



Catalyzing Positive Change in Education: The Four Pillars

Taken from Mark D. Milliron's white paper, *Catalyzing Positive Change in Education: The Four Pillars*

Introduction

Quality education is essential. This simple personal, economic and societal truism has become a rallying cry for a host of innovations, initiatives and movements. Indeed, in the span of little over a century, education has moved from the purview of the elite or connected to a basic human right, community necessity, workforce essential and national imperative.

The call to education arms is now a common refrain from leaders ranging from presidential candidates to local college trustees to school board members: Education must change or we are at risk. What is exciting about all of this focus is the possibility to truly transform education in positive ways. What is frightening is the possibility for fits and starts, demagoguery and diatribes, splashy new programs full of sound and fury but resulting in nothing. We're already seeing both extremes.

This synopsis is taken from Mark D. Milliron's white paper, *Catalyzing Positive Change in Education: The Four Pillars*, and provides a brief overview of a framework that is intended to help educators thoughtfully build for an increasingly dynamic time. The framework is based on the notion of four pillars. These four pillars are foundation activities that position educators to thoughtfully and more nimbly build for the future: (1) catalyzing conversations; (2) inspiring innovation; (3) championing insight; and (4) fostering leadership. While each is important in its own right, bringing them together allows us to realize our true transcendent potential. Moreover, these pillars are in no way presented sequentially. Indeed, part of the art of leadership will be determining the best way to bring elements of the four pillars together into programs, practices and engagement with people to make a powerful difference in education.

Catalyze Conversations

Nothing kills our energized embrace of education reform like top-down, do-it-or-we-die approaches. Time after time, we have seen these approaches fail in the world of education. However, we try them again and again. A patriarchal, dominating leadership style is rarely well received – even when championing the best of ideas.

When we have engaging and thoughtful explorations and conversations about the context in which we are providing education, we begin to prepare the soil for the harvest ahead. On this fertile conversational ground, our innovations take root, our insights bring water and nourishment, and quality leaders at all levels can bring a bountiful harvest home. Not only do students learn more effectively, educators also learn along the way and are better prepared for even more transitions. What follows next are some ideas for the topics of these conversations, topics that seem to be stirring interesting activity.

Learning Swirl

The “pipeline” metaphor is based upon the idea that there’s a neat, linear pipeline that sends students flowing through educational programs and services in standard patterns of attendance, moving from K-12 on into higher education. While there is still a percentage of students that fit this pattern, a larger segment of higher education – particularly community colleges and state universities – have very different student flows.

In short, higher education today is a complex, diverse service sector meeting the needs of students often coming at all ages and stages. They swirl in and out of our institutions, with many coming back multiple times either to complete or continue their education. Yes, they have a primary swirl – their first time through. However, more and more are on their second and third flow through higher education. In the industrial age, it was more common to have one shot through a pipeline. Today, however, most students will swirl in and out of education throughout their careers.

Globalization

Part of the reason we're seeing this changing flow of students has to do with the changing economic model. During a special event held at North Carolina State University's William & Ida Friday Institute for Educational Innovation,¹ Jim Goodnight, CEO of SAS, and author Richard Florida made the case that we are likely to see the wholesale redesign of our education system because of the global need for greater education access and improved education outcomes. As we moved from the agrarian age to the industrial age, we reinvented education to power our societies and economies – inventing high schools, community colleges and land grant institutions. But in the industrial world, we only needed some of our students educated at the higher education level. Now, we need most of our students educated at the associate and bachelor's level to thrive.

Advancement

While more students are coming into education at all ages and stages, and an ever-more-connected global economy demands higher education success rates, education funding in most circles is being slashed. Concerns about waste, abuse and poor outcomes are causing many legislative groups to cut funding, tie funding to outcomes and demand that education “do more with less.”

Not surprisingly, many in education are starting to get more strategic about advancing their institution.² They are aggressively developing their legislative relations capacity. From individual institutional lobbyists to consortium- and association-based legislative advocacy, education institutions are working to make their case. Most significant, however, is the push toward private fundraising. With Harvard's endowment at over \$35 billion and an increasing number of institutions actively working on billion-dollar capital campaigns, the push to generate private support for higher education is alive and well.

Big Blend Building

The time has come to move beyond the unspoken segregation of on-ground, facility-centric education and online, portal-central education. A good number of education institutions are working on how they thoughtfully embrace building out “the big blend.” This blend ranges from hybrid classes to diverse service offerings – some online, some on ground. With the majority of students taking online courses also taking on-ground courses, students are going hybrid whether we like it or not.

