

Agricultural Education Teacher Leaders’ Development of Ownership and Responsibility for the Profession through Participation in Continuing Professional Education Program Planning: A Case Study

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Historically, planning and delivery of professional development for public school teachers was centralized in state departments of education and universities, with teachers having little input or control over the content. For many years the literature in adult and continuing education has reflected an emphasis on learner participation in program planning (Houle, 1980; Knowles, 1980; Richey, 1957). Contemporary adult learning theory holds that when adults are integral to the program planning process (Cervero & Wilson, 2006; Little, 1993) they are empowered to address their educational needs in the context of their practice (Cochran–Smith & Lytle, 1999). The purpose of this case study was to examine teacher participation in the planning of continuing professional education within the small field of agricultural education in New York. The over–arching theme that emerged from this study was that when the teachers took primary responsibility for planning their own professional development they, seemed to assume an increased sense of ownership for practice in their profession.

Key words: continuing professional education planning, teacher leaders, agricultural education

The literatures in adult and continuing education as well as teacher education reflect a history that emphasizes the importance of learner participation in program planning (Houle, 1980; Knowles, 1980; Richey, 1957) where planning is a mutual responsibility of the teacher(s) and the adult learners (Knowles, 1980). While the literature identifies learners as an integral component in program planning (Cervero & Wilson, 2006; Little, 1993) particularly adult learners (Cochran–Smith & Lytle, 1999), there appears to be a lack of empirical examinations of how learners participate in the mutual relationships of responsibility for the planning work. Moreover, the research is not clear on how learner participation in planning may influence the development and implementation of a continuing professional education program (Houle, 1972) and in particular little research is available to justify why learner participation is

an integral aspect of program planning in adult education.

According to Cervero and Wilson’s (2006) contemporary planning theory for adult and continuing education, planning is a “social activity whereby people construct educational programs by negotiating personal, organizational, and social interest in contexts marked by socially structured relations of power” (p. 24). The authors posit that it is “practically and ethically essential to ask who benefits and in what ways” (p. 26) from the continuing professional education program. Based on this theory, educational program planners need to have an understanding of who participates in the planning process and how those participants engage in the planning practices where people make decisions with others in social and organizational contexts (Cervero & Wilson, 2006). Cervero and Wilson also maintain that these planning practices occur at “multiple physical and metaphorical planning

tables” (2006, p. 18) that exist not only during the traditional preparation of a program but continue to operate as participants influence how a program is facilitated while it is unfolding. Learner participation in their own educational experiences has been emphasized in continuing professional education and adult education literature for decades (Houle, 1980; Knowles, 1970, 1980; Lindeman, 1926/1989; Schön, 1983; Sork & Buskey, 1986). Unfortunately the effects or influences of learner participation in planning on the learners and the educational programs have not been closely examined through empirical studies documented within the continuing professional education and adult education literature.

The Cervero and Wilson (2006) framework is in contrast to the typical continuing professional development program planning practices reported in the agricultural education literature. In that literature, the planning process has been described as university-driven technical content updates (Duncan, Ricketts, Peake, & Uessler, 2006). In general, such professional development activities are built on a theoretical framework of Technical Rationality (Schön, 1983). In the technical update model, teachers are viewed as the *recipients* of professional development in-service that is planned and delivered by other agencies using a top-down approach, with decision-making being reserved to those who are being *responsible* for teacher growth. The traditional planning theory reflected in technical update professional development in-service programs generally results in university faculty and state staff having the primary responsibility for the agendas of professional development programs for teachers with the in-service instruction delivered by those agencies or by outside consultants.

The purpose of the study was to examine and document teacher participation in continuing professional education planning based on Cervero and Wilson’s (2006) contemporary adult planning theory as a potential model for agricultural education. The research questions that guided the research were:

1. How do the teachers describe their participation in the planning of the continuing professional education program?

2. Why do teachers participate in the continuing professional education program planning process?
3. How do the teachers perceive that they influence the planning group decisions regarding the continuing professional education program planning activities and design?
4. How do the teachers in the planning group perceive that their participation in the continuing professional education program planning influence their professional practice and their profession?

