



Your School is not a Cornfield

PLAN TO IMPROVISE

Some leadership teachers become hooked on teaching all the mechanics of running an event rather than letting students run the event and learn from the real experience and success of completing an event. These teachers believe that students who learn all the elements and techniques of planning will have more successful events. There is no room for improvisation because that is too hard to quantify and mark. This is the same mentality that feels that people need to become experts in grammar before they can become great writers. They know that the planning of an event is necessary, but it is only just the outline structure that an event hangs on.

Planning is necessary, but over-planning can be counter productive. Keith Sawyer points out that during the 1980 earthquake in Italy "it was found that planned and organized response was less effective than the improvised emergent response." Many people believe that creativity for an event ends after the brainstorming has finished. The planning process and the running of an event is a fluid entity that must be flexible to the reality of the situation. The difficulty is understanding and allowing the fine balance between a creative response and chaos. Improvisation is a skill that can only be learned from successes and failures in running events.



Some people have used a description of education as a process of planting seeds and helping them to grow over the course of time. With the implementation of modern agricultural technology, farming itself has gone very high tech; crop yields have tripled and quadrupled through farmers paying strict attention to the numbers associated with these new technologies. This quantitative approach has produced crops that are uniform in size and quality, and the modern corn farmer can crunch the numbers and tell you how tall his crop will be and its yield per acre without even getting his boots dirty. This same adherence and absorption with numbers is happening in education, and the expected success rates of our students are being predicted, monitored, and analyzed.

Your school is not a cornfield. The application of modern fertilizer will produce dramatic results on a plot of land, but some of the numerical fertilizer that is being spread in education is having truly damaging results. A corn farmer plants the same strain of seed and can be very certain that corn will pop out of the ground in the late spring. Your school is more akin to a natural garden that contains all sorts of different plants with different attributes, variances and abilities. The garden's strength is its biodiversity, and its natural beauty lies in the variety and vitality of the plants within it. Your school needs to produce and support variety and not be focusing on having all students producing at the very same rate according to a standardized test. This is the true vitality of a school; it is the diversity within the school's population and varied participation that produces citizens with strengths for the reality beyond school.

Student Activities is the last plot of land in the school yard where the battle is being fought for the health of a multiplicity of programs. Activity programs are not measurable by tests or spreadsheets. Some are messy and some are uniformed. Some are well-attended and others are only supported by fringe groups. All of the many activities in your school are healthy varieties of participation and growth for your students. Please know that your struggle to tend the riotous garden of activities is worth it. Keep getting your hands dirty in the garden of activities and planting those seeds of real education. ■

“We’ve all got both light and dark inside us. What matters is the part we choose to act on. That’s who we really are.”

J. K. Rowling

WALLET TEST

The “Wallet Test” is an experiment designed to test honesty. The EDSS leadership class took four wallets and put \$12 in them (each student from the class contributing \$2), a student ID, various receipts, video rental cards, a contact number and a handwritten note. The wallets were “lost” in four different locations around town on a Friday afternoon and students waited to be contacted.

The results were surprising as well as the class discussion post and prior to the dropping of the wallets. All four were returned, but it was not just people’s honesty that was impressive. Two people went out of their way to return the lost wallet. It was a sign of empathy that was heart-warming.

This idea was copied from a wallet test done by the *Toronto Star* where 17 of 20 wallets were returned within a two-week period. The *Star* noted that a “similar test done by the *Reader’s Digest* noted that people in affluent areas were less likely to return found property than those in lower-to-middle class areas.”

Dave Conlon

Leadership Structure: KCI Style

The only elected positions within the council are the two co-premiers. This election process consists of submitting an application that contains: a short essay on why the candidate believes that she or he should be co-premier; a copy of their last report card; a list of extra-curriculars participated in; and 100 signatures from fellow students. If more than 4 candidates apply, there are preliminary elections in home room with a short blurb about each candidate on the ballot. The intent is to have an election with only 4 candidates running.

After the four candidates are selected, election week begins. Candidates are given a stairwell to decorate, as well as a specific section of the front foyer. On election day, each campaign manager presents a two-minute introduction speech and the candidate gives a five-minute prepared speech for the school-wide assembly. Ballots are handed out upon leaving the auditorium and results are announced at the end of the day.

Instead of having specific positions within the council, members of the leadership group become part of a team according to their interests and abilities. The teams and their missions are as follows:

Transformation Team

- To maintain values of diversity, healthy choices and collective conscience with respect to the environment, human interactions, and working together towards a peaceful school community and to actively coordinate and engage students in the habit of giving and sharing through co-ordinating KCI’s charitable giving to outside groups.

Communication Team

- To ensure that the collection and relay of information related to all activities, events and programs are being successfully communicated to all interested parties.
- To assure quality of messaging within the school and co-ordinate and promote communication between staff, students and student council within KCI.

