

Script for "You Can't Mandate What Matters"

A Problem-Based Learning Project on School Improvement

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"You Can't Mandate What Matters"

Performance time: About 8 minutes

Instructor

Good evening! Tonight, we have a special guest with us, Chris Wilson, an alum of our program. Chris called last week to get some practical advice about school improvement. It's a fascinating situation. I thought we could all learn by helping Chris develop a school improvement plan.

Chris Wilson

When I was enrolled in this course two years ago, I usually sat right over there (gestures toward a student). One night, we focused on the principal's role in school improvement. This was the reason I decided to study school administration! I figured that as a principal I'd have the power to change things, but Dr. Lee pulled the rug out from under me. You know how she loves quotes that capture important concepts? Well, she closed class with Michael Fullan's warning, "You can't mandate what matters." All the way home, those words haunted me.

About three years ago, I decided to leave teaching and become a principal because I wanted to make a bigger difference in the lives of kids. I loved teaching, but I felt so powerless to change things. Most of the critical decisions--budget, schedule, curriculum, and discipline policies -- were made higher up the hierarchy. And there was a dreadful, all-consuming fixation on test scores.

Good things were happening in my classroom. Kids were learning, and so was I, but I felt alone. When I walked the hallways at my elementary school, I passed classroom after classroom with teachers talking and children sitting in straight rows of desks, passively listening or actively not listening. My principal was also doing lots of talking. Nobody was listening to him either! I wondered if he had ever heard John Goodlad's charge that "boredom is a disease of epidemic proportions" in our schools.

Well, last summer, I finally completed the courses for principal certification and passed the SSLA (pronounced "slay"). I landed a job in the Washington School District as principal of Central Elementary School.

I love to talk about my school. Central is a K-5 school with about 350 kids. It's one of 10 schools in Washington, a small suburban community, made up mostly of working and middle class folks. Washington is blessed with a strong tax base, attractive salaries, low pupil-teacher ratios, and rich instructional resources.

Teachers stay here forever. Of the 25 teachers at Central, 16 have more than 15 years experience. And there are 5 bright young teachers who've taught less than 5 years. The school district has worked hard to recruit minority teachers. About a fourth of the staff is African-American.

All we hear from Central Office is, "You need to bring up your test scores." My staff at Central feels that our school is the district stepchild. Our standardized test scores

are the lowest in the district, but they're about average in the state. No other school in our district faces the challenges we confront every day. We have a high transience rate--about 50%. More than half of our students are African-American. And 70% of our students receive free breakfast and lunch. We serve students from a homeless shelter and a children's home.

And, you know, if a student started at Central on Monday, and we started testing on Tuesday, if she doesn't speak English, and can't read, can't even stay in her seat -- that child has to take the test along with everybody else. Michael Fullan says that "problems are our friends," but I'm having a hard time finding the silver lining in this storm cloud!

I purposely decided not to change a lot of things my first year at Central. I thought it was important to observe and listen first. Morale was pretty low, and I figured we needed to rebuild a sense of trust and hope.

Well, two weeks ago, the superintendent called me in and told me the Washington District is under pressure from the state department to bring up test scores. That's why Washington's number one goal is to increase student achievement. She said straight-out that this was the reason the Board hired her.

This is high-stakes stuff. There's so much pressure. Scores are published in the newspaper. Districts are losing accreditation. My superintendent made it absolutely clear that my evaluation, my raise, even my job depends on improving those test scores by next year.

When I was deciding to go into administration, I promised myself, "When I'm principal, I'm going to make a difference in the learning and lives of children." I never thought, "When I'm principal, I'm going to make a difference in those test scores!"

Test scores are just one indicator of student success--and not a very good one at that! Standardized tests are better than they used to be, and they provide useful feedback. But some learning can't be measured by a standardized test.

Sometimes in education, our walk doesn't match our talk. The mission statement of every school uses lofty words about all students "reaching full potential" and becoming "life-long learners." But our actions scream, "We want higher test scores."

I've mentally clustered Central teachers into two groups. The first group emphasizes obeying rules and following directions. They rely on textbooks and paper and pencil work. Teachers talk, and students listen. It's so mundane and predictable. The kids must be bored, because I sure have a hard time staying awake when I visit those classrooms.

