

EVALUATION OF TEL.A.VISION CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION AT BIG LAKE HIGH SCHOOL

INTRODUCTION

Big Lake High School is a comprehensive senior high school in the semi-rural town of Big Lake, Minnesota serving 930 students in grades 9-12. The school administration and staff have developed a Transition Program aimed at acclimating new 9th graders and increasing their chances for success as they transition from the community's middle school to the high school. The Transition Program includes Transition Day (a day set aside exclusively for 9th graders just before school starts in the fall) and then multiple elements carried out throughout the school year. One element of the school's Transition Program is the Tel.A.Vision curriculum. This curriculum asks students to create a short video describing who they are; what their special talents, strengths, and interests are; and what they envision for their future. Administration and staff incorporated this element with great anticipation about its potential to help students get to know each other and to begin to think in concrete ways about the direction they want to follow in their studies and in their lives as a whole.

Academic year 2011-2012 was the second year the school planned implemented the Tel.A.Vision curriculum. It was initially introduced during Transition Day and was then reintroduced and implemented in each 9th grade English class during the early weeks of the semester. A comprehensive evaluation plan for the benefit of both the Tel.A.Vision curriculum developer and the school was developed and is the focus of this report. In addition to producing reliable data, the evaluation project was designed to engage youth fully in the process and help them develop evaluation skills, team skills, and leadership skills. Eight 9th graders were recommended by the English teachers as potential volunteers and the evaluation consultant met with both students and staff to present an overview of the process. All eight students (two males and six females) made the decision to be part of the team. Late in the spring, scheduling conflicts required the male students to withdraw from the project, but all of the female students were able to participate for the entire time.

The student evaluator team worked under the guidance of an evaluation consultant who served as a subject matter expert, a guide and mentor, and a collaborator with the student evaluators. Each step of the process involved training, discussion, application activities, collaborative product development, and collaborative critique and revision. In order for the students to benefit in significant ways from the project and to take on ownership of the project, it was important to

gain their input and decision making on all aspects of the project and for the final products to reflect their work as much as that of the consultant. Time constraints were often a significant barrier to allowing student skills and work products to develop more fully, but both the process and the outcomes are reflective of their efforts and perspectives.

Originating Questions

As indicated in the student evaluator Powerpoint report, the questions driving the evaluation came from both the Tel.A.Vision curriculum developer and from Big Lake High School students and staff.

Developer questions included:

- What works / doesn't work for this particular group and purpose?
- What is the nature and degree of positive impact on the students?
- What outcomes can be generalized to other groups?
- What can we add to the research knowledge base regarding this curriculum?
- What prior findings can we support and reinforce?
- What new findings might we discover?
- What insights can we gain for improving the curriculum?

Big Lake High School questions included:

- Do our 9th graders benefit from the Tel.A.Vision curriculum? In what ways?
- Do staff at the school benefit from the Tel.A.Vision curriculum? In what ways?
- Can we document the student benefits?
- Can we increase or solidify those benefits?
- Should we continue to use it as part of the Transition to 9th Grade program?
- Can we improve on how we deliver the curriculum?

Secondary to questions about the impact of the Tel.A.Vision curriculum were questions regarding the student evaluator model and process. The model and process were assessed on an informal basis throughout the year and during a video-taped interview with the student evaluator team during the spring of 2012. Questions regarding the model included:

- What are the benefits of using this model?
- What are the impacts on the students?
- What are the impacts on the school?
- What are the key supports & challenges?
- Should we use this model for other student or school initiatives?

Evaluation Components

The evaluation design involved two components – a student survey and student focus groups. Questions were aimed at understanding how students experienced the Tel.A.Vision curriculum program and at determining what kind of impacts the program had on the students. Multiple steps were involved in the development, implementation, and analysis of these evaluation components, as can be seen in Appendix 1. In addition to developing the survey instrument and the focus group protocol, student evaluators also learned and carried out the consent and invitation process.