Methods

The case selected as the context of the study was the executive board and the planning committee responsible for preparing a state agricultural education teacher summer professional in-service conference. The purposeful sample (Patton, 2002) of eight agricultural education teacher leaders selected for this case study was the group of individuals who were active in the continuing professional education program planning work through their leadership roles in the New York Association of Agricultural Educators. These agricultural education teachers were participants/learners in the summer in-service conference. The researcher chose this group because the teacher leaders would be an “information rich” (Patton, 2002, p. 231) group that deviated from those individuals identified as the planners in the other agricultural education continuing professional education program planning literature (Anderson, Barrick, & Hughes, 1992; Duncan et al., 2006; Pals & Crawford, 1980) where the writers indicated that university faculty and state staff conducted the planning work. The teachers on the Executive Board were elected by their peers in the state agricultural education community to serve as: president, president-elect, past-president, treasurer, secretary, and three regional representatives.

The study participants (teacher leaders) were sent an email letter two weeks prior to the first group meeting in October. The email provided an explanation of the researcher’s request to observe the planning committee meetings. Formal observations (Yin, 2003) were conducted during each of the planning meetings, conference calls, and through the inclusion of

the researcher in all email exchanges that took place in between the formal group meetings. Throughout the study, the researcher maintained a role of participant observer (Spradley, 1980), allowing the planning group members to know that they were being observed. The meeting observations were audio-recorded while the conference calls were recorded by hand for later transcription, coding and analysis. All email and written communications were also coded and analyzed. The researcher recorded field notes during all observations and composed research memos (Spradley, 1980) to capture her reflections and reactions to the events she experienced. The observations provided contextual references (Spradley, 1980) which were helpful points for questions during the interviews. These observations were planned, focused (Spradley, 1980) and guided by observation protocols (Yin, 2003) that were based on the study questions and propositions.

Data Collection

Data were collected through multiple methods that included the review of the documents related to the continuing professional education program planning activities, observations of the Board and committee meetings, and multiple interviews with the eight teacher participant. A focus group meeting was conducted after the planning committee session in January to provide the participants with an opportunity to validate the preliminary findings.

Content Analysis

The collection of related documents and archived materials began prior to the first planning meeting of the Board and then throughout the duration of the case study. Materials included documents from the state agricultural education website, previous conference planning materials and evaluations, archived staff records from earlier planning meetings for previous conferences, Association archived meeting minutes, as well as the agricultural education annual program reports. Since these documents were not written specifically for this study they were critically reviewed to determine their original purpose (Yin, 2003) and application to the case study.

Observations of the Group Meetings

The researcher conducted observations (Yin, 2003) during each of the planning meetings,

conference calls, and all email exchanges that took place in the time between the formal group meetings. Throughout the study the researcher maintained a role of participant observer (Spradley, 1980) where her observation activities were known by the participants however, the researcher did not engage in the activities of the meetings. The researcher audio-recorded the meetings as well as the conference calls, for later transcription, coding, and analysis. The researcher also recorded field notes during all observations and composed research memos (Spradley, 1980) to capture her reflections and reactions to the observed events. The observations provided contextual references (Spradley, 1980) which were helpful points for questions during the interviews. These observations were planned, focused (Spradley, 1980) and guided by observation protocols (Yin, 2003) that were based on the study questions and propositions.

Two Rounds of Interviews

A primary data source in this descriptive case study was a series of in-depth interviews with the teacher leaders of the Board. The interviews were designed to provide the respondents space to offer their reflective insights (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001) into their work in the continued professional education program planning. As members of the agricultural education planning group and as experienced teachers, these respondents were able to assist the researcher understand the process they experienced during the planning of the continuing professional education program.