Participation Team

- To actively participate in and connect with KCI teams, clubs and groups and to ensure that they are successfully lead, co-ordinated, advertised, supported, have active participation and are communicating their needs and goals.

Motivation Team

- To maintain and generate a positive attitude within the KCI community by creating opportunities, environments and events for and within the school that generates a sense of belonging and allows individuals to express themselves in unique and caring ways.

Two teachers are assigned to each team as well as one teacher to the co-premiers. The co-premiers and the teachers meet once a week with the exec student from each team. Students apply to be a specific part of council with a copy of their last report card as well as a few paragraphs about why they would be a good asset for this group. ■

KCI is a downtown-core high school with 1300 students located in Kitchener, Ontario.

Writing successful fundraising letters

You need a special approach to write a letter that asks for funds during these tough economic times. Here are some crucial rules:



“A lot of people are waiting for a Martin Luther King Jr. or a Mahatma Gandhi to come back – but they are gone. We are it. It is up to us. It is up to you.”

Marian Wright Edelman

- **Use “I” and “You,” but mostly “You.”**

Forget what you’ve learned about writing a press release or a brochure and think of how you would write a letter to another individual.

- **Base your appeal on benefits, not needs.**

Donors give in order to get something in return, primarily the good feelings that come from helping others, but sometimes it is also because of some tangible gift they will receive from you.

- **Ask for money, not support.**

Be explicit when asking for money.

Example: We are asking for a donation of \$25 or more.

- **Write a package, not a letter.**

At the very least, your package will contain an outer envelope, a reply envelope, and a reply device, as well as the letter.

- **Write in simple, straightforward English.**

Your words should be powerful and your sentences short and punchy. Use emotional words rather than those that provoke analysis.

- **Format your letter so it is easy to read.**

The eye needs to rest, so leave plenty of white space around.

- **A business needs a business reason to support you with cash or product.**

Businesses are geared to make money, not give it away. Explain how giving your group cash or product will benefit their business.

- **Give readers a reason to send money now.**

Create a sense of urgency by citing a deadline for a matching grant, or tie your request to a budget deadline or a particular holiday.

- **Write as long a letter as you need to make your case.**

Many people will read every word while others will simply scan; write to both groups.

This information is from the Official Fundraising Handbook.

Check out their website at www.officialfundraisinghandbook.com

PERSONAL SOUNDTRACK

Do you ever notice how when you are happy or sad and you turn on your iPod every song seems to fit what you are going through? Do you ever notice how sometimes different songs pop into your head at the weirdest times? Are there certain songs that no matter how many times you listen to them you never get tired of them? Are there any songs that have inspired you to do something that you didn’t think you could? Are there songs that pump you up and make you feel like you could accomplish anything? If you answered “YES” to any of these questions then you understand how powerful songs can be.

Here is your assignment: Imagine your whole life was being made into a movie. It could be a movie from the time you were a little kid until now, or it can be a movie about where you are currently. Create the soundtrack to that movie. You must come up with 10-12 songs that will become your personal soundtrack. For each song you choose please include the reasons you chose the song as well as the time period that the song represents. Put some thought into this. Remember they should be songs that represent a certain time period or event in your life.

When you have chosen your songs, take some time to design a CD cover for your soundtrack.

Bill Battaglia

Vision From Start To Finish



By John C. Maxwell

How did James Cameron direct a movie as incredible as *Titanic* or *Avatar*? How is Alicia Keys able to write world-class music in an era when few elite performers pen their own lyrics? How does Pixar keep churning out animated blockbusters?

The answers all involve vision. The best leaders are able to see a vision and then activate it by stepping forward. In addition, they're willing to sacrifice to see the vision come to fruition. Finally, they realize the importance of surrounding themselves and their vision with an incredible team.

See the Vision



Many people don't jumpstart their lives because they don't have anything to jump to! They plod along through life with little more than survival in mind. Visionaries dare to dream. They peer into the future and generate possibilities in their mind's eye.

The legendary sculptor, Michelangelo claimed that as he looked into the stone, "I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free." His imagination had already created his masterpieces before his hands did the work.

Step Toward the Vision

Some people see the vision, but they never step toward it. They cannot seem to summon the courage to overcome their fear, or they cannot find the passion to get past their apathy. As a consequence, their vision sits on the shelf until it spoils, or until someone else takes initiative to claim it.

More than two months before Alexander Graham Bell submitted his patent for the telegraph, Elisha Gray had already arrived at the conclusion that voice could be transmitted over a telegraph wire. Why, then, is Elisha Gray anonymous and Alexander Graham a celebrated inventor? Because Gray procrastinated two months before putting his vision on paper. Then, when he finally finished his sketch, Gray delayed another four days before taking it to the patent office. When he finally made up his mind to go, he arrived two hours too late. Bell had already secured the patent, and Gray's idea was worthless.