Student Survey

A necessarily interactive relationship existed between the development of the student survey instrument and the implementation of the student focus groups. After gaining skill at writing good survey questions, student evaluators developed a tentative survey instrument to assess the impact of the Tel.A.Vision program on fellow 9th graders. The development of these questions also helped inform the development of a focus group protocol. After conducting the focus groups, new information and insights were in turn used to refine and finalize the survey instrument.

Upon completion of question revisions, the survey was placed online within the school's Survey Monkey account and student volunteers were recruited to pilot test it for ease of use and question clarity. Pilot testing indicated that no substantive changes were needed and the survey was made available in February 2012 to all of the 9th grade students who had returned their consent forms. It should be noted that the 54 students who responded to the survey represented only 21% of the 9th grade class. In order to get a better response rate in the future, it has been suggested that responding to the survey be made a mandatory part of the Tel.A.Vision curriculum class assignment.

Focus Groups

Prior to conducting peer focus groups, student evaluators learned the process of developing focus group questions, participated in mock focus groups, and then led practice focus groups about topics of personal interest. They then conducted two peer focus groups in December 2011 that were tape recorded and transcribed for analysis. The initial design called for additional focus groups in February and April 2012 to see if the results remained consistent over time and student evaluators also hoped to conduct focus groups with teachers and parents. However, because of a variety of time-consuming and valuable projects that developed as a result of the evaluation, the student evaluators were unable to conduct these additional focus groups.

Organization of Findings

Findings from the evaluation project are included in two separate documents. The current report summarizes the key outcomes of the Big Lake High School evaluation project while the lengthier *Data Addendum* accompanying the report provides detailed data from both the survey and the

focus groups that the reader may find useful for further exploration. In addition to providing more detailed data, the Addendum also provides snapshots of the data analysis process that was followed. Also accompanying the report is the Powerpoint report presented by student evaluators to key school personnel in May 2012.

TEL.A.VISION CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

With guidance from the evaluation consultant, student evaluators coded, analyzed, and then synthesized data from the peer focus groups and then integrated the results with those from the student survey. The selected findings presented here are organized by the themes that emerged during the evaluation process. Comprehensive survey results and extensive focus group transcript data from which these findings were drawn can be found in the *Data Addendum*.

As noted previously, only 21% of the 9th graders responded to the survey. Student evaluators indicated that the 21% responding were generally considered “good” students. There was some speculation that this group of students may have taken the Tel.A.Vision assignment more seriously than others and may also have enjoyed it more. In combination with the voluntary nature of the participation, it is possible that the survey results are skewed more toward the positive than they would have been had all 9th graders completed the survey. But it is also possible that the same *pattern* of impacts would have been observed with 100% participation, even if the actual ratings ended up lower.

Summary of Key Tel.A.Vision Benefits¹

All data indicate that the Tel.A.Vision curriculum had significantly positive impacts on the students who participated in the evaluation, including:

- Increased self confidence
- Excitement about the future
- Motivation to succeed in life
- More serious view of school work
- Improved relationships with classmates and English teachers
- Special appreciation of the positive attention received from peers & teachers

Overall Experience

There was a rather dramatic difference in student reaction to Tel.A.Vision when first introduced to it as compared to their reaction once they became engaged with it and then completed it. Only 28% of the students had an initial positive reaction, while 30% felt negatively about it and 42%

¹ See “Benefit and Recommendation Summary” in Appendix 2 for additional information.

felt neutral. By contrast, later reaction was 85% positive, 11% neutral, and only 4% negative. This clear change of perspective is indicative of a need to improve the initial presentation but is simultaneously promising regarding the power of the curriculum once students do become engaged.

A similar and corroborating pattern was found in student responses related to feeling words. A selection of both positive and negative feeling words was added to the survey based on focus group responses and students were asked to select the words that were applicable to them. As can be seen in the chart below, there was a significant increase in the choice of positive feeling words as the students got engaged with the Tel.A.Vision curriculum and an even more significant decrease in the choice of negative feeling words.