At the conclusion of the first Board meeting, each of the teacher leaders received a letter explaining the round one, part one interviews. The first round of interviews was conducted over the four weeks following the Board meeting, based on the teachers' schedule. Each interview focused on the participants' past experiences as members of the planning group as well as their perceptions of the communications and interactions they experienced as part of the planning group. Each of the interviews in round one consisted of two parts (Weiss, 1994) to allow the time needed to expand the discussion and allow the respondents to share their stories. The second part of the round one interview focused on follow-up questions based on the researcher's review of the

first transcript and attention to questions that had not been addressed well in the first session. The transcribed interviews were sent to the respective interviewees to review for accuracy and clarification (Yin, 2003). A second round of interviews included the three teacher leaders in the planning group who had five or more years of experience in the planning process. These teachers were able to share perspectives of the planning process that reflected changes in the work over time.

Focus Group

This study used a focus group to seek the teacher leaders' reactions to the categories developed in the preliminary analysis (Patton, 2002). All eight of the teachers in the study were invited to participate in the focus group. Due to scheduling conflicts only four teachers were able to participate in the focus group session. The remaining four teachers were given copies of the material shared in the focus group and were asked to provide the researcher with any feedback or comments. The social context of the focus group allowed the teachers not only to respond to categories with their own perspectives, but to build on those responses and the responses of others to further articulate their understanding or belief about the questions associated with the categories. The audio recording of the focus group complement the field notes and observations gathered during the session (Hatch, 2002). The focus group resulted in one major outcome: the teachers requested that the findings of the study emphasize the importance of the collaboration between the teachers, the Agricultural Education Outreach staff, and the Agriculture Tech Prep program.

Analysis

The intent of this descriptive case study (Yin, 2003) was to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences and perspectives of the teacher leaders in the continuing professional education program planning process and "develop conceptual categories to support the theoretical assumptions" (Merriam, 1998, p. 38) regarding the participation of adult learners in educational program planning within the framework provided by the Cervero and Wilson (2006) planning theory. The specific analysis process followed the constant comparative method in

which "joint coding and analysis" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/1995, p. 103) was conducted where "each incident" was "compared with other incidents for similarities and differences...to identify properties and dimensions" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 73) that were specific to each category as they were developed.

It was critical to maintain a collaborative relationship with the participants, rather than representing the authority from the university. As part of a collaborative relationship, Haverkamp (2005) recommended that the researcher be keenly aware of her responsibilities in a "fiduciary role" (p. 151) in her relationships with participants. While it could have been difficult to establish and maintain distance with the study participants, an effort was taken to "clarify expectations" (Suzuki, Muninder, Mattis, & Quizon, 2005), maintain healthy relationships with the participants, and reduce the chances of misunderstandings (Haverkamp, 2005, p. 154). The researcher used member checks through the participants' review of all meeting and interview transcripts to ensure the accuracy of the observations and interpretations and to maintain relationship of trust with the participants.

Limitations of the Study

While the researcher collected as many notes and reports from previous meetings as possible, there were records of previous planning meetings that were no longer in existence. The interviews relied on the ability of the teachers to recall events and their ability to provide perspectives on events that occurred at some time in the past. These experiences, as they were recalled, may have been influenced by the teacher's ability to recall details of events and their interpretation of these events over time. Finally, this study did not include interviews with the other members of the Board, and therefore the data does not account for the perspectives of the non-teachers who worked within the group.

Results

Six organizing themes emerged from the analysis and those led to the synthesis of an overarching theme. The organizing themes and

the overarching theme are described in the following paragraphs.

Organizing Theme: The process of planning for the annual continuing professional education conference has evolved over the years from top-down to teacher-driven.

According to a teacher leader who participated in this study, Stephanie (please note: pseudonyms are used throughout the paper):

I remember going to the conferences and filling out the forms about what do you want to see next and all of that stuff and then the next year it was just there...I thought the workshops just happened through the State Education Department or whoever put them together. It wasn't really us.

This description of previous teacher conference experiences is consistent with the planning practices described in the current agricultural education literature (Duncan et al., 2006).

