

What Makes PD Transformational

Elena: If you've ever led a PD session that felt great in the moment, but that didn't lead to real change, then this episode is for you. Hello friends, and welcome to the Bright Morning Podcast. I'm your host Elena Aguilar, and in each episode, you will learn how to lead conversations and experiences that build connection and spark real change.

All right, so today we are exploring what actually makes professional development transformational. Because there is a big difference between sessions that feel good in the moment and those that lead to lasting shifts. So let's get into it. A few years ago I worked with a school leader, I'm gonna call her Dana, who was facilitating a PD session for her team, and the focus was on collaborative planning.

Dana had done all the right things. She created a thoughtful agenda. She included helpful protocols, and she built in opportunities for teachers to apply the tools to their own lesson plans. So during the session, things went smoothly. Teachers participated. They nodded along. They seemed to enjoy it. But a few weeks later, Dana told me, I don't get it.

Nothing changed. The teams went right back to how things were before. They're not using the protocols, they're not planning together. She felt deflated, and I've heard the same story from so many facilitators. Dana's session addressed one part of what makes learning transformational behavior, but behavior alone isn't enough.

So in my work, I have found out that transformation happens in what I call the three Bs: behaviors, beliefs, and ways of being. So let me explain what I mean by that. So behaviors are what we want people to do differently, like using a planning protocol or structuring team meetings in a new way. Beliefs are what people hold to be true, and beliefs shape whether or not people will actually try out a new behavior and whether they will stick with it.

And ways of being are the dispositions that people bring to a learning experience. And those can be things like curiosity, humility, courage. So if you only focus on behavior and you ignore the beliefs and ways of being that underpin it, you won't get very far. Let's go back to the example of Dana. She taught a new planning protocol.

That's behavior. But let's ask these questions. Did the participants believe that collaboration was valuable? Did they believe that they had something to contribute? Did they trust that their voices would be heard and respected? Because if someone believes that their ideas don't matter. They won't speak up no matter how great your protocol is.

And what about ways of being? So collaboration requires presence and openness and a willingness to be challenged and to challenge others. And you can't force those things, but you can invite them and you can model them. You can create a space where they are more likely to emerge. So what could Dana have done differently?

Okay, well, she could have invited reflection on past experiences with collaboration. She could have asked something like, think of a time when that team meeting felt truly collaborative. What made that possible? She could have surfaced beliefs by asking, what's a story you tell yourself about working in groups and how might that story be shaping how you show up?

She could have named the ways of being needed for collaboration. So for example. She could have said, as we move into this work, I wanna invite you to show up with curiosity and a willingness to experiment, because this isn't about getting it right, it's just about growing together. So these small shifts can create a profound difference in how people engage.

Now here's how you can use the three Bs framework in your own PD design. Start with this, which behaviors do I want people to adopt? That's usually the easiest to name. And then ask what beliefs might support or prevent that behavior from taking root? And finally, ask what ways of being will people need to access in order to sustain this change?

Here is a personal example from one of my early PD sessions where I did not consider the three Bs. So this was a training for instructional coaches and I was introducing a new structure for giving feedback. I explained it. I modeled it and we practiced it and the energy seemed high. People seemed to love it, but afterwards, only a few coaches actually used the structure.

When I checked in with folks later, one person said it was a cool tool. But I don't feel confident enough to use it with my principal. I'm worried that I'll mess it up, and another person said, honestly, I'm afraid my colleagues will think I'm being too critical. So those comments don't reflect behavior issues.

Those reflect. Beliefs and ways of being. I hadn't surfaced space for people to surface or shift those beliefs or ways of being. I hadn't invited them to consider courage or compassion. That's what was missing, and I didn't make that mistake again. So when you use the three Bs as a design lens, then you move from simply transferring knowledge to transforming mindsets and habits and ways of being, and that is what makes Learning Stick.

So here's your challenge as you design your next PD, try walking through those three questions. Ask. What behavior are you targeting? What beliefs might be at play, and what ways of being will support transformation? Now, if you want more tools to help you design PD that actually leads to change, then join us at the PD workshop or the Art of Virtual Facilitation.

These experiences are designed to help you plan. Facilitate and reflect through the lens of the three Bs, and you will find links to those in the show notes and you can go even deeper with the PD book. It is full of examples and frameworks and practical tools that will support you no matter your role.

All right, thanks for being here with me today. And if this episode helped you think differently about PD, then share it with a colleague. And if you are listening on Apple Podcasts, I would be so grateful if you left a five star rating or review, because that helps other people find the show. And if you are watching me on YouTube, then hit the like button and subscribe so that you don't miss future episodes.

If you're not watching us on YouTube yet, then come and join us there and you will find a link to that in the show notes. All right, folks. This show is produced by LesLee Bickford with sound engineering by Stacy Goodman. Be well friends. I'll see you next time.

