

CASE BRIEF: CASE STUDY #7, TINA SEARS

1. *Who* is/are the decision maker(s) in the case (you might be one of them) in terms of the work that you are responsible for? (Be sure you include WHY you think someone is a decision maker – what is your evidence?)
2. *What* appears to be the primary issue(s) (concern, problem, challenge or opportunity)? What has happened or what situations have arisen because of this issue(s)? (Be sure to provide evidence from the case or your reasoning here)
3. *When* do I have to decide, resolve, act or dispose of this issue(s)? Is there urgency? (Provide evidence from the case)
4. Have I (or others) already taken any steps to resolve the issue(s)? If so, what are they? Have they been successful – why or why not?
5. Specifically *how* will you proceed from here? For each point, be sure that you provide the reasoning behind your thinking and how it directly links to the primary and secondary issues you have identified. Be precise about how you will proceed – what will you do first, second etc.

Journal Entry – October 2

Well, I think I might have really screwed the pooch on this one. It's been three months weeks since Mr. Cook threatened to cut off funding for the laptop program, and I'm finally beginning to figure out where I went wrong. Thankfully, he's given us another chance to show evidence of student learning. The reality is that without his financial support, we'd never be able to do even as much as we accomplished last year.

Perhaps if he hadn't failed to consult us before he committed us to this program, we could have discussed all of the stakeholder goals and I would have had a clearer picture of his expectations for the program. I thought he'd be excited about the reactions of the students, teachers and parents; after all, many of these parents work for him, and since it's well known that he's responsible for funding the laptop program, that could place him in a more positive light with his employees. Most of them seemed to feel that student attitudes toward learning had improved as a result of the laptop program, as had student learning – or at least that's what my survey showed. And isn't attitude toward learning an important ingredient for learning? I seem to recall reading about this in grad school (What was his name? Kirkpatrick? in his model for evaluating training, he assigned evaluation of learner reaction to level 1, and evaluation of learning to level 2, because he believed that positive learner attitudes and positive reactions to learning were an important precursor to learning). I guess Mr. Cook never read Kirkpatrick's work.

And the video – how could anyone not see the impact of the laptops on the students and teachers. How could he not recognize students downloading census data and using Excel to

predict future population trends as evidence of deep learning? This is not just copy-and-paste – this is really understanding what the data can tell us, then applying it in a new way to predict the future. That’s higher order thinking. I can understand that Mr. Cook is not really interested in how much the teachers have changed their attitudes, their approaches to teaching the content, their classroom management strategies. But, doesn’t that, too, have a significant impact on student learning?

I really wish I hadn’t said anything about the ITBS scores – I should have realized that’s what Mr. Cook would focus on. In business, it’s all about the numbers – cold, hard, empirical evidence. As if student learning can be so easily quantified. What was I thinking? I know better – standardized test scores measure only tell part of the story, and there’s clearly a mismatch between the learning that occurred through the laptop program and the measure of learning on which I proposed we rely.

But enough placing the blame on Mr. Cook’s shoulders. He told us from the beginning that he wanted clear evidence of student learning. I guess I got so caught up in the excitement of the opportunity to bring technology into the classroom at a district-wide level that I forgot some basic tenets of instructional design – like building in, from the beginning, the assessment of both student learning and the program. First you conduct your analysis – context, learning environment, learners, and content – and determine your learning objectives, then you figure out how you’re going to evaluate them. How often was that drilled into me in grad school?

Now we’ve hired Dr. Colm’s team to develop a plan to further evaluate the program. She did a great job facilitating the stakeholder meeting – I’m glad I didn’t have to do it. I saw members of her team madly scribbling notes, and it seemed like everyone who wanted to had the opportunity to speak up and be heard.

I didn’t hear much that was different from my own evaluation of the program – I observed and recorded how students and teachers used the laptops, I surveyed teachers and parents, and I looked at student test scores – but maybe hearing from all the stakeholders will encourage Mr. Cook to look at other measures besides test scores (a girl can always hope, can’t she), although I’m concerned that in the meeting the discussion of evidence focused almost exclusively on those darned test scores. Why didn’t someone from Dr. Colm’s team try to introduce other ideas for evidence?

OK, stop whining, Tina! Just figure out what you’re going to do next. With Dr. Colm and her team taking on the evaluation, what’s left for me?

I expect that their evaluation plan will address several areas, among them:

1. student and teacher reactions to laptop use, probably through a survey – I wonder if they can use the data I already collected, or if they’ll want to do a new survey;

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2. student learning as a result of laptop use (they want to use the ITBS scores, and we already know that last year's scores showed no impact, and I'm now convinced that that won't be an accurate or valid measure of the types of learning students have experienced – I wonder if they've thought of other measures);
3. transfer – now that these students are in sixth grade, they'll be engaging in new types of problems that use some of the same principles and concepts from the ones they examined in the fifth grade, and measuring whether these same students can use that 5th grade knowledge in addressing their 6th grade problem will certainly provide evidence of deeper learning; and
4. results – have the teachers' attitudes, methods and strategies changed in ways that will lead to improved student learning? Has the student laptop program resulted in achieving the goals of all the stakeholders?

(I know this model is common in business and industry, but since that's Mr. Cook's mindset, it seems appropriate here.)

Tomorrow, I'll email Dr. Colm, expressing my interest in being kept in the loop and offering my services as a liaison between the students and teachers and the evaluation team – I can smooth the way for the team and facilitate communication with the teachers and students. It will probably be too early for the evaluation team to have formulated any specific ideas about how they'll proceed, but I can at least ask Dr. Colm for her initial impressions.

Then I'm going to go back to the beginning – right back to the front-end analysis – to make sure that all of my t's are crossed and my i's are dotted in the event that Mr. Cook agrees to expand the laptop program to the other grades (and I have to believe he will). Will it make sense, for example, to equip first grade classrooms with laptops? I ran across some research not too long ago about how computer use in the early grades affects student learning – I should look that up, because I recall that it wasn't very positive.

I want to have a solid plan in place, one that ensures that the program will continue to meet with success and attract continued funding, and that we focus on both formative evaluation – making sure we get feedback at every level and stage of the program, from training the teachers to designing appropriate instruction for students at different grade levels, to evaluating our objectives, making needed adjustments as we go along – and summative evaluation – making sure that we actually meet the objectives we set for the program and its participants. I don't want to repeat past mistakes or put the program at risk again.

OK, I'm starting to feel better about this – having a clear plan of action always makes me feel more optimistic about the future.