The changes in planning participation in this group of teachers were explained as a second participant, Mary reflected on the changes in who had responsibility for planning conferences:

Today we have our officers but we have state staff that can kind of lead us as well... Our state staff goes around the state, and they see what schools offer, what schools do really well, what programs are working, and I think that is valuable. I know what is happening in my program; I don't know what is happening across the state... Our state [association] leadership has also been to the national agriculture teacher conferences and they bring back ideas from those conferences for workshop ideas... I feel really good about what we offer now.

This planning history has had a strong influence on how and why agricultural education teachers have become involved in the planning work and how the leadership and responsibilities within the planning work are distributed among teachers, state staff members, and other stakeholder groups.

According to documents from the state agricultural education staff files, state-level leadership in agricultural education slowly

decreased in the late 1980's as the State Education Department staff members retired and were not replaced. Andrew reflected that:

When I first started teaching there were maybe six people at the State Education Department so they helped a lot with that stuff and then we went through that period in the 1980s when we went from six to three, to now half of a staff position.

This loss of leadership in the state structure created a void that was filled by the leadership of the state agricultural education teachers' association. Specifically, the Association presidents, with some help from the Board members, became responsible for planning the annual professional development conferences. Andrew shared:

I can recall back to the years, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when basically the president of [the Association] was responsible and maybe the State Education Department people would come in with some of their stuff, but the president was pretty much the one that went out and lined up this stuff.

He explained that it "was a period there where most of what we did was some paper handouts and that was about all you came home with because there was [sic] not the people or the money to put things together."

Organizing Theme: Over time teacher participation in the planning work resulted in fundamental changes in the continued professional education conference format and focus.

Teacher leaders on the Board and planning committee did not always have a positive opinion about the conference workshops and program format. As the group members shared their reflections on their early participation in the conference, five of the teachers stated that as new teachers attending the conference they had felt isolated or disconnected from the other participants. For example, Mary explained "my first New York Association of Agricultural Educators' conference was in a hotel in Rochester. I was in the hotel by myself because I did not know anybody else, and you made your

own hotel reservations.” As Theresa reflected on her first conference she remembered, “it was important to have that group interaction. That was what made me comfortable at the end of my first year.” In general, the teachers agreed that this feeling of isolation amplified their positions as new teachers, and at times they found it also limited their opportunity to interact with experienced teachers and develop a network of peers that they could use as a support in their local teaching practice.

The teachers shared that these early conference experiences had a strong influence on their current planning work. As Theresa explained, “when we sat down as a group and we thought about ways that people could interact, that was my big push. We needed to have interaction.” They did not want new teachers who attend today’s conferences to feel isolated and alone. They want them to feel like they are part of a larger profession in which they could rely on their fellow professionals to help them when they needed assistance.

In addition to the concerns about individual isolation at the conference, the teachers explained that during previous conferences there had been too much top-down directed sessions, specifically “a couple of years ago we were getting too much [university] interaction, too much of the university” (Theresa). According to the 2005 conference program Theresa was referring to, ten of the 15 total workshops were presented or facilitated by university faculty or staff. The teachers felt “they were being sold the university” information “instead of being educated about agriculture in general” and according to Theresa the teachers freely shared these concerns with the Board and planning committee. To address this issue the planning group sought out agriculture teachers who were interested in facilitating the workshop sessions. Thomas expressed that a similar concern motivated him to become a part of the Board and planning committee:

The reason I got involved with it was as a teacher or as an educator is the understanding that we go to an in-service, we see a lot of times new data coming at us...it is all in a lecture and in the agriculture field we obviously cannot do that all of the time. We have hands on.

As the teachers on the Board shared these concerns and their experiences at previous conferences, they explained how these concerns lead them to rethink their beliefs about their roles in the planning process and their understanding of the purpose of the conference.

Organizing Theme: As a part of their planning work, the teachers see themselves as having a responsibility for the future direction of the profession.