Word	Felt this way when I FIRST STARTED making my TAV	Felt this way when I GOT FURTHER INTO making my video	% change
Fun	32%	85%	53%
Exciting	37%	81%	44%
Motivating	36%	78%	42%
Freeing	34%	81%	47%
Energizing	31%	86%	55%
Boring	89%	20%	-69%
Stressful	81%	29%	-52%
Confusing	95%	15%	-80%
Frustrating	93%	24%	-69%
Hard	96%	18%	-77%
Limiting	62%	46%	-15%

View of Future

All survey questions about how the Tel.A.Vision curriculum impacted students' views of their future resulted in high positive scores.

- 96% said they were able to picture themselves actually doing what they put in their video
- 94% said they incorporated realistic goals for their future
- 83% said that the Tel.A.vision curriculum helped them organize their thoughts about their future
- 81% said that the assignment helped them think more clearly about their future

- 83% said that making the video made them feel positive and excited about their future
- 79% said that making the video helped them think in new ways about their future options

Examples of related student comments include:

- *“I liked seeing all the things I truly want to do in life. It's more than I originally thought”.*
- *“It was fun and easy to make. It really made you think about your future and your future goals.”*
- *“Like when you actually...umm...when you actually broke things down and then you put ‘em on the TelAVision you realized “oh wow, I could actually do this!”*
- *“You could think of, like, a small idea. And then, like, by the time you write it out it gives you more ideas about what you have to do to accomplish the one you wanted in the beginning.”*

One area noted in the survey about the future suggested that students felt strongly that a second Tel.A.Vision video should be made by seniors during their twelfth grade experience so they can compare their views from 9th grade expectations/visions and be able to note the change in goals and perspectives. Approximately 2/3 of all the students either agreed or strongly agreed that this should occur. It indicates that the process of Tel.A.Vision was viewed as forward thinking; helping students to think and plan for their future.

View of Self

There was some inconsistency in the survey results when students were asked about impacts on their view of themselves. For example, 76% said that making the video increased their appreciation of their unique strengths and abilities and 64% said that it increased their self-confidence. However, a later question indicated that only 37% experienced an increase in self-confidence. Despite this apparent inconsistency, open-ended comments on the survey and comments made during the focus groups suggest that an increase in self-confidence was common. As one student stated:

“It made me feel like...umm..well, it made me kind of feel proud. You know...after you write those things out you realize you could accomplish it...and you would feel proud if you did accomplish it.”

View of School Work

When asked about how Tel.A.Vision impacted their view of their schoolwork, 67% said it helped them see more *purpose* to their school work and 59% said it helped them take their school work more *seriously*. Although these percentages are lower than those for some other areas, only 9% and 11% respectively responded that Tel.A.Vision did not help them see more purpose or take their school work more seriously. The rest of the responses were neutral. Given that the student participants had been described as “good” students, and largely advance placement students, it is

possible that the relatively high rate of neutral responses may indicate that many of them already take their school work more seriously than the average student.

Classmate Relationships

Both the survey and the focus groups indicated that students felt overwhelmingly positive about learning more about their classmates and having their classmates learn more about them. Responses about this experience are threaded throughout the survey in response to several of the questions. However, direct questions about impact on classmate relationships in their English classes (where they did the videos) yielded much lower positives, averaging about 33%. As the survey results were integrated with the focus group transcripts, this issue generated a great deal of discussion. The lower positive scores seem to reflect a substantial variation in the individual English classrooms as much or more than they reflect the impact of the Tel.A.Vision program. For example, in one class students saw a dramatic increase in interaction after the videos were made, saw new friendships being formed, and saw other friendships being strengthened. But in another class, the students already interacted extensively and they did not see a change. Even without this possible reason for the lower positive scores, having one third of the students observe and/or experience stronger classmate relationships is very important.

Teacher Relationships

Seventy-two percent of the students said they felt their English teacher understands more about who they are, while 8% did not agree and 20% were neutral. During the focus groups, students described this as a positive benefit that they wished could be expanded in two ways:

1. Have more opportunities for other teachers to see their videos.
2. Have the teachers all make videos of themselves to share with the students.

