

Strategic Communications Rubric

Communicating School Redesign through the Youth-Adult Partnership Lens

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This rubric outlines the key criteria for developing successful communications to facilitate the implementation of “student-centered” practices such as personalized learning plans, flexible pathways and proficiency based graduation requirements. It was co-created by participants in a Vermont-based course titled, “Communicating School Redesign through the Youth-Adult Partnership Lens” during the 2013–14 school year, as part of their work to design tools and strategies to assist schools in the implementation of Act 77 and the Vermont Quality Standards. This rubric can serve any school undertaking strategic communications with a commitment to involvement of youth as partners in this process.

This rubric is based on “strategic framing,” an approach to communications that utilizes social science research to surface public perceptions of education, learning and school redesign. Research to date, conducted by FrameWorks Institute of Washington, D.C., has revealed a dissonance between proposed school innovation and the adult public’s existing beliefs about education and learning. This approach provides a research-based structure and process for designing “re-frames” that are compelling and unifying, to further Vermont’s efforts in school redesign.

Current national communications research has largely been conducted on voter age adults only. Course participants have expanded this base of research to better understand the “mental models” of youth as they think about education, learning and change strategies.

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CRITERIA	AWESOME	ALMOST THERE	GETTING STARTED	MISSED THE BOAT
Research-based message re-frame	Created a re-frame that more regularly permeates the public conversation and routinely crowds out existing ineffective frames (e.g. focus on individual achievement incompetent teachers, bad unions, unmotivated students).	Created a re-frame that occasionally seeps into the public conversation and begins to replace existing ineffective frames for progressive school redesign efforts.	Created a re-frame that contains some of the elements that begin to redirect conversation to better public understanding, but leaves out some of the essentials.	Attempted to create a re-frame that reinforces existing frame.
“Big picture thinking” approach to promote school redesign understanding	Created a compelling “big picture” re-frame, using a story that captures issues and trends, highlighting the opportunity for civic engagement and action, and including a public or collective solution. This framing clearly “connects the dots” for the audience between problem & solution.	Created a generally “big picture” re-frame, using a story that captures issues & trends, highlighting the opportunity for civic engagement and action, and including a public or collective solution, but it would benefit from tuning to better connect the dots between problem and solution.	Created a generally individualistic frame, using a story focusing on the individual as the consumer of information leading to the idea that fixing particular people is the solution. The “dots” between problem and solution are not clear for the audience.	Created an individualistic frame, using a story focusing on the individual as the consumer of information, which leads to the idea that fixing particular people is the solution. The audience has little or no understanding of the rationale for school redesign and the identified solution.
Appropriate narrative sequence	Developed a clear and compelling narrative that starts with big ideas and culturally shared values, moves to a broad issue level and then leads to policy or program solutions.	Created a generally clear narrative that starts with big ideas and culturally shared values, moves to a broad issue level and then leads to specific policy or program solutions, but tuning is needed.	Created a partially clear narrative, but does not progress from big ideas to specifics relating to school redesign.	The narrative is both unclear and lacks a progression from big ideas to specifics relating to school redesign strategies.

CRITERIA	AWESOME	ALMOST THERE	GETTING STARTED	MISSED THE BOAT
Effective metaphors and simplifying models	Tested metaphor(s) and simplifying models are very successful in helping to bring the abstract concepts of school redesign “down to earth” in an understandable way to a broad audience. The language is accessible to youth and adults alike.	Tested metaphor(s) and simplifying models are generally successful in helping to bring the abstract concepts of school redesign “down to earth” for a broad audience. The language is largely accessible to youth and adults alike.	Tested metaphor(s) and simplifying models are marginally successful in bringing the abstract concepts of school redesign down to earth. The language is generally accessible to youth and adults alike, but at times are inaccessible due to overly technical or scientific language.	No metaphors are used to describe aspects of school redesign. Instead, overly technical or scientific language is used without a narrative framework, or untested metaphors are deployed.
Tone (style, mood, manners, philosophical outlook) of the tools and strategies	The tone of the tools and strategies is reasonable and promotes a problem-solving stance among youth and adults (versus triggering a defensive reaction); the tone also honors the expertise of stakeholders, such as teachers, makes clear that school redesign is everybody’s business.	The tone of the tools and strategies is reasonable and promotes a problem-solving stance among youth and adults. (versus triggering a defensive reaction); no stakeholder is blamed.	The tone of the tools and strategies is somewhat argumentative and sparks an argumentative response. The audience is reluctant to take in new information or be involved in solution creation. There is an undercurrent of blame in the narrative.	The tone of the tools and strategies is argumentative and polarizing, shutting the audience down in terms of their receptiveness to new information or involvement in solution creation. There is a strong sense that someone is to blame for the current situation.
Connection of tools to dialogue strategies to build public understanding and goodwill toward the desired changes	Communications approach fully integrates clearly defined and engaging dialogue strategies to build public understanding for change.	Communications approach includes clearly defined and engaging dialogue strategies identified to effectively build public understanding for change.	Communications approach includes some dialogue strategies to promote public understanding for change.	Communications approach lacks dialogue strategies to promote public understanding for change (more typical of a one-way media campaign).
Development of tools that are directed to youth and co-created with youth	Youth have helped co-create communications tools & strategies with adults that are compelling and help build youth as well as community understanding of school redesign. Youth are regularly deployed as effective expert messengers about system change.	Youth have been consulted and sometimes partner with adults in the process of creating effective communications tools and strategies to build youth and community understanding of school redesign. Youth are sometimes the expert messengers but are under-utilized.	Youth are rarely consulted or involved in the process of creating effective communications tools and strategies to build youth and community understanding of school redesign. Youth are seldom the expert messengers.	Youth are never included within the design or implementation of a communications strategy to build youth and community understanding of school redesign. Youth are never the expert messengers and/or are used as tokens or “window dressing.”