As members of the Board, the teachers in this study had clear goals they hoped to achieve for their profession through the design of the annual continuing professional education conference. During the interviews teachers explained their concern that communication between teachers and between teachers and other professionals “is one of our State’s downfalls” (Theresa) in agricultural education. In addition to the communication issues, the teachers also expressed a desire to design continuing professional education activities that encouraged teachers to work in groups to build trust and collegiality. The teacher planners created the new conference program model in an effort to improve both communication and trust within the profession. Christine explained that the team concept worked to address the communication and trust issues because “you talk to people you probably wouldn’t talk to because everybody stays in their own little groups pretty much, so it forces you to work as a team and meet with these other people.”

Teachers in the planning committee were confident that the conference workshop might have a direct impact on the curriculum focus of the individual programs as a result of the resources provided through the various workshops. Andrew remarked that:

The purpose of our conference would be to update our teachers on some of the more recent innovations to help provide professional development. To help a teacher add some things to their classes because they are being shared by other teachers so they are already getting things that are proven to work. There are not many workshops that we have had in the last seven or eight years that I would say I didn’t use somewhere.

The general feeling of responsibility among the participants in the study for improving practice in the profession was reflected consistently throughout the process.

Organizing Theme: The teachers developed informal planning practices to select potential topics for continuing professional education conference workshops.

The teachers explained that their influence on the program primarily came from their ability to use their range of teaching experiences and content backgrounds during the review of the teacher feedback from previous conference surveys. Specifically Andrew explained, "I come with almost 30 years of experience. I also tend to maybe view some topics as, in a different way than others might because of my years of experience." Mary agreed reflecting that:

Teachers [who] currently are in leadership roles have a lot of history...they know what works and what doesn't work. Or they know what we have done in the past. Maybe it is time to do that workshop again because it has been a while since we have done it...We have to sift through...piles of surveys and piles of ideas and ... the teachers on the [Board] have a lot of history... It is easier because the staff... [has] quite a bit of history as well, but in the future you don't know so I think it is important that we bring these teachers in to make sure our staff is going in the right direction.

According to Stephanie this experience was a critical aspect of the program planning work:

We know what we need. It is like, we know what's good. I mean, from 8 o'clock to 3 o'clock in the afternoon we know what we are doing and we know what is going to fit. I had a teacher say a few years ago, I go to these conferences and all we are doing is, we are adding stuff... What I think we are doing now is saying that you don't have to take things out, but here is just a better way of doing it... I think that is different if you have teachers taking a look at these lists, somebody who is not involved at the teacher level can regulate anything by saying, 'Wow, here is a great thing that sounds

really cool. But then you get it and it is not practical.

The teachers articulated their understanding of the *right direction* as an effort to select workshop topics that could be shared in a way that allowed the topics to be integrated into courses teachers were already teaching instead of expecting teachers to develop additional courses around the new material presented in a workshop.

Organizing Theme: The recent success of the continuing professional education conferences was attributed to the cooperation and collaboration among the organizations.

While the planning committee continued to work to develop and improve the new conference format, they appeared to try to incorporate different organizations or groups of agricultural educators into the program activities. According the Association's constitution and bylaws, this effort reflects one of the purposes of the organization, "to develop and maintain proper relationships with other organizations and agencies having compatible objectives" (p. 1). As the plans developed for the current program, the planning committee was specifically focused on collaborating with the university faculty who were involved in research studies at the Agriculture Experiment Station and a regional community college. During the planning process the teachers expressed a concern regarding the lack of participation from secondary agriculture teachers employed at regional centers. In addition to inviting other groups of teachers the committee discussed inviting staff from the Department of Agriculture and Markets to become more of a partner in the program. This partnership would be in addition to the partnerships the teachers already had established between themselves and the New York State Education Department, Cornell University, the AEO project, and the state Ag Tech Prep project through the Association's representation on the New York State Agricultural Education Leadership Council.

The planning committee recognized they had a number of faculty members from three of the state's four-year colleges attend as participants in addition to serving as conference presenters. Theresa spoke about the concerns

they had that “while we do have postsecondary agriculture teachers that come, we really haven’t planned specifically towards those postsecondary educators yet.” Andrew was hopeful that “maybe an invitation there will bring them in.” He went on to explain that a similar effort was made to involve other postsecondary faculty members, “I have talked to people at the State University of New York at Morrisville and said ‘wouldn’t you guys like to get involved?’ And they say ‘we would like to, what would you like us to do,’ but it is a matter of getting them there, and they see the kind of people they are working with, they kind of understand.”

