

Empower: Integrating Innovative Teaching Strategies

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Introduction/Need for Innovation or Idea

The Empower Conference was designed to provide agricultural education teachers in Virginia and West Virginia with a professional development opportunity to enhance their teaching strategies. One focus area included utilizing teaching approaches to increase student engagement and achievement. Teachers were also given tactics for amplifying the students' capacity for critical thinking by implementing LifeKnowledge materials into their daily instruction.

The decision to develop this program was based upon a perceived need of teachers to rejuvenate their teaching strategies and techniques. Due to the low adoption rate of LifeKnowledge into Virginia and West Virginia agricultural education programs after the initial induction program in 2005, the need for teachers to implement LifeKnowledge into instruction also existed.

How It Works/Methodology/Program Phases/Steps

The Virginia Agricultural Education Curriculum Specialists in conjunction with the Virginia and West Virginia participants of National FFA Organization's Delta Conference chose to develop Empower as a two-state professional development conference for teachers in Virginia and West Virginia. Planning phases included selecting a target audience, analyzing the needs of the target audience and structuring activities to meet those needs. Conference planning was done in tandem with National FFA LifeKnowledge specialists, Virginia Tech Agricultural and Extension Education Department and representatives from the Virginia Department of Education and West Virginia Department of Education. Due to the financial support of these partners, teachers were able to attend the conference at no cost.

Empower was a one and a half day conference for teachers held on November 9 and 10, 2006. LifeKnowledge Specialists and Delta Conference participants engaged teachers in methods to energize classrooms and amplify their students' achievement and comprehension through engagement. Thirty-six current and pre-service teachers participating in the workshop were organized into Learning Communities according to their specialty teaching areas. They were encouraged to share experiences, ideas, and serve as collaboration groups. Teachers were asked to collaborate to enhance lesson plans that each participant was requested to bring along. At the conclusion of the conference, teachers were asked to submit an electronic copy of the lesson plan integrated with Engaging Strategies and LifeKnowledge materials to the curriculum specialists. Empower lesson plans would be compiled and placed on the Virginia Agricultural Education Resource Website.

Results to Date/Implications

As a measure to ensure the programmatic approach to the Empower Conference, each participant was also asked to complete an on-line survey. The survey yielded the following results. Through a 69.4% response rate to the survey, we identified the following vital information.

- 76% of the respondents had 5 or less years of experience
- 83% of the respondents teach at the high school level
- 96% of respondents rated all learning activities as Good or Excellent
- 60% of respondents had received no prior LifeKnowledge training
- 52% of respondents indicated that Empower “Definitely encouraged me to implement LifeKnowledge”
- 92% indicate 2 or more uses of Effective Directions
- 88% of respondents indicate 2 or more uses of Interest Approaches
- 64% indicate 2 or more different E-Moments used
- 83% of the respondents stated that Empower did meet their expectations
- 60% indicate 2 or more uses of Contextual Settings
- 40% of the respondents indicated that more time was needed within the Learning Communities

Implications:

- Our target audience for the adoption of LifeKnowledge and Engaging Strategies materials is teachers with five or less years of experience teaching predominately at the high school level.
- The learning activities conducted at Empower were effective but can be built upon and enhanced to increase the level of teacher adoption.
- A greater amount of time will be allocated for the entire conference with larger windows of time dedicated for Learning Communities to work together.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

Results of that survey will be used to make future workshops of the Empower Program more effectively designed and provide information and materials that teachers desire to have. Informal follow-up interviews will be conducted with each of the participants throughout the year to assess the long-term impact of the Empower Conference on integration of the materials into their teaching strategies.

Costs/Resources Needed

Lodging, meals and mileage \$4,000
Substitute Teacher pay \$300
Engaging Strategies and LifeKnowledge curriculum CD \$1760
Printing and conference notebooks \$350
Total cost \$6410

References

- National FFA Organization. (2006). *Engaging Strategies for Agriculture Classrooms*. Indianapolis.
- Reardon , Mark and Seth Derner. (2004). *Strategies for Great Teaching*. Chicago, Zephyr Press.