Anecdotally, several school staff that talked about the ways student videos helped them substantially in their relationships with the students. For example, school administrators and the 9th grade counselor discussed viewing the videos before meeting with individual students and gaining significant insight into who the student was and what their interests were. Similarly, the media center director saw numerous videos and discussed at length how much it helped her in her interactions with students.

(Note: The reader is also referred to the “Tel.A.Vision Implementation Reactions” of this report for additional comments relevant to student-teacher relationships.)

TEL.A.VISION WEBSITE REACTIONS

The survey responses regarding the Tel.A.Vision website were surprisingly positive in light of the comments made during the focus groups. The students in the focus groups had both positive and negative feedback to provide regarding the website, but a few negative comments seemed to dominate. The most consistently negative in the focus groups and in the survey was the lack of good music choices that the students could relate to. Other aspects of the website – transitions, navigation, sample videos and tutorials, etc. – were more positive but also had a much wider range of responses. Website questions consistently produced more opposing viewpoints than other types of questions, with the results averaging out to somewhere in the middle of the rating scale. Such results fail to indicate either strong positive or strong negative patterns, but do suggest that each area of the website would benefit from improvement. Details for each website question can be found on the survey spreadsheets in the *Data Addendum*.

One aspect of the website that was not asked about in the survey but that came up several times was the difficulty of locating and opening individual videos without having to work with the videos from an entire class. Students wanted an easier and less cumbersome way to access their own videos.

TEL.A.VISION IMPLEMENTATION REACTIONS

Among the responses with lower than average scores were those related to the introduction and teaching of the Tel.A.Vision curriculum. Survey results, focus group comments, and discussions with the student evaluator team all indicated that this was an area that could easily and effectively be improved. The student evaluators began planning ways to improve these two areas near the beginning of the evaluation project and it was out of these efforts that several of the spin-off activities listed below evolved.

Tel.A.Vision Introduction

Many students commented on their poor initial reaction to Tel.A.Vision when it was introduced as part of Transition Day. Students tended to view it as just another “school assignment” that they would be required to do that did not seem interesting or valuable, much less motivating. Their initial reaction has been discussed from one perspective above, but student evaluators also focused on another perspective. Rather than wait and “hope” for a more positive response after students became engaged in the process, student evaluators wanted to make it more appealing and exciting when it was first introduced. For example:

- *“I know that when we had 9th grade orientation day...on the first day of school...that they introduced it to us. But I was thinking...when they first introduced it I thought it was going to be really boring. And then once I got into it, it was really fun. So what I think would be a good idea is that we...umm...have people who have **done** the TelAVision before be the ones to introduce it. Because I know that it was the teachers...um...second year, I think, doing it...and it didn't sound interesting at all.”*

- *“OK, so it would be more fun to have someone who’s actually **done** a TelAVision... somebody who went through the whole process...and actually had a good time doing it...and put in the effort. **They** should explain it.”*

Student evaluators will introduce the Tel.A.Vision curriculum on Transition Day and will be using a variety of strategies to convey their own enthusiasm. They are using the Tel.A.Vision website to create an introduction to the curriculum and also using it to introduce themselves and others in the 10th grade as resources for the new 9th graders. They will also show a composite video from those they made. In general, they will draw on their personal experience as peers to present the Tel.A.Vision curriculum as an exciting and valuable opportunity.

Tel.A.Vision Classroom Implementation

There was substantial variation across classrooms regarding the way in which Tel.A.Vision was reintroduced and implemented. Some of the variation was based on degree of teacher knowledge and experience and some was based on supporting strategies that may or may not have been included. For example, in at least one of the classrooms the teacher was very familiar with the curriculum and had also developed a planner for the students with additional instructions and tips. These factors helped make the implementation a more positive experience.