The planning committee also identified one other group of teachers, those teaching agricultural education at the regional secondary educational centers, who hadn’t regularly participated in the annual conference, and therefore still needed to be specifically invited to participate in the upcoming event. Andrew emphasized:

We are constantly trying to come up with ideas where, are there new clientele that we are not reaching? We know that the discussion within the Board has been that we have to come up with better ways to reach the teachers who don’t tend to see themselves as ag teachers.

This emphasis on trying to attract other stakeholders to the workshop permeated the planning process.

Organizing Theme: The agriculture teacher planners were challenged by their responsibility to communicate with the teachers they represented.

While the teachers were very comfortable communicating within the planning committee and Board, during their interviews they expressed apprehension and worry about their ability to communicate with their professional community. The teachers in this planning committee indicated that they engaged in both informal and formal communication practices in an effort to seek out workshop topic ideas from their fellow teachers and to ensure teachers knew about the conference plans early in the school year. The informal communication occurred at conferences and other agricultural

education events while the formal communications were web based surveys, email notices on the state-wide electronic teacher list-serve, and written evaluations at the conclusion of each conference.

Andrew indicated that the planning committee’s effort to collect formal feedback and their efforts to use this feedback to design the conferences has encouraged other teachers to share ideas because they see that the conference reflects their previous suggestions. He observed:

We did some evaluations that at one year’s conference would carry over to the next conference. There would be comments made about ‘wish you would offer a workshop in’ fill in the blank. I think two years, two summers ago we did a big survey and everybody got online and we had surprisingly good responses. Most of the teachers now feel that, based on one conference after that, we looked at some of the things they said.

That survey was used extensively in the planning process and it was noted by many teachers as an indication that their input was actually used.

The free flow of suggestions from teachers surprised Thomas. He reflected on the responses he received from teachers after sending out an email to those in his region requesting input and ideas for the conference planning committee:

I thought I was going to zip out something and no one is going to respond and the next thing I knew I got ten emails back... On a survey it did not come to them, but after the survey it came to them.

The teachers explained that their involvement included helping collect teacher feedback regarding their needs, select the program location and facilities, identifying workshop topics and presenters, seeking out resources to distribute as part of the workshop sessions, and negotiating with other organizations to secure the funding needed to carry out the annual program.

Over-arching Theme: The teachers who provided leadership in planning the professional development developed a sense of ownership, a sense of responsibility for the direction and practice of the profession in their state.

These six organizing themes converged to establish a single over-arching theme: The teachers in this case study established a sense of ownership of their continuing professional education experiences and for the improvement of their own professional practices and those of their peers. In his final interview Andrew shared in his reflections that this sense of teacher ownership went beyond the group of teachers directly involved in the planning work:

There is more feeling of ownership amongst the teachers, and therefore more want to go to the conference, and then they are more apt to come back from the conference and use either the materials that they got or the ideas that they heard about. I could say that there were years where we had a conference where not much of anybody used anything that went on at that conference because they really didn't feel a whole lot of ownership.

Andrew's *feeling of ownership* implied both a sense of empowerment and a sense of responsibility.

The teachers illustrated their influence in the planning group decisions through the stories they experienced. The teachers told of their involvement in the impromptu brainstorming session that took place three years before this study in the basement of a state staff person's house. The teachers described this as a pivotal point of change in the annual summer continuing professional education program planning practices. This group session resulted in changes in program emphasis, a redesign of how teachers interacted with each other during the conference, and the development of a web-based survey that generated a significant amount of feedback from the teaching community. The teachers attributed the success of the survey to their leadership in the development, distribution, and analysis of the instrument and the resulting data. This teacher involvement in the needs survey was in contrast to the previous planning practices in this state's agricultural education community where previous surveys were administered by state education department staff

or university faculty. As a result of the large response to the web-based survey the teacher leaders became more involved in the analysis of the teachers' workshop ideas and selection of presenters.

