

Education is not aimed at knowledge but action

Further education has to be transfer-oriented: insight into the CIEA-Seminar 2005 in Chile

By Roland Stähli¹

For almost 50 years the CIEA (International Centre for Agricultural Education and Extension) has contributed to the further education of teachers and extensionists in the rural area. In recent years the attempt was made – in the framework of various seminars – to intensify the transfer efforts made by the participants, i.e. the transfer of the knowledge acquired during the course into the professional reality. The results achieved are encouraging, as the following experience report shows.

Imagine that you are forced to see a doctor for of a medical problem requiring a major operation. The visibly young doctor who is going to treat you introduces himself and says that he has just finished his studies. You would probably be somewhat rattled and would be worried about the outcome of the operation. With this example Gruber et al (2001) describe the problem existing between knowledge and behaviour.

Further education courses for teachers and extensionists are usually not a matter of life and death and yet the motto is: “The overall aim of (further) education is not knowledge but action.” In connection with this motto, the people in charge of education have to keep questioning themselves critically, and try to find out what further education measures help the participants to pursue the knowledge and the competences they have acquired in a course or the ideas they have outlined and transfer them into their professional life. Which three concrete measures, dear reader, spontaneously come to your mind?

A brief introduction to the CIEA

The CIEA (International Centre for Agricultural Education) is an international study centre for education and extension both in agriculture and in the rural area. The CIEA is based at the Federal Office for Agriculture in Berne. It was founded in 1956 on the suggestion of F. T. Wahlen, at that time director of the Agriculture Department of the FAO in Rome. The CIEA holds seminars – in Switzerland and abroad – for experts in agricultural education and extension. The CIEA-Seminar is intended for participants coming from industrialised, emerging and developing countries. Since 1995 the CIEA has been managed by the Swiss College of Agriculture, Zollikofen.

Just as many other providers of further education, the CIEA aims at reaching a long-term effect with the ideas and results elaborated and discussed during a seminar. The further education offer is intended to trigger off concrete actions, once the participants have returned to their professional life. Therefore, the CIEA-Seminar has to facilitate sustainable learning and be transfer-oriented.

Sustainable teaching/learning processes

If a further education activity has to be above all transfer-oriented, sustainable teaching/learning processes are among other things necessary. Today, various descriptions of the concept of “sustainable teaching/learning processes” can be found in many pedagogical texts and texts for adult education. The following characteristics seem to be especially decisive for many authors:

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School directors present their group results in the plenary.

Effective, sustainable learning in further education means:

- The learners' questions and concerns are in the centre of the learning activities.
- All participants have the possibility to take an active part - in a variety of ways – in as many stages of the seminar as possible.
- The learning processes are not primarily aimed at acquiring new knowledge, but at enlarging and expanding personal competences, experiences and attitudes.
- The learning results can not primarily be found in a beautifully printed book, but lead to visible changes among the participants or in the participants' institutions.
- A good learning process is, among other things, characterised by the fact that participants ask questions, deal with the topic, want to understand it and think about it.

Many of these characteristics and definitions show the paradigm shift away from an externally planned learning process to one which is more strongly controlled by the students.

Transfer

The concept of transfer is also diversely used in literature. Thorndike already outlined the basic idea in 1914 and this idea was picked up and deepened by various specialists until today. He emphasised that *transfer takes place if something learned in a certain context can be transferred to another context or applied in another context*. In order to achieve this goal, people in charge of education do not only have to ask themselves what has to be taught in a course, but also how further education measures can be directed to the institutional

and personal needs of the participants. Additionally, factors having a beneficial or a negative influence on the successful transfer of learning, have to be determined with regard to a seminar.

Typical reasons why knowledge acquired by further education can not be transferred into practice or at least not sufficiently are for example: negative attitude of colleagues or superiors, lack of motivation of the participants, lack of possibilities to apply or transfer knowledge because of organisational problems, time pressure caused by the day-to-day business. A number of measures carried out before, during or after the further education, however, allow a purposeful encouragement of the transfer of learning or the minimisation of transfer obstacles. Such measures can be divided into three groups and phases respectively:

Learning transfer phase I: Preparation of the seminar/the training

Learning transfer phase II: Transfer measures during the seminar/the training

Learning transfer phase III: Follow-up activities after the seminar

To sum up one can say that the following didactic guidelines play a crucial role in these three phases:

- The training situation has to – as far as possible – correspond to the real-life situation of the participants.
- Various training and consolidation possibilities in similar/related problem areas.
- Clear definition of the difference between the seminar situation and the real-life situation.
- Individual topics and learning phases have to be finished successfully and in a targeted way.
- As many examples and possible applications as possible have to be shown or dealt with.
- Stimulate metacognitive reflection on the things learnt.



The delegation from Colombia is elaborating a proposal on how to improve the agricultural education system in their country.

