

Learn – Plan – Do: A Reflection Tool for Teacher Induction Professional Development

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Introduction

We do not learn from experiences; rather we learn from reflecting on experience (Dewey, 1933). John Dewey was the first theorist to introduce the concept of reflection as a problem-solving technique (Hatton & Smith, 1995). Dewey (1933) postulated that humans do not learn from experiences, but rather from reflections on them. Dewey recognized the role that real-life and hands-on experiences have on learning and the importance of connecting learning to real-life applications. It is essential to take into consideration Dewey's explicit focus on the necessity of reflection while providing support and guidance to early-career school-based agricultural education (SBAE) instructors through teacher induction programming.

Simply put, reflection is a process of meaning-making in which the learner attempts to relate previous and current experiences by drawing connections between them (Dewey, 1933). The impact of reflection on teachers is directly related to the understanding and practice they have in the classroom. The findings of previous research point to a significant connection between reflection and the awareness and development of a practitioner's professional practice (Schon, 1983). Dewey (1910) contended that reflection should take place within a community because active affirmation of meaning and encouragement of further thought can result from such group interaction. The Learn – Plan – Do reflection tool, when utilized for teacher professional development, provides reflection-on-action by planning an action and then reviewing and analyzing what resulted (Schon, 1983; Van den Bossche & Beusaert, 2012).

How it Works

Beginning in the 2017-2018, program coordinators for the Minnesota agriculture, food, and natural resource (AFNR) Teacher Induction Program (TIP) introduced the Learn – Plan – Do reflection tool. Early-career SBAE teachers engaged in the induction program received an electronic copy of the tool and were asked to utilize it throughout the year long program. Given the nature of programming, monthly professional development webinars offer early-career SBAE teachers a just-in-time topic related to their role as a SBAE teacher and FFA advisor. Content-experts share expertise with early-career teachers for about 30 minutes of the monthly professional development webinar, focused on a given topic such as student engagement techniques, integrating leadership development into the classroom, and grants and career and technical education funding. These topics provide a focus area for the early-career teachers to apply learning using the Learn – Plan – Do reflection tool. The content-experts' presentations are the focus of the *Learn* component of the reflection tool.

In the second step, the *Plan* component, program participants record their name and one thing they commit to do related to what was learned from the expert in the Plan section of a google document shared with all participants. Each participant is asked to focus specifically on one thing they want to remember and identify an action they will take in the next month to apply their learning. At the next monthly meeting, program participants return to the shared document, reflect on their plan, and share an update of the action that occurred. During this final step, the *Do* component, early-career teachers add a short statement in the shared document about what they did and what the outcome or result was.

Staff of the teacher induction program review the Learn – Plan – Do document each month to identify follow up needs, themes that emerged, and additional supports and resources needed by program participants. Instructional coaches and regional mentors for the program meet with staff monthly following the participant meetings and discuss the Learn – Plan – Do reflection tool, as well as actions and resources needed based on the monthly feedback from early-career teachers.

Results to Date & Implications

Each month, early-career teachers and induction program staff are given the opportunity to reflect on growth that has occurred and identify key professional development needs by referring to the Learn – Plan – Do document. These insights are used year after year to not only direct the preparation of the monthly professional development but also to determine which topics early-career teachers have found to be the most helpful in their classrooms. This information provides direction for the preparation of future presentations by both staff and subject matter experts.

Early-career teachers benefited from consistently engaging in reflective practice and being held accountable by focusing on one achievable action completed within a month to apply a newly acquired idea. While teachers have full autonomy over the way the monthly topic is incorporated into their own programs, the structure maintains reasonable expectations and fosters follow-through in the form of a reminder of intended actions. One participant indicated, “Learn – Plan – Do was a great way for me to reflect in the moment about what I learned from speakers, plan out a strategy to use with my program that helped me directly apply what I had just gained, and then actually do it and see some great results. I appreciated the applicability of the model and how it allowed me to actually make a plan of action rather than just getting the knowledge and not knowing where to go with it.” Another emphasized the importance of providing time for collaborative reflection, stating, “During the first year of teaching, you are trying to figure out what works and what doesn’t, but finding time to sit down and reflect is hard.”

In addition, the Learn – Plan – Do reflection tool provides instructional coaches and regional mentors with a specific topic on which they can follow up with their early-career teachers. This helps instructional coaches and regional mentors support early-career teachers in a more personalized way.

Future Plans & Advice to Others

The Learn – Plan – Do reflection tool will continue to be used in the teacher induction program. In subsequent years, there will be a greater focus placed on intentional follow up with instructional coaches, which will assist in fully integrating the tool into on-site, in-person coaching. In addition, when several years of experience are gained, recurring themes of needs and actions will be recognized in order to further address the supports that early-career SBAE teacher’s desire. It is advised that one Learn – Plan – Do document be used throughout the full year to make it possible for program participants and their support system to have simple access to the document. This also allows the document to be easily located and returned to.

Costs & Resources Needed

Implementing the Learn – Plan – Do reflection tool involves very little in the form of financial or other resources. The sole resource required is a document that can be accessed virtually and edited by multiple people.

References

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