

A Few Suggestions About How to Make Changes Back Home

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“A vision without a strategy remains an illusion.”

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The best way to translate your Confratute experiences into a specific action plan is to picture yourself as a person who plays the following three roles:

The Keeper of the Dream. Start to develop a *long range master plan* that focuses on what you would like your school to look like in five years. Develop a chart and time line that lays out the big picture of program components (e.g., Compacting, Personnel, Budget, Schoolwide Enrichment Teams, Enrichment Clusters, etc.). Think of this plan as a blue print or skeleton that provides general direction, and then begin to think about how and who will develop the service delivery strategies for each component. Learn major components of the SEM “by heart!” Then, make a list of all the questions you hope no one will ask, and use your knowledge of the model to answer them.

The Champion of the Cause. Major changes do not take place unless one person places a high priority on the object of change. Recruit as many persons as you can to help further the cause, but remember that without a champion, there is little likelihood that a sustained commitment will occur on the parts of others you recruit. Make certain that you are represented on school or district decision making committees. Thus, for example, if the district has a committee that selects topics and persons for staff development days, be certain that your interests are represented.

The Sharer of the Technology. Dreams and causes are ideals that will only be achieved if we provide people with the tools necessary to carry out the job. Make categorical lists (for principals, central office administrators, teachers, parents, the press) of the information that you will share with others over specified periods of time. Everyone likes a gift **giver**, so view yourself as someone who has much to give and share. Collect and categorize the information [Our web site is loaded with articles, videos, and other resources that can be downloaded and reproduced without cost or permission. Pick those you believe will get people interested (<http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/sem/semart.html>)] so that they correspond with your long range master plan.

If your principal or supervisor is the type who doesn't usually react favorably to new ideas, consider these approaches:

- **Establish Credibility In High Places.** Use the occasion of your Confratute participation to make an appointment with the superintendent. Share a few key pieces of

information with him or her to point out how the experience you gained here can contribute to the improvement of **the whole school program**. Remember, most general educators still view the folks in gifted and talented as being a separate, special interest group. Emphasize how a good deal of the technology of gifted education can help everybody! If your district supported your attendance at Confratute, you have a perfect entry as part of the THANK YOU LETTER that you **MUST** write.

Before you meet with the superintendent, prepare a news article or arrange for an interview with the education reporter from a local newspaper. Pick something from your Confratute material that will have an eye-catching affect (e.g., research on declining scores among our highest scoring students, as compared with students from other nations). Picture the headline you would like to see (e.g., LOCAL TEACHER SUGGESTS PLAN FOR ENHANCING HIGH LEVELS OF CHALLENGE FOR ALL STUDENTS) By pairing up your involvement at Confratute with a major national issue, you achieve immediate local celebrity, and therefore the superintendent will be much more interested in you. This is a great way to gain entry and establish credibility.

• **Write a Proposal!** Shape your master plan so that it can be approved by your immediate supervisor. If he/she is on your side, the plan will make its way to subsequent levels of approval much more expeditiously. Make the proposal brief, clear, and letter perfect, but include supporting back-up material in appendices. If the proposal is “fat,” use a Tab at the beginning of the appendices to forewarn the reader that you do not expect them to read a lengthy document, **BUT** the back-up material is there if they need it. Include a copy of the Executive

Summary of *Schools for Talent Development* . Encourage principals, parents, and teachers to read the summary, and then set up discussion sessions that include members of all three of these groups.

- **Build a Support Team.** Discuss the proposal with your peers and others who might be affected. If the “boss” says, “The others won’t like it,” note that you have already obtained support of the people who would be involved in the change. Have team members read and re-read the proposal until it is nothing short of a masterpiece. Format is important --use bullet items, graphics, bold type (selectively), and all of the other vehicles that computers have made available for effective communication. HINT: Look around for a document (not necessarily educational) that has a compelling format, and use it as a guide.

- **Find something** in the district guidelines or policies that will support what you want to do. Every school district has mission statements or policies that mention meeting **individual** needs. Administrators like to work within existing guidelines!

- **Explain how** the program you are proposing will help the overall district get where it wants to go faster, easier and perhaps cheaper. The gifted specialists already have a good deal of the teaching skills and thinking skills technology that that the district may be paying high consultant fees to obtain. Use our new 11 minute video, *A Rising Tide Lifts All Ships*, to show enrichment clusters in action (write or call for information about this video).

- **Show how** the change will make the district look good and the schools more reputable.

Type III's to the rescue! Copy some Type III's from various sources, especially those that appeared as newspaper articles. Emphasize that **Our Schools** could be gaining this kind of recognition for excellence.

- **Use reform terms** that are hot button items in your school district. "Common Core State Standards," "High Stakes Testing" should **not** be criticized. Rather, point out how these and other currently popular issues ("Differentiation," "Problem Based Learning," and "Flipped Classrooms," and "On-Line Technology Resources") can be used as assets in helping to make curriculum compacting decisions and how enrichment experiences can be **infused** into existing structures. If possible, relate the changes you are proposing to something that is one of the school's existing key goals, or objectives.

- **Keep the focus** on concerns about how your school should be dealing with *individual students' strengths* (interests and learning styles *as well as* abilities) by downloading and circulating the Total Talent Portfolio summary from the NRC/GT web site. Emphasize that parents are concerned with *their* child, and the TTP is a good way to show that we have their child in mind.

- **Use illustrations** and examples to persuade. Sometimes we get so caught up in our jargon and rhetoric that we fail to deliver the message. Whenever I talk about the *concept* of Type III Enrichment, for example, it is a thousand times easier if I have presented a couple of well-selected examples. In a similar fashion, use a few carefully selected quotes by famous

people, but be careful here. Field test the quotes to be absolutely certain they clearly enhance your message. A misinterpreted quote (or cartoon) can be a disaster.

- **Offer three (that magic number)** reasons why your proposal should be accepted. Two may not seem like enough and four may be too many.

- **Log onto the NRC/GT web site (<http://www.gifted.uconn.edu>)** to keep your school in touch with the constant flow of resources that are being developed and collected at UConn.

HOW TO CONVINCING YOUR ADMINISTRATOR

If your administrator is the type who doesn't usually react favorably to new ideas, consider these approaches:

- Shape your idea so that it can be approved by your principal. If he or she has to go upstairs for approval, the proposal you prepare will provide the material he or she will need.

- Discuss the idea with your peers and others who might be affected. If the principal says, "The others won't like it," note that you have obtained support of the people who would be involved in the change.

- Find something in the district guidelines or policies that will support what you want to do. When it comes to change, people feel better when following a manual.

- Explain how the change will help your school get where it wants to go faster, easier and perhaps cheaper.

- Show how the change will make the district higher-ups look good and the school more reputable.

- Use terms that are hot button issues in your school district's school improvement repertoire. (e.g., Differentiation, RtI, Equity, etc.). If possible, relate the change to something that is one of the district's key goals, or objectives.

- Use illustrations and examples to persuade. Point to research and to other schools that are doing it. Show the "Rising Tide" and/or "Developing the Gifts and Talents of all Students" video tapes. Involve some respected, articulate parents.

- Offer three reasons why your idea should be accepted. Two may not seem like enough and four may be too many. Most of all, never give up! **"Love [and Task Commitment] will find its way through paths where wolves would fear to prey."** Lord Byron