Innovative Reflection Tools for HRD Training, Development, and Education

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The English word reflection is derived from reflectere, “to bend back” – as a mirror bends back the light, making apparent what is otherwise hidden or mysterious (Johnson, 2006). Reflection bends the light of our experiences back into our minds, to consider what the experience was about and what it meant. Reflection is also a critical element in transformational learning opportunities that should be part of effective training, development, and educational experiences (e.g., courses, workshops, programs). Since developing people is seeded in learning, HRD educators, scholars, and/or practitioners continuously work to understand the most effective methods and techniques to assist individuals in learning more effectively with the goal of improving performance. The purpose of this engaging workshop is to offer a variety of innovative tools that both academics and practitioners can use with adult learners in various settings to help them further develop knowledge, competencies, and skills through enhanced reflection experiences.

We cannot help create employees, managers, and leaders who transform without helping them first be transformed by their own learning experiences. Learning that transforms individuals is learning that changes individuals. Since developing individuals is a transforming process, transformational learning theory provides a valuable theoretical lens to guide this

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Merriam and Caffarella (1995) explained that “transformational learning theory is about change—dramatic, fundamental change in the way we see ourselves and the world in which we live” (p. 318). They explained that this kind of learning is more than merely adding to what we already know. It shapes people; “they are different afterward, in ways both they and others can recognize” (Clark, 1993, p. 47). According to Merriam and Caffarella (1995) and Mezirow (1991), this theory focuses on three core components: mental construction of experience, critical reflection, and development and action. First, mental construction of experience is facilitated through engaging with each life experience to make meaning. Through this there is an opportunity for a change in perspective and behavior. Second, effective learning follows effective reflection (critical reflection); learning does not necessarily come from the experience itself as many would argue. To be transformed from learning individuals must not only think about their experiences, but they must also examine the underlying beliefs and assumptions that influence how they make sense of their experiences. Bennis (1989) explained,

> There are lessons in everything, and if you are fully deployed, you will learn most of them. Experiences aren’t truly yours until you think about them, analyze them, examine them, question them, reflect on them, and finally understanding them. The point, once again, is to use your experiences rather than being used by them, to be the designer, not the design, so that experiences empower rather than imprison.

Third, to truly transform, they need to try out their new knowledge, skills, or roles and then build new competence and self-confidence (development and action) (Madsen & Tunheim, 2009). In this transformational learning process, critical reflection (the topic of this session) is one of the three core components, and we would argue that it is also a critical component of the human development process as well.
Session Purpose

The purpose of this engaging, innovative session is to offer participants a variety of innovative reflection tools that can be used by HRD academics and practitioners in various settings. Each tool presented will be taught, practiced, and shared. It will provide attendees the opportunity to challenge behaviors and practices commonly seen and held within this arena. We have just facilitated a successful session at the International Leadership Association conference (Madsen & Tunheim, 2009) on this topic and realized that we need a similar conversation in the AHRD as this session uses important adult learning theory and demonstrates its vital utility in HRD academics and practice.

Session Description and Format

In this innovative session, participants will learn about the reflection tools, practice using them, and then share their experiences with others in small groups. Each participant will receive a packet that includes descriptions of each tool, technique, and activity. This will include references and lists of additional resources. Here is an outline of our proposed 75 to 90 minute session:

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Session overview
   a. What are the session objectives?
   b. What is reflection? (flip chart activity)
   c. Why do reflection? (includes introduction of theoretical framework already described)
3. Reflection tools (each will have a short explanation, opportunity to practice the tool, and duo or trio sharing exercise, and implications to practice discussion):
a. ORID Reflection Process: Objective, Reflective, Interpretive, and Decisional Data


c. Journaling Reflection Process

d. Reflective activities: (e.g., Moods, Body Parts, Quotes, Ball of String, Poem/book, and Brainstorm Groups (linguistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, spatial, musical, mover, mathematical))

e. ABC/123 Reflection Model

f. Other tools (ideas from participants)

4. Debrief: overall implications to practice in HRD education and practice (including programs such as leadership development)

5. Summary, next steps

Conclusion

Through extensive work with reflection processes, we have discovered that most college and university students (particularly undergraduates) and many employees do not understand, take the time, and/or fully engage in a critical reflection process that could assist them in transformational learning experiences. Parks (2000) argues:

Many young adults, even those who are regarded as privileged, are often being cheated in a primary way. They are not being asked big-enough questions. They are not being invited to entertain the greatest questions of their own lives or their times.

Dilworth (2009) agrees:

It takes time and practice to unlock the ability to reflect. The art of critical reflection takes even longer, and some never get there. However, once the impasse is breached and reflection starts to occur naturally and routinely, the individual can feel empowered and
in control of their own life. That can be a liberating experience. When the reflection pushes to the deeper levels of self, it becomes possible to jettison dysfunctional assumptions and behaviors. Deep learning can then occur. It can become transformative learning. The individual is elevated to a new plateau of self-awareness. At this point, it becomes what can be called emancipatory learning—throwing off the self-imposed, and frequently externally imposed, chains that have been constraining clear thinking and advance. Reflection in the end is a dialogue with self.

Most developmental courses and programs do not assist participants in developing the skills to learn to reflect at the breadth and depth just described. We argue that it is through a host of reflective tools and experiences that individuals can develop true critical reflective skills and habits. This workshop can assist educators and practitioners in being aware of the variety of techniques available and give them practice to enhance these skills. Most importantly, they can immediately begin to implement what they have learned into their own settings.

Bibliography


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