The Amazing Career Connection: Applying Educational Concepts Across Disciplines

Krysti Kelley
Doctoral Candidate
Texas Tech University
krystkel@ttu.edu

Clarissa Darby
Doctoral Candidate
Texas Tech University
cladarby@ttu.edu

Introduction/need for innovation or idea

In today's interdisciplinary workforce, career readiness increasingly depends on students' ability to transfer skills like communication, leadership, and instructional design across professional contexts (Robinson & Garton, 2008). Agricultural education, which is strongly rooted in experiential education, offers opportunities to teach these transferable skills, even to students outside of the agricultural education major (Parr & Edwards, 2004). However, many introductory courses remain content-heavy and context-specific, which can cause them to be disconnected from students' diverse career interests. Non-formal learning experiences, such as game-based or challenge-driven formats, have been shown to increase engagement and deepen understanding by situating learning in authentic, collaborative tasks (Kolb, 1984; Knobloch, 2003).

At Texas Tech University, the introductory agricultural education course is commonly composed of a majority of students who are not agricultural education majors. These students voiced concerns about connecting course concepts to their careers outside of classroom-based agricultural education. Inspired by The Amazing Race television show, this activity was designed to help students in an introduction to agricultural education course explore how core teaching concepts apply across career fields and create a relevant bridge between agricultural education content and students' individual professional goals.

How it works/methodology/program phases/steps

This activity was implemented at the end of the course to ensure that students had been introduced to key concepts, including the differences between formal, non-formal, and informal learning experiences. Before the race, materials were prepared, including custom race clues, a team rotation schedule, and a reflection worksheet for student teams. During the class before the race, students completed a strengths-based assessment called the High5 assessment to identify their individual assets. Based on these results, students were grouped into teams of five to six and discussed how their strengths might contribute to team tasks.

On the day of the activity, teams received their first clue and began rotating through four stations, each designed to challenge different strengths such as critical thinking, communication, or adaptability. The four stations included a puzzle station, a volleyball station, a ladderball station, and a notecard mental task station. Teams were required to strategically select members for each task based on their assessment results and explain their choices on their reflection sheet. Upon completing all five stations, teams submitted their reflections and were ranked based on their finishing time. In the following class session, students debriefed the experience. They discussed how the race simulated the application of agricultural education concepts, particularly the facilitation of professional development and non-formal learning, in their future workplaces. Strategies for designing and implementing a similar experience in work-based environments were discussed.

Results to date/implications

Over the two most recent iterations of the course, participation in the capstone adult-education exercise comprised 50 students in the Spring 2024 cohort and 46 students in the Spring

2025 cohort. In class meeting after the activity was facilitated, a structured debrief connected the race to professional development principles in agricultural education, focusing on designing engaging non-formal experiences, scaffolding reflection, and leveraging individual strengths within diverse teams. Student feedback underscored the exercise's impact. One participant noted, "I'd never put myself in a situation where I didn't know anyone, but this showed me that in our industry, we'll collaborate with all kinds of people toward the same goal." Another remarked, "For the first time, I could see exactly how the course concepts apply to my future career in agricultural communications."

Such reflections confirmed that the activity not only reinforced theoretical content but also helped students envision its practical value in their forthcoming professional roles. Collectively, these data indicate that the adult-education race not only achieved its immediate instructional objectives, reinforcing distinctions among formal, non-formal, and informal contexts, but also promoted transferable skills in teamwork, adaptability, and critical reflection that students perceive as vital to their forthcoming roles in their respective workforce fields.

Future plans/advice to others

Texas Tech University plans to continue incorporating this activity into future iterations of the course, particularly during semesters with a high percentage of non-agricultural education majors. The activity has proven to be a valuable tool for helping students make meaningful connections between course content and their own career goals. Moving forward, additional opportunities will be explored to integrate cross-disciplinary connections further and enhance the relevance of agricultural education concepts for students with a variety of professional aspirations.

For educators looking to replicate this activity, it is helpful to first introduce students to the concepts of formal, non-formal, and informal learning. Investing time planning race logistics, such as team assignments, clue design, and station flow, will ensure a smooth and engaging experience. Consider using widely accessible strengths assessments, such as High5, to personalize the experience for students. During the activity, provide a facilitator for each station to ensure that activities are conducted according to the rules and to assist teams that need additional help. To maximize the impact, debrief the activity in the following class and guide students to reflect on how educational strategies can be applied to non-educational careers.

Costs/resources needed

Implementing this lesson in an introductory agricultural education course involves only modest spending. Depending on which activity stations were included, expenses varied. The puzzle station required four puzzles, totaling $7.50. The coaching station needed a volleyball purchased in spring 2024 for $16.99 and a balloon bought in spring 2025 for $3.00. The ladder-ball station called for a $15 set. The department supplied notecards and scissors at no extra cost for the notecard mental task station. Altogether, material purchases amounted to $39.50 in spring 2024 and an additional $10.50 in spring 2025. The strengths-based assessment, High5, was a free resource for students and only required an account to be created.

References

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