

## **Experiential and Transformational Learning as a Professional Development Framework**

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The purpose of this poster is to demonstrate how Iowa's Team AgEd used principles of Experiential Learning (EL) and Transformational Learning (TL) as a framework for a state-wide professional development conference. The conference was intended to build community and empower agriculture teachers to meet the future demands of agricultural education in Iowa within the context of TL.

The program was guided by Preflection, Experience, Reflection, and Transfer (PERT) as a process for utilizing EL in programs. There were three reflective components to the program: preflection (before), formative reflection (during), and summative reflection (after). By using PERT as a process for implementing EL, we employed the principles of EL to engage participants in minds-on learning (Kolb, 2015; Retallick, 2009).

The necessary components of TL include 1) identifying a disorienting dilemma; 2) engaging in critical discourse; and 3) processing experiences by critically reflecting on personally held beliefs, ideas, values, and attitudes (Mezirow, 1997). By creating a space for critical discourse and providing the necessary tools for meeting these criteria for TL, our ambition was to empower agricultural educators to identify and act towards improving dilemmas in their agriculture programs.

## **Program**

### **Preflection before the Experience**

During the preflection stage of the conference, participants engaged in pre-work, completed a pre-survey, and participated in an introductory workshop session. The session aimed at helping participants process (reflect) and share (discuss) through a series of intentionally guided reflection prompts. These prompts began with *descriptive reflection* and asked participants to define and describe their situation and identify their disorienting dilemma. Next, encouraged *reflection* by building awareness on these situations. We asked participants what their role, contribution, and level of responsibility was in the situation and what their feelings were about their dilemma. Finally, we engaged in *critical reflection* by participants to assess the situation and determine desired outcomes. This was accomplished by asking them what their desired outcomes and goals were, who would benefit from improving the situation, and how it would impact their future.

### **Formative Reflection on the Experience**

During the conference, we engaged participants in formative reflection by asking them to utilize transformational learning in a team breakout session and to process and debrief in a whole-group reflection. For the team breakouts, participants were divided into teams of 12 in which the teams were purposefully formed by mixing years of experience. Facilitators were assigned to monitor team progress and serve as a resource. The team members were asked to share the disorienting dilemmas they had identified in the preflection session. They explored options and ideas for solutions in a team discussion. Next, the teams engaged in *action reflection* and considered a plan for implementing viable solutions for their problems. They were asked to create and share their goals for implementation. Finally, the teams regrouped and reflected on their biggest highlights and takeaways from the program experience.

### **Summative Reflection and Transfer After the Experience**

At the end of the conference, participants engaged in summative reflection by asking them to transfer their learning. They were asked to consider how they could integrate the principles of TL into their experiences and programs. We asked them to identify their TL takeaway and to consider how they could apply the concepts from conference to new contexts and situations. Finally, participants were guided to identify their next steps. We asked them to think about who they could connect with after the conference and how they could collaborate in the future. The conference was concluded with a post-survey.

### **Results and Implications**

A pre/post-survey design was administered to determine the effectiveness of the program. Participants reported growth in their knowledge of TL and intention to use TL in their programs. Over half the participants reported changes in the way they looked at themselves, their ideas, their behavior, and their beliefs. Most participants highly valued their time at the conference. One participant shared that the conference helped them to “focus on the reason why we do things.” Some participants shared that they wished we had even more time to collaborate with teams and shared that “you [had] us talking and collaborating and good stuff was happening.” One participant shared that “this was one of the best state held conferences I have been to.”

We found that using the PERT process for utilizing EL and the principles of TL to host a state-wide professional development conference was impactful. Based on our intention to build community and empower change in agricultural education programs through facilitating critical discourse and guided reflection. The broader implication of this project is the usefulness of this framework for developing engaging and impactful professional development.

### **Future Plans and Advice to Others**

Our plans involve following up with participants after the conference to encourage continued engagement in community discourse and reflective thinking. Our goal is to continue to support community building, the development of reflecting thinking skills, and to support the empowerment of agricultural educators to solve the dilemmas that face their programs.

Our advice is to use the PERT process for implementing EL and the principles of TL as a framework for professional development. We plan to continue using this framework for future professional development as we help agricultural educators tackle important challenges. Conceptualizing reflection as prelection, formative, and summative should be considered as a means to develop reflective practice.

### **Resources Need**

A primary requirement for this program is substantive time for reflection and discourse. Reflection and discourse should be intentionally guided with prompts. We found it useful to consider prompts in advance and created a workbook for participants to capture their thoughts and discussions. We also provided participants with guides for EL, TL, discourse, and reflection. We found it useful to designate team leaders and identify facilitators who were available to assist the teams as needed.

### References

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