Sacrifice for the Vision

Visionaries give up to go up. They bypass good to gain a shot at being great. If they fail, at least they go out swinging. Visionaries don't fear failure; they only fear losing out on opportunity.

In an effort to break into the U.S. market, Cirque Du Soleil founder, Guy Laliberte, took his entire troupe from Montreal to Los Angeles. At the time, Cirque was a budding act that was barely breaking even. As legend has it, the circus did not even have gas money to return home if the show flopped. Laliberte had leveraged every resource at his disposal for the opportunity to achieve his vision of striking it rich in the United States. Thankfully for everyone involved, the show was a smash hit. Cirque Du Soleil's success catapulted it forward in terms of recognition on the entertainment scene.

Seek Help for the Vision

Teamwork makes the dream work. If you can achieve your vision by flying solo, then chances are you're not doing anything worthwhile. A big dream requires a talented team in order to take root in reality.

Wilt Chamberlain was one of the most gifted athletes to ever set foot on a basketball court. He holds the NBA record for most points in a game (100), most rebounds in a game (55), and the highest scoring average for a season (50.4 points per game). However, Wilt was so talented that he had trouble meshing with his teammates. At one point, coaches even advised him to shoot less so that other players could be involved.



Despite his prodigious abilities, Wilt never won a championship while the star player of his team. However, he did eventually learn to become an unselfish player. As his point totals declined, he became better and better at setting up teammates to score. Well past the prime of his career, Wilt finally won and achieved his vision of winning a title. As a role player for the Los Angeles Lakers, he captured two NBA championships. His growth as a teammate made him an invaluable asset even though his athleticism had diminished from its peak. ■

John C. Maxwell is an internationally respected leadership expert, speaker, and author who has sold more than 19 million books. Visit his website for more information at: www.johnmaxwell.com His book, The 360 Degree Leader, is an excellent source of insight for advisors teaching student leadership classes.



*“There are no passengers
on spaceship earth.
We are all crew.”*

Marshall McLuhan

THE IMPERFECT ROLE MODEL

We know that students learn from what they see us do rather than what we tell them to do, so telling them to be a role model is difficult when they don't see one in front of them. Another problem is that a young person thinks that being a “role model” means being perfect. The challenge is to show student leaders how to be a role model and work with the challenges and imperfections that the role brings.

It is healthy for an advisor to state when they are worried or afraid. Leaders know that a coward is not a person who fears; it's one who fails to act wisely when afraid. Being scared of something is often a sign of intelligence, but true leadership and role modeling is demonstrating how to deal with this fear. The fear is stated and then the possible solution is outlined in full.

Good advisors should also show how to deal with challenges. State how tough the problem is in reasonable terms and replace the “I can't” with “I can't yet.” It is true leadership that faces challenges willingly and without whining.

The best lesson is to recognize when young leaders participate in problem-solving by saying, “You solved it. You figured it out!”

Michael Brandwein

Human Hangman

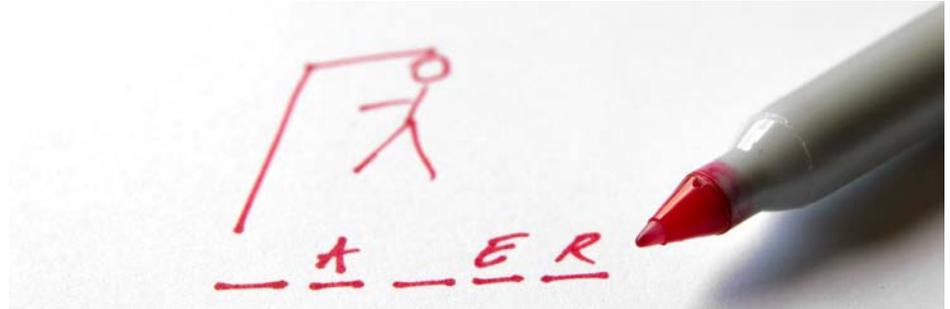
Curriculum Unit: Communication

Objectives:

To identify and understand nonverbal communication cues through creating a word as a group and a sentence as a class; to incorporate appropriate listening levels.

Materials:

Sticky notes or index cards with individual letters/punctuation marks on them to create words and sentences.



Directions:

1. Use a quote or a statement about leadership to create individual index cards/sticky notes with one letter or punctuation mark on each piece of paper.
2. Create one group per word by writing group numbers on the back of the individual cards/sticky notes, e.g., for the word “action” the letters a, c, t, i, o, n might all have the number 3 on the back.
3. Hand out the cards/notes to participants, one per person. (If needed, some people can have more than one index card/sticky note, but make sure they are in the same number group.) Ask people to form groups based on the number on the back of their index cards/sticky notes.
4. Have groups form a word nonverbally with the letters they have.
5. Once all the words are formed, ask them to form a sentence using all the words.
6. Discuss the resulting sentence and the process used to create it.