Teachers in the second group think good teaching is a performance. They go to workshops all the time and come back with trendy new gimmicks and games. Everything has to be fun. Their kids are always making things out of M&Ms or marshmallows or pipe cleaners, and everything looks alike. The kids enjoy it, but they don't seem to understand why they're doing these activities. I don't think the teachers understand either. They're cheerleaders who motivate students with competition and prizes.

When I was first named principal, I spent a lot of time analyzing the test data. Months later, I went back and examined those printouts again, looking for discernable patterns. Did the kids with the boring teachers or the fun teachers score higher? I couldn't find any real difference. Sure, there were individual classroom differences, but no real trends.

Lately, I've been thinking about Paulo Freire's (pronounced free-air) notion that learning and teaching must be rigorous and joyful (move to board or chart pad and write "rigorous and joyful"). Boy, that's powerful! I've got a group of teachers who pride themselves on being rigorous, and a group of teachers who take pride in being joyful. They're both wrong.

The hardest part of rigorous and joyful is the " and"--you know, rigorous and joyful (underline " and" on chalkboard or chart pad) . For me, this is the key. If teaching and learning are rigorous and joyful, kids and teachers will understand that deep and powerful learning is its own reward. The test scores should go up because kids and teachers will be confident that they can ask and answer their own questions, solve problems, and think critically and creatively.

I went back to the superintendent and told her the focus at Central Elementary School next year would be rigorous and joyful learning--for children and adults. She said I had an exciting vision of student learning. That's the starting point for school improvement, she said, according to Newmann and Wehlage. I thought, " Newmann and WHO?" But I didn't ask. I just tried to act like, "Of course, I know all about Newmann and what's his name." Then I summoned up all my courage and asked for resources to support our school improvement effort. She set aside \$10,000 that I could spend at my own discretion. The superintendent also reminded me, "The bottom line is: we have to turn those test scores around."

OK! How do I begin?

I need your help to create a plan for next year and a budget to support change at Central. I've got some resources, and I've got a vision--but it's still my vision, not the teachers', not the kids', not the parents'.

I don't have as much power as principal as I thought. I can't achieve positive results for kids through coercion, manipulation, or deception.

My question for you is: How do I achieve rigorous and joyful learning at Central Elementary School since I "can't mandate what matters?"

Instructors and Students Notes and Scoring Guide

For

"You Can't Mandate What Matters"

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To the Instructor

Following the performance, please provide your class with the written instructions below and ask students to read them. (Please adapt the assignments to serve your purposes. Be sure to include due dates.) Explain the assignment and question students to be sure they understand. Asking students if they understand is not adequate. Instead, ask several individuals what they understand the assignment to be, or what they know for sure about the assignment. At some point after the performance, you may want to make copies of the script available to students.

To Students

Multiple products (appropriate for your portfolio) will document your learning in this problem-based learning project:

- Reflective journal (individual responsibility)
 - Meeting Summaries (responsibility of recorder and process observer)
 - Annotated Bibliography (team responsibility)
 - School Improvement Plan (team responsibility)
 - Budget and Rationale (team responsibility)
 - Professional Growth Paper (individual responsibility)
1. Immediately after the performance, quietly reflect on your own learning goals for this project and your personal questions about school improvement. What do you want or need to learn from this experience? Record these reflections in a journal entry before moving on to the next step. Continue to reflect in your journal throughout the project.
 2. Form a team of 4 to 6 members. Select a facilitator, recorder, and process observer. The facilitator will continue in this position throughout the project. Please rotate other roles so that everyone (other than the facilitator) has an opportunity to serve as process observer or recorder. After each meeting, the recorder and process observer will submit to the instructor a brief (less than one page) summary of the content and process of the meeting.
 3. Collaborate with your team to build an annotated bibliography on school improvement. Be sure your bibliography includes authors mentioned in the monologue: John Goodlad, Paulo Freire, Michael Fullan, and Fred Newmann and Gary Wehlage. Each group member should identify, review and summarize at least 5 significant resources. Submit the annotated bibliography to the instructor by the date assigned.
 4. Draw on the school improvement theory and research you reviewed to develop a 3-year plan for Central Elementary School that focuses on rigorous and joyful learning and improving student achievement. Your plan should include processes and a timeline for establishing a vision, goals, and objectives, as well as implementation and evaluation strategies. Provide

