exam is the students' efficacy in compiling the previously completed portions of the marketing plan into one comprehensive marketing plan which will be presented to the partnered agri-business. The University of Kentucky project research team is providing on-going visits for support and observations throughout implementation. Also, a teacher log survey is sent to each teacher every two weeks to document feedback as they progress with the curriculum project. Students will also compete in the Kentucky FFA Marketing Plan competition, providing the opportunity to assess the effectiveness in preparing the students for the competition against other schools.

Results to Date

The two-day workshop on the execution of the agri-marketing curriculum marked the completion of the curriculum writing and the beginning of implementation. There were four themes present in the teacher feedback following the workshop: the project provides for relevance to the students, a connection to the community, a variety of activities, and a future possibility of extending and continuing the project after the pilot year is over.

Four of the five selected agricultural educators began teaching the agri-marketing curriculum in their classrooms August 2017. These teachers are half-way through the content and students are continuously developing their marketing plans. The last educator is on a block academic schedule; therefore, this teacher began the curriculum in January 2018. There are 90 students between the five classrooms who are receiving instruction. Students and local business partners have met twice thus far. Ongoing evaluation efforts by the project team are being done.

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 vital content knowledge and activities to be utilized within all agricultural classrooms. With collaborations among the SBDC, 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 which 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%), and participant support \$30,820 (23%). Salary is included for university faculty and staff to ensure the overarching goal and objectives are achieved. Travel funding is provided to assist the leadership team with helping the teachers implement the curriculum. Stipends for teachers and business owners are provided to encourage participation and teachers are provided an allowance for teaching materials, supplies and field trip expenses to the business. Each business will receive funding to implement the designed plans as well as funding to hire one of the students, as an intern, to facilitate the actions items of the accepted agri-marketing plan.

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