Characteristics and measures concerning the CIEA-Seminar 2005

What significance do the above mentioned principles and characteristics have for the CIEA-Seminar 2005? In what measures did they express themselves concretely? The present report offers insight into the experiences made during the CIEA-Seminar which was held from 19 to 28 October 2005 in Frutillar, Chile. About 70 specialists from agricultural extension and education from 15 Latin American countries participated in the seminar which lasted for 10 days and dealt with the topic of “Managing and encouraging agricultural extensionists and teachers: Ideas, methods and experiences to improve the learning results”. In the framework of the seminar, participants were expected to have an in-depth look at the seminar topic as well as use the possibility of exchanging various experiences with colleagues from Latin America.

To reach the aim of contributing to sustainable learning processes and stimulate transfer in the framework of the seminar it was divided into three phases: a planning phase, the seminar itself and the follow-up activities. Which were the special measures?

During the planning and preparation phase (learning transfer phase I) the following points were especially taken into consideration:

- special prerequisites for the selection of the participants. (It was planned to have at least three participants from three different fields per country: a specialist from an educational or extension institute, a decision-maker from a governmental authority and an agricultural entrepreneur).
- Thorough analysis of the problems and the participants’ expectations. (The guiding question was: What does the potential participants interest in connection with the seminar topic?).
- Adequate concept from the point of view of learning psychology und temporal organisation of the individual parts of the programme (focus on broadening and application).

The main goal of these measures – especially the selection of the participants – was to let different points of view influence the discussion during the seminar already



Each country group analyses the agricultural education system of their country. Here you see the group from Argentina at work.

as well as at the same time offer the possibility to instil new ideas into the different players. In the framework of the transfer, the possibility of proposing and dealing together with change arises.

During the seminar (learning transfer phase II) great store was set by the correct use of the prepared working methods and the carrying out of a clear role (e.g. presenter, member of a group, lecturer etc.). The motto during the methodical course was: little input – a lot of possibilities to deepen the subject - high activity of the participants. The basics and the case studies were treated in groups and in the plenary but also with exercises on the spot. Thus learning sequences in the field and concrete consultation talks in the classrooms could be observed among other things and immediately discussed with the teachers. During all the seminar days, the participants were taking an active part. During the course, great importance was attached to varying the composition of the groups (country groups, interest groups or groups according to participant category) according to subject and exercise. At the end of the course, all participants were asked to write down their impressions and thoughts in a learning diary.

Towards the end of the course, the working methods “information market” and “negotiating table” were applied – with regard to transfer. The participants had the possibility to outline and agree on small or big ideas and

projects together. Not only the question “What do I need?”, but just as much the question “What can I offer” were decisive for this work. At the negotiating tables, more than 60 project ideas were put down in written declarations of intent, with the aim of putting them into action either bilaterally or multilaterally after the seminar.

The follow-up activities (learning phase III) will also play a crucial role for the transfer. They take place on two levels: On the one hand, the agreements reached at the negotiating table have to be put into action. On the other hand, each country group had outlined a country project (e.g. analysis of specific issues, developments in extension or education, multiplication of the seminar results) during the course which now has to be examined and implemented on the spot. The organisers of the seminar accompany these actions with follow-up activities on three levels. First, the organisers draw up a report about the seminar in order to consolidate and disseminate the results. Then, about three months after the seminar, a first short survey among the participants is conducted in order to stimulate the transfer once again. Third, six months after the seminar, the participants have to write a short report on the successful transfer efforts they have made.

Results and conclusions

The interim results from the CIEA-Seminar 2005 in Chile that are available up till now are encouraging. At the end of the seminar 15 country projects and more than 60 agreements on small projects (e.g. exchange of experts or material, exchange of students, organisation of joint further education, assessments) had already been drawn up. Furthermore, the final evaluation showed a high degree of satisfaction about the course of the seminar and its results. The survey carried out three months after the seminar is now being evaluated.



Each country presents its interesting agricultural educational programmes which could be offered to interested experts from other countries.

The organisers are convinced that learning and change are possible if concrete action is taken in the framework of further education offers. If possible, teaching/learning processes have to be directed to transfer and application. It has to be stressed that learning does not only mean cognition but also emotion. A. Müller (1999) expressed this as follows: Transfer is not primarily about figures and facts written on a piece of paper, but it is about a feeling of satisfaction and success. Furthermore he emphasised:

“Learning and change take place if I have a critical look at myself, at others and at the environment. Transfer is also directed to these diverse situations. If things concern me, are important for me, then learning and change processes develop a certain dynamism.”

It seems as if the organisers – with small steps and various elements – managed to stir up such emotions and therefore set good prerequisites for a successful transfer.



Questions and contributions to discussions in the plenary are also possible with simultaneous interpreting.