¹ SAS and The William & Ida Friday Institute for Educational Innovation (n.d.). “Are We on the Brink of a Creativity Crisis?” On-demand Webcast. Retrieved May 7, 2008 from <http://www.sas.com/events/govedu/121729/speakers.html>.

² Lauer, L. D. (2002). *Competing for Students, Money and Education: Marketing the Academy in the 21st Century*. Washington, D.C.: CASE Books.

Put simply, the actions that need to be taken to update the education infrastructure run the spectrum from online to on-ground, but should be focused somewhere in the middle of the two extremes. Given trends like learning swirl, we know that we need to have high-tech infrastructures to reach younger net-savvy students. However, we will increasingly need to blend that outreach with high-touch strategies for adult re-entry and at-risk students that need more one-on-one focus.

Inspire Innovations

Taking the time to catalyze key conversations is a necessary component of driving positive change in education. However, all conversation and no action is an empty change strategy. Correspondingly, action without the conversation necessary to engage and involve participants is often met with powerful resistance. When educators are well-engaged in key conversations, they'll take the necessary actions that make innovation possible. Next, some of the leading innovations and activities are outlined.

K-20 Partnerships

Call it K-20, P-16, seamless webs or integrated education systems, but the idea is the same – deep, substantive, inter-institutional partnerships. These innovative linkages are happening at the regional, state and national levels. The various forms of this innovation include more standard partnerships like dual-enrollment programs, where high-school students take college-level courses on-site, off-site or online.

These innovations are a clear response to the challenges of learning swirl and globalization. They are leveraging big-blend strategies as well by building many of these initiatives on ground and online. But make no mistake: These innovative programs need to be built with strong understanding of the context for education, the need for greater flexibility for students, the possibilities of extended reach by using technology, and the vital role that a robust and seamless education system plays in economic development.

Strategic Enrollment Management/Customer Relationship Management

Given the fluid nature of student enrollment patterns and the need to build lifelong relationships with these increasingly diverse students,³ it is not surprising that the activity around strategic enrollment management has picked up.

³ Ashburn, E. (2008, March 19). Colleges Grapple With Major Shifts in the Student Population That Are Predicted by New Data. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved May 2, 2008 from <http://chronicle.com/daily/2008/03/2177n.htm>.

Strategic enrollment management (SEM) is a series of activities and innovations that an institution uses to attract, retain and ensure the success of the students it serves. The question of which target students an institution is going after is an important one and often dictates how it approaches its funnel management – moving large student target groups through a funnel of activity until you reach a group to admit and serve.

Customer relationship management (CRM) is the corporate version of SEM. It's the idea of moving customers from leads (e.g., first contact) to loyal, lifelong customers.⁴ CRM strategies are seeping into higher education. Indeed, to make the big blend come to life, an institution needs to understand how it leverages all of its infrastructures – call centers, learning management systems, classrooms, libraries and service centers – to build positive and productive relationships with students. Many institutions make their SEM/CRM relationship-building goal quite plain: to connect with students from birth to endowment.

Gaming and Social Networking

While they might not have the systemic appeal of policy partnerships and the institutional structure of SEM/CRM, gaming and social networking are clearly driving activity, causing conflict and evidencing the creative spirit of teachers and students alike. These immersive and interactive strategies are taking the university and community college world by storm and pointing the way to some very interesting possibilities.

The idea is that these innovations are not to be feared, but embraced. The challenge is to move beyond our own misconceptions about these tools and explore how they help us connect with younger swirling students, expand our reach globally and advance our institutional profiles.

Educational and Civic Engagement

The broader topic of engagement has become a conversation starter and a difference maker. Research and practice clearly show that student engagement makes a powerful difference in student recruiting, retention and success. As a result, the different tools and techniques to help bolster and broaden student engagement are beginning to drive interesting innovations. Both the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) explore key focus areas in engagement, including academic challenge, student effort, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction and support for learners. After measuring student engagement perceptions on these focus areas and then allowing for benchmark conversations, institutions then try a number of innovations in support services, curricular interventions and learning technologies to see if they affect engagement.

⁴ Baran, R. J., Galka, R. & Strunk, D. P. (2007). *Principles of Customer Relationship Management*. Location Unknown: South-Western Educational Publishing.

Champion Insight

Catalyzing compelling conversations about the trends and challenges on the road ahead is essential to drive positive change. Inspiring innovations that address these trends and challenges bring to life these discussions, moving institutions and systems from talk to walk. Still, conversations and innovations without insight are often impotent. The ability to champion insight clearly is a necessary pillar in the move toward positive change.