Notes:

- If letters can form more than one word, don't tell them if the word they created is “wrong.”
- Require nonverbal communication until the end or until you see frustration levels rising.

Sample Processing Questions:

- What did your index card/sticky note mean when you first got it?
- How difficult was it to form your word? Why?
- How difficult was it to form your sentence? Why?
- In what ways did you communicate?
- Was it easier with verbal or nonverbal communication?
- How can you apply this to communicating with peers, administrators, and others?

The Princess Project

The Prom or the School Formal is a major event in a school year that some young women don't participate in. Their given reason for not going is usually that they "are not interested in that kind of thing," but the real reason is often more because of the money that is involved. Getting that special dress and a matching pair of shoes can be beyond the means of many young women, so they choose to not attend rather than participate. Consider running a program in your community called "The Princess Project".

This is a grass-roots community endeavor to provide prom dresses and graduation clothing for those young ladies who would not attend these functions only because they can't afford the clothing necessary to attend. The Princess Project began in San Francisco in February 2002 when one girl needed a dress for her prom. The founders, Laney Whitcanack and Kristi Smith Knutson, responded to her simple request for help by collecting dresses from friends and family. Within days, women from all over the Bay Area responded with overwhelming support through donations of their "time, talent, and taffeta," and so The Princess Project was born.

Every year, The Princess Project collects fashionable, new (2005 to new), or nearly new prom dresses, shoes and accessories and organizes everything in one central location: the Dress Giveaway event.

All high school girls who are in financial need of a prom dress are welcome to attend. No proof of financial need is required, just a valid high school ID. You simply attend the event and walk out with a dress and accessories that you love— all for free!

At Elmira District Secondary School, a local mother was willing to do the groundwork and had already secured a place to store the dresses, shoes and purses in our community. Our leadership students ran a mini fashion show in the cafeteria at lunch, and this event generated many more donated dresses from the girls and staff at the school. You can read more about how to start your own Princess Project at the website: princessproject.org

"Everyone is kneaded out of the same dough but not baked in the same oven."

Yiddish Proverb

EFFECTIVE EDUCATION

Our most memorable and effective teachers are not those who give us lots of information; the best teachers are the ones who relate knowledge to action, who affect our lives, who converse with us.

Teachers who merely present facts (or ideas as fact), and then test to measure memory or indoctrination, are not educating their students. Such teaching turns schools into one big game of trivial pursuits, a game some students have no interest in playing. Without the willingness to sincerely engage the student, to ask questions that are not merely rhetorical, to begin a conversation and follow where it leads, meaningful education does not occur.

John Kaufman



“Everything works out in the end. If it hasn’t worked out, it’s not the end”

Vanessa Clemmer

Above and Beyond

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Resources

Be sure to visit the CASAA website for more lesson plans, activity ideas and a complete list of resources.
casaaleadership.ca



CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF STUDENT ACTIVITY ADVISORS
EMPOWERING YOUTH TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Look on the Bright Side

It’s going to rain!

One approach that you must use when working with student leaders is to never mention that wet four letter word. If you think of failure before an event has even been started, you will affect your mindset and your approach to the event. This is not to deny that liquid drops might fall from the sky during your outdoor event, but it doesn’t help to focus on this possibility. Optimists are realistic, but when you plan for the negative, you will affect the whole attitude of working on an event. The pessimist doesn’t work as hard on the pre-event details “because it’s going to rain anyway.” The realistic optimist has a plan R in case of liquid sunshine, but that must not be the focus of the approach to the event.

Martin Seligman has studied optimism and pessimism for over forty years and states: “Pessimists, I have found . . . are up to eight times more likely to become depressed when bad events occur; they do worse at school, sports and most jobs, than what their talents augur; they have worse physical health and shorter lives; they have rockier inter-personal relations, and they lose elections to their more optimistic opponents.” He shows that a pessimist’s life is affected by their viewpoint.

Seligman goes on to say that, “Optimism and hope are quite well-understood, they have been the objects of thousands of empirical studies, and best of all, they can be built. Optimism and hope cause better resistance to depression when bad events strike, better performance in work, particularly in challenging jobs, and better physical health.”

Professional basketball players know that they can miss that basket or drop a pass, but Michael Jordan said, “Never think of the consequences of failing, you will always think of negative results. Think only positive thoughts and your mind will gravitate towards those thoughts!” Athletes know that they can influence their success by thinking positively about their actions and abilities.

With a positive approach, you will be more successful in running events and keeping fellow students engaged. When you do get some of that wet stuff falling from the sky, you are more apt to catch it in a glass, add lemons to it and make lemonade. ■

Dave Conlon

