Scaling Innovation: A Systems Approach to Personalizing Student Learning

Daniel M. French and Jacquelyne Wilson
Vermont Design for Education (1968)

- Education is a process conceived to benefit the learner. Central to any focus is the individual and how his/her learning process may be maximized.
- Education should be based upon the individual's strong, inherent desire to learn and to make sense of his/her environment.
- Education should strive to maintain the individuality and the originality of the learner.
When Students Own Their Learning

- Learning activities are designed to support individual student aspirations.
- Learning activities are designed to support individual student learning growth irrespective of assigned grade levels.
- Just-in-time assessments are used to monitor individual student learning growth and to provide data for students to set personal learning goals.
- New tools for documenting student learning (e.g. PLPs and ePortfolios) are utilized to provide evidence of individual student growth over time.
The Adaptive Challenge (Heifetz)

Heifetz: An adaptive challenge demands a response that is beyond our current repertoire of solutions and asks, “what must be given up to thrive, and what can’t be compromised to be successful in the future?”

- The K-12 education system is structured around the time, space and technology assumptions of the 19th Century.
- These assumptions describe not only what is taught in the classroom, but also how schooling is organized.
- Technology has changed the structure of knowledge (David Weinberger).
- Technology is now changing the structure of schooling systems.
Responding to the Adaptive Challenge: Innovation

- Innovation is a good strategy when the path forward is complex or not clear.
- Innovation needs direction in order to focus organizational systems on achieving the desired ends.
- Innovation is a good strategy when rapid change is necessary.
Bennington-Rutland Supervisory Union (BRSU)

- Large multi-district supervisory union
- 11 school districts in four counties
- 54 school board members
- 6 schools: three K-8, three K-6
- 2,200 students
- 460 square miles
- No high school with some students attending designated high schools in New York
BRSU Systems Innovation Plan

1. School board Ends and Monitoring policies
2. System benchmarks (formative and summative) based on a logic model to ensure organizational focus during change. These benchmarks were developed in consultation with Dr. David Silvernail from the University of Southern Maine.
3. The rapid development, implementation and evaluation of best practices through a lateral innovation network using a common learning management system
4. Quality control over the instructional, curriculum and professional development processes through a peer-led Instructional Leadership Team
5. Standards-based curricula
6. Documenting student learning through Personal Learning Plans and e-Portfolios
7. NWEA MAP just-in-time assessments used three times a year to provide formative data to students and teachers, and monitoring data to administration, parents and school board members
Lateral Innovation Network (David Hargreaves)

Open the instructional, professional, and curriculum development processes to a peer-led network in order to provide a more effective means for sharing best practices and transferring them more rapidly among a group of schools.

New Definition of Best Practice

A promising approach that is both:

- High Leverage - with a relatively small amount of input, there is a significant impact on student learning; and
- Transferable - the practice is easily scaled across organizational boundaries.
BRSU LMS Ecosystem
BRSU Personalization Logic Model (see detail)

Organizational Outputs

1. Organizational structures support students owning their learning.
2. A system of focused, lateral innovation is well established among educators.

Best Practice Activities (high leverage and transferable)

1. Develop technological infrastructure
2. Create new systems to document student learning - PLPs and ePortfolios
3. Shift the role of teachers to be designers of learning
Scaling a Complex Best Practice:
Personal Learning Plans (PLPs)
Personal Learning Plan Design

- Aspirations (Hopes & Dreams)
- Dispositions Towards Learning (Independence, Collaboration, Persistence, Curiosity, Flexibility and Critical Thinking)
- Civic Ethics
- Core Academics

PLP Templates: 3-5 PLP, 6-8 PLP, Implementation Continuum
I hope to learn long multiplication and division.
I hope to learn cursive.
I hope to learn to take risks.
I hope I learn to challenge myself.
I hope to learn more about different scientists.
I hope I learn not to give up.
I hope to get better in a garden.
I dream to meet more kinds of animals especially from a rainforest.
I dream to go to Mammoth Cave.
I dream to use a sling shot.

Third Grader, Sunderland Elementary School
Examples of Classroom PLPs

Building The Foundation

A Classroom PLP

Creating Classroom Culture
- Expectations: behavior and learning
- Guided discovery/scaffolding
- We are in this together

Student As Architect

Individual PLP

Setting Goals
- Long-range hopes and dreams
- Specific learning goals
- Self-monitoring
Linking PLPs to ePortfolios and Student-Led Conferences

Teachers are designing new ways to implement PLPs and linking them to ePortfolios and student-led conferences. Some examples include:

- Goal Setting - 6th Grade
- Goal Setting within the ePortfolio
- Student Aspirations Video
- Screencasting for Student-Led Conferencing
- ePortfolio Progression Continuum
- Evidence Collecting and Reflecting in the Primary Classroom
Scaling Innovation in a System
Rogers: Diffusion of Innovations (1962)

The process of innovation relies heavily on human capital. There are four main elements that influence the spread of a new idea:

- the innovation itself,
- communication channels,
- time, and
- a social system.
System Benchmark

Table 11: Comparison of Rogers* and BRSU Teacher Innovation Adoption Curves
Some Thoughts on Scaling Innovation

1. It is difficult to transfer or scale a best practice without an innovation network.
2. The chief job of a leader is to build innovation networks in his/her organization.
3. There is a direct relationship between the quality of an innovation network and the ability to scale a complex best practice.
4. Some best practices “resonate” with staff more than others. There is a direct relationship between the compelling nature of a best practice and its scalability.
Thank You!

daniel.french@brsu.org

jwilson@brsu.org

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