- *“Like, I know last year, they were just told to make a video...and then this year there was more of like a planning step in it. Did you guys like the whole thing in our planner?”*
- *“It helped a lot.”*
- *“[It]...really helped me organize...when I first went on, it was kind of overwhelming. ‘Cause I didn’t know where something was...or I didn’t now how to do this or how to do that, but when I looked in the planner, there was like step by step instructions...”*

By contrast, in at least one classroom the teacher was unfamiliar with the curriculum and/or did not provide additional instruction. These factors made the implementation less positive, at least initially.

- *“At first it was really confusing because honestly we didn’t know much about it. ‘Cause all we had to go by was stuff in our planner...and by what our teacher said...’cause our teacher didn’t know much about it...”*
- *“I would change the teachers’ understanding of it. Because I know that my teacher just said ‘Here [unintelligible] project. Here’s the instructions. Ready, set, go.’ And I had to...figure it out kinda by myself. I had to go on the website. I had to go...just like look at it...figure out where everything was and how to use it. How to put this there. How to add pictures...and...how do you add music...and stuff like that.”*

In order to continue and extend what they hope will be an enthusiastic attitude toward the Tel.A.Vision Curriculum, the student evaluators will reintroduce the curriculum in each English classroom and then mentor the 9th graders through the process. They expect that their familiarity with the curriculum, their concrete assistance throughout the video development stages, and their own positive attitudes will work together to create an energetic and positive climate for creating the videos.

Teacher Videos

Another idea that emerged several times during the evaluation was a suggestion that each English teacher make their own Tel.A.Vision. In addition to ensuring that teachers were familiar with the technology, students were eager to learn about their teachers' lives prior to teaching at Big Lake High School. In particular, students wanted to know what their teachers were like in high school, what they wanted for their own futures, and what path they followed to get there. Besides being interesting, students thought this would help contribute to a more meaningful climate for creating and sharing videos about themselves and their dreams for their futures. Students were also interested in having all Big Lake High School teachers create a video – not just the English teachers – and thought they might even be able to feature one per week on their school news studio broadcast. It should be noted that some teachers have in fact made their own Tel.A.Vision videos but not many, and they did not seem to use them as an integral part of the curriculum implementation for the students.

STUDENT EVALUATOR OUTCOMES

As mentioned previously, the student evaluator model was assessed on an informal basis throughout the year and during a video-taped interview with the student evaluators during the spring of 2012. The student evaluator team experienced substantial growth and development throughout the year as they became more confident about their individual and collective abilities and as they formed new kinds of bonds. Virtually all members of the team talked about how open they learned to be with each other, how much they learned from each other, and how much their confidence in themselves and each other grew. Although the students knew each other by name prior to the evaluation project, none of them were in the same social groups and were quite amazed at how close they felt as a result of the evaluation project.

Summary of Key Student Evaluator Benefits

- Understanding the value of gathering data to inform decisions
- Trust in their ability to manage a complex project
- New respect for, and trust in, school staff

- Motivation, confidence, and determination to continue to lead change processes in their school
- Recognition of the power of a collaborative group to:
 - address problems
 - form bonds
 - break down barriers to relationships (e.g. use in future to break down barriers across cliques.)

Spin-Off Projects & Activities

As the evaluation progressed, the student evaluators took on additional projects and activities that grew directly out of the evaluation. Of particular significance to future evaluation outcomes are the introduction and implementation changes referenced above that are being undertaken by the student evaluator team with the approval, cooperation, and gratitude of the Transition Committee. There were also several other activities “above and beyond” the initial goal of conducting the evaluation itself that reflect the student evaluators’ motivation, creativity, and enthusiasm. The abbreviated chart below demonstrates the number and type of additional projects and activities that became a part of the student evaluator work and it is this dynamic that shows the true power and potential of a collaborative student initiative such as the Tel.A.Vision evaluation. The additional activities moved the students into collaborative efforts with the school’s Transition Committee, with the English teachers for next year’s 9th graders as they prepare to mentor that class with the Tel.A.Vision program, with the video editing program at the high school, and with a school counselor who helped them create an “Introduction to Big Lake High School” video. In addition, the student evaluators were invited to deliver a presentation about the evaluation project at both a national and a regional conference.



