



IMPLEMENTING THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM IN A MIDDLE SCHOOL CONTEXT

CHANGE MANAGEMENT IN A HURRY

The title of this presentation is Implementing the Australian Curriculum in a Middle School Context. The abstract, written some time ago was an attempt to blend an academic approach to managing change in the context of a middle school, while providing a reflection of the actual process. That's not very interesting unless you are in the same context, and I think that we all know that won't be the case. So my role today is to share experiences and, hopefully, plant the seeds of ideas that you may draw upon in your own context in the future.

CONTEXT

- New to sub-school
- Need to implement change for 2017
- Middle School Context – freedom and restrictions
- Change Management Theory

So, here was my situation in April 2016. While I had worked at the school for eight years, I had been in a different section. I was promoted into the role of Head of Middle School. In applying, I had ‘pitched’ my view of what the middle school could look like under an Australian Curriculum model. It was easy from a distance to do this. When walking in the door the first day, I wondered how it could be done. And then came the time restriction. No sitting back and following the numerous theories that state “watch and learn” when you start a new role. I was given a very short space of time to do this – it needed to be implemented in 2017, come in within budget, and empower staff. It was, and has been really important to ensure that the change wasn’t perceived as fixing something that was broken. The current curriculum and what was happening within it wasn’t broken. It was enabling our students to excel. They are happy, well adjusted and well prepared to move into our senior school context. But it was time for a change. The empowering aspect of a middle school is the freedom that comes with it. I can’t speak for Primary school contexts, but, having taught extensively in High School or Senior School contexts across Australia, there were so many restrictions that in many cases hands were tied. And then, there were very high stakes attached to results at the end of Year 12. Being radical and innovative at that end of the school is even more challenging. But, in middle school, there is a degree of freedom. And that was, and is, exciting.

So I went to the theories. How can I do this? What can the experts tell me?

CHANGE MANAGEMENT THEORIES

- ADKAR model (developed by Prosci). ADKAR is an acronym for Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement.
- Kotters 8 Step Model: Establishing a sense of urgency, Creating the guiding coalition, Developing a change vision, Communicating the vision for buy-in, Empowering broad-based action Generating short-term wins, Never letting up, Incorporating changes into the culture.
- Lewin's 3-Stage Model of Change: Unfreeze, Change, Refreeze
- The Change Curve The Change Curve is based on a model originally developed in the 1960s by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross to explain the grieving process.

There are many different theories of how to implement change, some of which are illustrated on the slide. Is any one of them correct? The one thing they have in common is that they take time. What elements of these models (and others) can I use to fast track change.

WHAT HAPPENED?

- Sense of urgency, unfreeze, create awareness and try to make the change desirable.
- Be the expert, or pretend to be!
- Bring the staff along on the journey.
- Get champions.

Pulling elements from a range of theories, the starting point was to make the change desirable. There were external contributors that made this easier. The need to implement the AC. The impending “registration process” all provided solid reasons for those who were initially sceptical. This wasn’t challenging. I don’t actually think anyone really has a full working understanding of all the areas in the AC. Who can calmly state the individual subject areas, essential learnings and choices within then and then state where the general capabilities lie amongst this? I needed to become an expert very quickly. It wasn’t that I knew nothing, but I had never engaged in maths curriculums before. When a question was asked I didn’t know, I had to find out fast. This was all about developing confidence from the staff that there was expertise and understanding of what was needed. This was expert leadership model stuff.

I had a vision, but it needed to be shaped by the staff. They had to have buy-in. They needed to be excited, and to see the opportunities. Some strategic external professional development in Universal Design theory reinforced the message that was starting to be heard and was starting to grow.

Champions to model elements of change and to want the change weren’t hard to find. There was a desire. But they needed to be given a voice, they needed to be heard and they needed to be given room to experiment, not next year, but now. That meant some compromise. It meant conversations to shape the vision. It meant providing the physical space, the time, the financial support to get it started. I was lucky. I had committed staff ready to take it on. They are the champions of the change process.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Where are we at?
 - Model developed
 - Marketing to parents and students underway
 - Staffing adjusted to meet the change
 - Budgets allocated
 - Specific programming commencing

We are on the journey. All the staff are aware – to use Lewin’s model, we are unfrozen! Decisions have been made about the structure. Staff input was sought in some areas – not just to get the ownership, but it was a genuine desire to seek their expertise. We know what we are offering, we know how it will work, we know what we are doing.

THE MIDDLE SCHOOL CONTEXT

But we are not alone...

- Junior school curriculum provides the lead-in
- Senior school curriculum builds and compliments what we are doing
- But we are still uniquely a middle school – meeting the needs of our students

But to bring this back to our Middle School context. We are, as the name indicates, in the middle. We had to look at our junior school curriculum. We move across stages in the curriculum. We had to provide the foundation that the senior school wanted. But we needed to be unique. This is still a work in progress.

THE LESSONS TO BE REMEMBERED

- Have a vision – don't lose sight of the vision
- Have a solid knowledge base – be the expert – we didn't have time to seek a lot of views
- Get input – be willing to compromise to include this
- Bring people along with you – this means sharing ideas and be willing to hear the criticism and to then compromise
- That it is really hard work, and can't be done for every change you want. Pick what is really important.

SUCCESS???