Welcoming the insight pillar to the structure is a must. To champion well-grounded insight initiatives in institutions and systems, there are four key elements:

- Start with strategy – The most fundamental questions in any insight initiative are “What to measure?” and “Why?”
- Build out technology – Without a rock-solid technology infrastructure to collect, clean, report and analyze data, an insight initiative will falter.
- Raise the sights – Move beyond traditional uses of data to more compelling and potentially useful applications.
- Ready the culture – No matter how much work you put into strategy, technology or raising sights, the insight initiative will not succeed if the institutional culture is not ready.

Fostering Leadership

Years of research and practice in education make it clear that quality leadership is essential for bringing positive change to education institutions and systems. Educational leadership includes senior leadership, faculty leadership, staff leadership and community leadership. Leadership at all levels is needed to make positive change in education a reality.

Our challenge in driving positive change in education relates to just how difficult it is to lead today’s education institutions and systems. The complex combination of changing trends, demographics and economic realities challenge education leaders in new and interesting ways. Moreover, they are tackling these challenges with fewer resources, more scrutiny and less patience from stakeholders than ever. Educators are well-served to take the job of finding, growing, energizing and renewing leadership seriously.

Finding – Finding a leader with the ability to engage in expansive conversations is a must. Interest in and the ability to inspire innovations is essential. Moreover, finding a leader with a solid understanding of the role of insight in moving an institution toward positive change will make it more likely that you’ll have the intelligence necessary to inform the journey ahead.

Growing – First look for the signs of potential rising leaders in our midst, foster their interest in leadership, and then work to give them the experiences and exposure necessary to move in good directions. Engaging broad sets of the institution in the other three pillars allows us to see these potential rising star leaders in action and engage them.

Energizing – Found or grown, one of the essential things a leader must do to drive positive change is energizing an institution or system. When energized and engaged by positive and authentic leadership, substantive and powerful change has a better chance of happening within institutions and systems.

Renewing – Unless you are starting an educational institution from scratch, your educational leadership energizing will be targeting renewal. Renewal means taking a close look at where you are, what your capacities are, what the needs are going forward, and then mapping out how you change.

Conclusion

In many ways, the four pillars framework is about preparing us for personal and institutional transcendence. Transcendence is about “taking it to the next level.” Much of education is about helping students transcend their current state. Sometimes it’s their financial state, their state of mind, their state of ability or their state of belief.

Great educators understand these transcendence journeys. One of the great psychic benefits of being an educator includes watching students of all ages and stages take their steps along this journey to move up and on. It is always inspiring to see a student overcome internal fear, break old borders down, and move beyond where he or she even dreamed possible.

Positive change moves us toward transcendence. And if we can build on the framework of four pillars – catalyzing conversation, inspiring innovation, championing insight and fostering leadership – we can certainly move to the next level.

“Physician heal thyself” is the phrase used in the medical community. Put simply, not only should we be energetically encouraging our students toward transcendence, we should be willing to take the transcendence journey ourselves and with our institutions.

About the Author

Mark David Milliron, PhD, is an award-winning education leader, author, speaker and consultant known for exploring leadership development, future trends, learning strategies and the human side of technology change. Milliron works with K-12 schools, community colleges, universities, corporations, associations, community groups and government agencies across the country and around the world. He also sits on numerous education, nonprofit and corporate boards; he serves as chair of the board for the Institute for the Study of Knowledge Management in Education⁵ and as a trustee for Western Governors University.⁶ In addition, he is a guest lecturer at educational institutions nationally and internationally and author and moderator of the Catalytic Conversations Blog.⁷ Milliron's complete biography is available at <http://markmilliron.com/>.

About SAS

Since our origin more than 30 years ago as a research project at North Carolina State University, SAS has been committed to serving the education industry by delivering software solutions, strategic services and academic programs that spark innovation and expand educational opportunities. Only SAS offers industry best practices and true end-to-end capabilities, including superior data management, industry leading analytics and robust reporting.

Learn more about how SAS is helping to shape the future of education by reading our education success stories and white papers. Visit www.sas.com/success and www.sas.com/whitepapers .

⁵ <http://www.iskme.org/>

⁶ <http://www.wgu.edu/>

⁷ <http://catalyticconversations.blogspot.com/>



SAS Institute Inc. World Headquarters +1 919 677 8000 To contact your local SAS office, please visit: **www.sas.com/offices**

SAS and all other SAS Institute Inc. product or service names are registered trademarks or trademarks of SAS Institute Inc. in the USA and other countries. ® indicates USA registration. Other brand and product names are trademarks of their respective companies. Copyright © 2007, SAS Institute Inc. All rights reserved. 103473_489340.0508