Leadership Core

The student evaluator team is determined to continue the kind of collaborative work and school leadership represented by the evaluation project. They are ready and eager to serve as a core leadership team that can have transformative impacts for themselves, new student participants, and the school climate as a whole. In order to realize this promise, the school will need to take ownership of and build on the momentum. At least one dedicated school staff member and a designated permanent “place” in the school structure are the logical next steps.

IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORTS & CONSTRAINTS

Supports

It would be difficult to imagine a more conducive school environment than Big Lake High School for implementing the Tel.A.Vision evaluation project. The administration was supportive, generous with the student time allocated to the project, and as flexible as possible when the need arose. Key staff remained involved and helpful throughout the year. Equipment

and technology was made available as needed. It was a privilege to work with Big Lake High School administration and staff as they lived out their commitment to students.

In addition to a supportive school environment, a great deal of the success of the project comes from the incredible group of motivated young people that made up the student evaluator team. During the second half of the year, the student team talked openly about their reservations when they first volunteered to participate on the evaluation team. However, as they became more involved, took more ownership, developed team unity, planned exciting solutions, saw their efforts coming together, etc, their motivation and commitment grew exponentially. They, too, were a privilege to work with.

Constraints

Our team was extremely fortunate to have the generous number of meeting opportunities that we did. However, it is important to understand before undertaking a student-led project that administrators, teachers, and students all have multiple demands on their time and it is a perennial challenge to create an additional work space such as that required by this evaluation project. Even with the generous time allotted, meeting time constraints required regular adjustment of the project goals and activities.

Without doubt, the most significant challenge for the project was establishing and maintaining effective communications with students between meetings, which also had an impact on student follow through for work not being done during our meetings. The lack of regular and direct contact with the student team is an issue that would be wise to address creatively for future projects of this nature, but is also one that would could easily be resolved if the work was led by a school staff member.

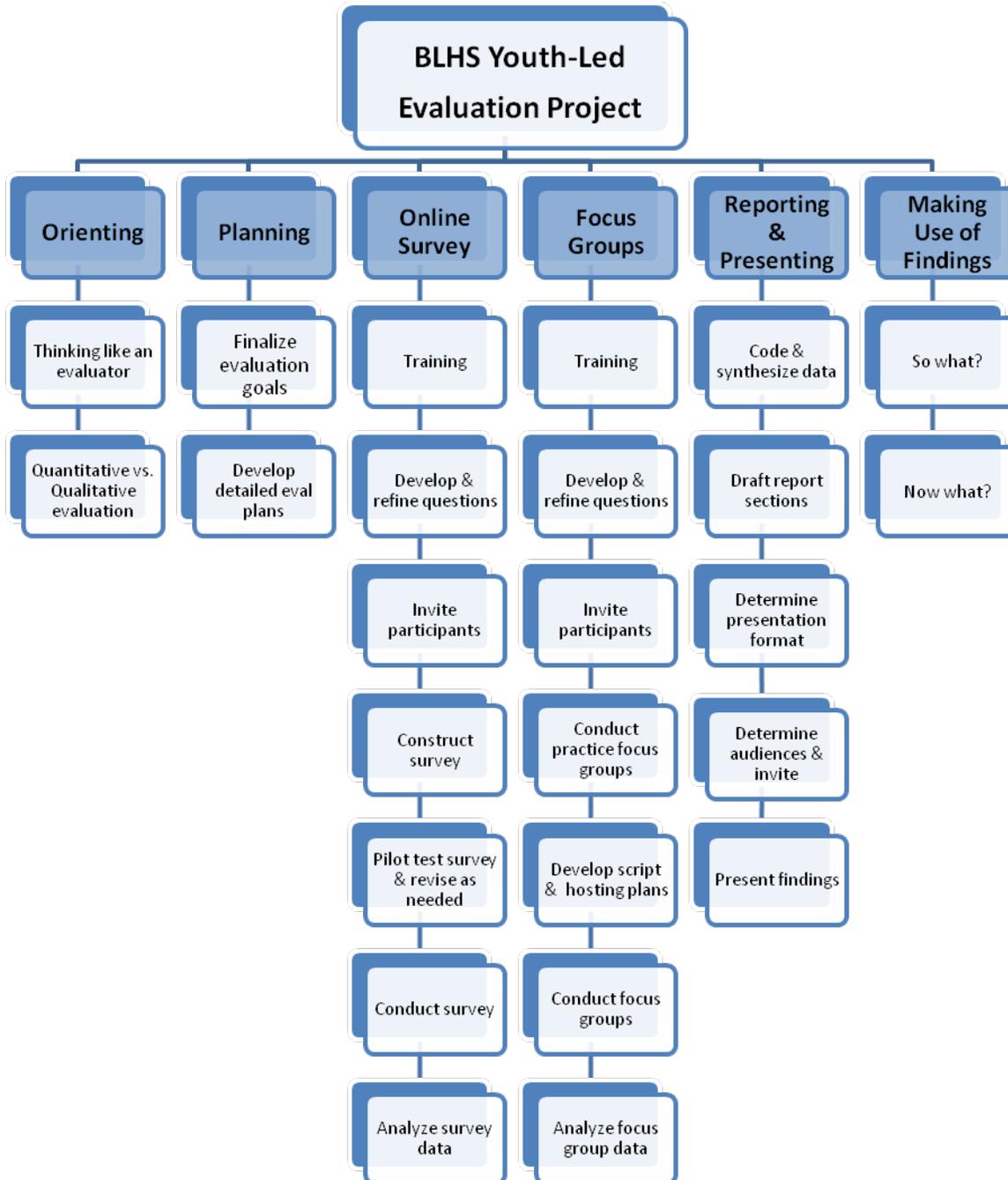
Additional constraints included scheduling conflicts with the school calendar and the inability to integrate evaluation assignments with class work.