- systematic details for the first year of the plan and a general outline for years 2 and 3. Submit your group's plan to the instructor by the date assigned.
5. Develop a \$10,000, one-year budget to support your school improvement plan. In addition, develop a preliminary budget request and rationale for continued support for years 2 and 3. Submit your group's year-one budget and your year-two and -three budget request and rationale to the instructor by the date assigned.
 6. Develop a brief (2-3 pages, double spaced) professional growth paper. Be sure to review your journal, including the goals and questions you identified at the beginning and your reflections throughout the project. What have you learned? Which of your own questions have you been able to answer? As evidence of your professional growth, be sure to cite (e.g. quote or refer to) your own work products from the project as well as the resources you reviewed.

Scoring Guides (some of the products have two scoring guides; as appropriate use both.)

JOURNAL (Individual responsibility)

0 No journal was submitted. Or journal entries were incomplete, disconnected or unrelated to the project.

1 The journal consistently presented literal descriptions of ideas and events encountered during the project.

2 The journal presented strong evidence of analysis and interpretation of ideas and events encountered during the project.

0 No journal was submitted. Or the journal failed to offer evidence of learning about school improvement.

1 The journal provided some evidence that the student had read and understood the material.

3 The journal provided clear, convincing evidence that the student had read and grappled with important ideas about school improvement.

SUMMARY OF MEETING CONTENT AND PROCESS

(Responsibility of team recorder)

0 No report was submitted. Or the report failed to address the content of the meeting.

1 The report provided a vague, disorganized or incomplete summary of the content of the meeting.

2 The report provided a clear, organized, and complete description of the content of the meeting.

(Responsibility of team process observer)

0 No report was submitted. Or the report presented no evidence that members understood and practiced effective consensus-building and negotiation skills.

1 The report presented some evidence of awareness and occasional efforts to practice effective consensus-building and negotiation skills.

2 The report presented strong, convincing evidence that group members understood and applied effective consensus-building and negotiation skills.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY (Responsibility of team)

0 The annotated bibliography consisted primarily of summaries of resources unrelated to school improvement.

1 The annotated bibliography presented clear summaries of relevant resources on school improvement.

2 The annotated bibliography presented thoughtful analyses of relevant and respected resources on school improvement.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN (Responsibility of team)

Knowledge

The principles of developing and implementing strategic plans

0 Inadequate evidence 1 Adequate evidence 2 Strong, convincing evidence

Effective communication

0 Inadequate evidence 1 Adequate evidence 3 Strong, convincing evidence

Effective consensus-building and negotiation skills

0 Inadequate evidence 1 Adequate evidence 3 Strong, convincing evidence

Dispositions

A school vision of high standards of learning

0 Inadequate evidence 1 Adequate evidence 2 Strong, convincing evidence

Continuous school improvement

0 Inadequate evidence 1 Adequate evidence 2 Strong, convincing evidence

Doing the work required for high levels of personal and organization performance

0 Inadequate evidence 1 Adequate evidence 2 Strong, convincing evidence

Performances

The vision is developed with and among stakeholders

0 Inadequate evidence 1 Adequate evidence 2 Strong, convincing evidence

The school community is involved in school improvement efforts

0 Inadequate evidence 1 Adequate evidence 2 Strong, convincing evidence

The vision shapes the educational programs, plans, and actions

0 Inadequate evidence 1 Adequate evidence 2 Strong, convincing evidence

An implementation plan is developed in which objectives and strategies to achieve the vision and goals are clearly articulated

0 Inadequate evidence 1 Adequate evidence 2 Strong, convincing evidence

YEAR 1 BUDGET AND BUDGET REQUEST AND RATIONALE FOR YEARS 1 AND 2 (Individual responsibility)

Performances

Needed resources are sought and obtained to support the implementation of the school mission and goals

0 Inadequate evidence 1 Adequate evidence 2 Strong, convincing evidence

Existing resources are used in support of the school vision and goals

0 Inadequate evidence 1 Adequate evidence 2 Strong, convincing evidence

PROFESSIONAL GROWTH PAPER

Knowledge

The principles of developing and implementing strategic plans

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Effective communication

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Effective consensus-building and negotiation skills

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