Through the process of recreating the program design and integrating the web survey results into the workshop selection process, the teachers accepted responsibility for planning decisions and the ownership of the program. In addition to the expected changes in curriculum content, the teachers involved with the planning work hope that the changes they have made in the conference format encouraged teachers to communicate with their peers and develop collaborative relationships to help them address future concerns in their practice or support them at times when they need encouragement.

Conclusions

This study drew upon a contemporary adult education program planning theory (Cervero & Wilson, 2006) as the lens through which the teacher participation in the continuing professional education program planning was examined. According to the Cervero and Wilson's contemporary planning theory for adult and continuing education, planning is a "social activity whereby people construct educational programs by negotiating personal, organizational, and social interest in contexts marked by socially structured relations of power" (p. 24). The authors posit that it is "practically and ethically essential to ask who benefits and in what ways" (p. 26) from the continuing professional education program.

Teacher leaders on the Board embraced their power and influence on the decisions of the program planning work and clearly valued the diversity of the perspectives provided by the other planners on the Board and in the planning committee. When Stephanie was asked to think about the participation of teachers in the planning work she reflected that, "I can't picture not doing it this way...now we can see the lists [of workshop needs requested] and say this is where we need to focus." This statement clearly illustrates the group's recognition of how they are able to exert power within the group and influence the planning decisions. Andrew's comment that "the teachers involved in the process have more ownership" is critical

because it reflects the relationship the teachers see they have on the development of the conference objectives and program activities.

While these relationships appear to be working in a manner that supports and encourages teacher participation in the planning work, the history of the group itself illustrates how the teachers' participation can change over time as different stakeholders come to collaborate with the teachers. In this case the emergence of the AEO project, as a partner in the planning work, reduced the teacher participation for a period of time. The Cervero and Wilson (2006) planning theory accounts for the ever changing relationships among people and groups at the planning table. Within the theory there is an emphasis on the need for planners to recognize who is at the planning table, what agendas they bring with them to the planning work, and how they exert their relationships of power to enact their agendas in the continuing professional education program plan. In this particular case the new teachers on the board spoke about their initial confusion about their roles in the Board and planning committee decisions but over time they learned from their participation how to engage in the decision-making process.

The current planning practices for continuing professional education programs within the agricultural education community reflected the collaborative partnerships proposed by both Nowlen (1988) and Cervero (1988). However, the agricultural education planning practices have not included any efforts to consider other educational program models that would encourage long-term learning experiences that encourage individual teachers to "direct their own learning" (Nowlen, 1988, p. 213). Instead, the Board continued to struggle to try to address the educational needs of all of the agriculture teachers with one four-day program. This continuation of the same program model has persisted even with the concerns expressed by teachers that the 'shotgun approach' did not necessarily fit their needs. Mary specifically indicated that "I think we have to make sure we address that, which is hard."

Finally, the teachers hoped the continuing professional education program would help with the retention of newer agricultural education teachers and would improve the communication among members of the agriculture teaching

profession in the state. The teachers hoped that if new teachers and pre-service teachers experienced the team activities in the new conference format and had the chance to work with these groups of experienced teachers during the conference they would be more likely to call upon the experienced teachers when they needed assistance in their own practice. The development of these long-term relationships with other teachers shifts the continuing professional education program away from a technical update model to include aspects of Nowlen's (1988) performance model that accounts for the teachers "cultural influences" (p. 73) in their local agricultural education program, school district, and community as well as the teacher's "individual characteristics" (p. 73). While this does not appear to be well developed as a formal piece of the continuing professional education program, it may be a piece that develops as the group continues to work with their newly expanded role at the center of the program planning process.

While the teachers in this study demonstrated a sense of ownership of their continued professional education program, further research is necessary to examine the evidence of ownership within groups that have varying degrees of participation in the planning work. The results of this case also suggest that additional studies may be necessary to examine what specific planning practices or dynamics within the planning group provided the support or access necessary for the development of *ownership*. Since this case only examined the perspectives of the teachers, further work would be warranted to examine the perspectives and specific practices of the non-teacher planners who engage in the planning process. Finally, while the results of this case suggested that the learners' ownership of the continuing professional education program may have an influence on their professional practice; it did not include a specific examination of the learners' professional practices. Therefore, additional studies of the professional practices (classroom work of the teachers) of learners who articulate a sense of ownership of their continuing professional education experiences may provide an understanding of the influence of learners' ownership of educational

experiences on their practice and their profession.

and could be conducted in groups or individually.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from this study, it is recommended that additional research be conducted within agricultural education to examine the planning practices of other planning groups through the lens of adult education program planning theory. There appears to be some concern within this group of learners that the technical update model used as the traditional summer professional development conference may not really be addressing the needs of the agricultural education teachers. In practice agricultural education continuing professional education program planners may need to examine the other program models that appear both in the research literature and professional journals. Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1989, 1990) have suggested that there are five models of teacher professional development that may be incorporated into program planning and design:

- *Individually guided staff development* might include independent study or other activities developed by the teacher based on their individual interests or perceived needs. This activity may or may not occur as part of a formal professional development program.
- *Observation/assessment* activities allow for peer feedback on teaching practice. This may take the form of peer coaching, clinical supervision, or teacher evaluation.
- *Involvement in a development/improvement process* that would include curriculum or program development activities at the local or state level.
- *Training (Technical Update Model)* is the typical format for teacher professional development. This form allows for a larger number of participants per trainer therefore providing an economical method of transferring knowledge and skills. The training model is the one used in this case study and is the typical model in agricultural education (Duncan et al., 2006).
- *Inquiry* based professional development would be designed in various forms including action research or problem solving

While each of these models is significantly different in their design and role of the teachers within the professional development activity, they all are designed to provide teachers with an opportunity to develop new skills or knowledge that changes their classroom teaching practices. Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1989) hinged the success of each of these models on the existence of foundational organizational needs that include: common professional development goals among the teachers and educational leaders, educational leadership that encourages the implementation of new teaching practices, the use of a variety of methods of professional development evaluation, and a teachers' access to resources needed to carry out the new teaching practices. Upon closer examination of the models through the lens of the teachers' educational requests and concerns expressed on surveys, the planners may find that other models may be helpful in supporting or supplementing the traditional technical update program.

In this case study the teacher leaders expressed concern for the improvement of the communication practices within their profession as well as the need for deliberate efforts to incorporate opportunities for new teachers to network with other teachers as a part of the professional development program. While these two objectives are not educational objectives, they do illustrate what Cervero and Wilson (2006) refer to as social objectives of the educational program and need to be incorporated as part of the program. Likewise, the teacher leaders in the planning group emphasized the need to improve the relationship between teachers and the professional organization, what Cervero and Wilson identify as a political objective of the educational program. It is rare that planners of continuing professional education programs articulate the social and political objectives that exist in addition to the educational objectives. However, it may be important for planners to recognize and support the social, political, as well as the educational objectives when planning educational programs to improve teacher professional practice.

The over-arching theme that emerged from this research was relatively simple but it should not be lost in this discussion:

As a result of their participation in the continuing professional education program planning group the eight agricultural education teacher leaders in this case study had established a sense of ownership of their continuing professional education experiences that included the responsibility for the development of the professional practices of themselves and their peers.

If we would have teachers take a more active role in their profession, then fostering a sense of ownership in those teachers by vesting in them more of the responsibility for planning their continuing professional development might be an important step. Perhaps it is time for

leaders in state departments of education and universities who have traditionally maintained centrality of influence in the agricultural education profession to recognize that the teachers can assume more ownership in their profession if they are given the opportunity to do so. It may be this sense of ownership that will be critical to engage teachers in the necessary efforts to adapt new and innovative teaching practices such as inquiry based instruction (National Research Council, 2000) and rigorous curriculum such as the National Council for Agricultural Education's CASE program. Moreover, that increased sense of ownership may serve to empower the teachers in ways that we cannot yet fathom.

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