SUMMARY

The Tel.A.Vision curriculum implementation at Big Lake High School was highly successful in achieving its objectives for the group of students who participated in the current evaluation. Students had some difficulty in finding value in the program initially, but developed a much stronger appreciation for the Tel.A.Vision process as they completed the videos and their appreciation of its benefits continued later in the year. Students noted that Tel.A.Vision did lead to better communication and friendship development among students and also helped teachers to have a better understanding of students. Although the group involved in the evaluation tended to be more academically advanced, it is anticipated that the suggested improvements to the website and the instructional process will yield similar results next year with the entire 9th grade class.

Two additional documents are being provided to Big Lake High School to assist in future implementation of both the Tel.A.Vision curriculum and the student engagement model. The *Tel.A.Vision Implementation Recommendations* provides more detail about internal process improvement recommendations and the *Student Evaluator Process* provides a detailed summary and discussion of the process that was followed so that it can be replicated and/or improved upon in the future for evaluation or other school initiatives.

APPENDIX 1: EVALUATION PROCESS MAP



APPENDIX 2: BENEFIT & RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY BIG LAKE HIGH SCHOOL TEL.A.VISION EVALUATION

Summary of Key Tel.A.Vision Benefits

- Increased self confidence
- Excitement about the future
- Motivation to succeed in life
- More serious view of school work
- Improved relationships with classmates and English teachers

- Special appreciation of the positive attention received from peers & teachers

Summary of Key Student Evaluator Benefits

- Understanding the value of gathering data to inform decisions
- Trust in their ability to manage a complex project
- New respect for, and trust in, school staff
- Motivation, confidence, and determination to continue to lead change processes in their school
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 - address problems
 - Form bonds
 - Break down barriers to relationships (e.g. use in future to break down barriers across cliques.)

Problematic outcomes areas

- Introduction to Tel.A.Vision and climate setting
- Teaching strategies for Tel.A.Vision
- Website limitations
- Low survey response rate

Recommendations to address problematic outcomes focus on

- Improving introduction to Tel.A.Vision
- Creating a motivating climate
- Providing better instruction
- Mentoring students during process
- Increasing survey response rate
- Creating better current and future opportunities to share and celebrate (for example: teachers creating their own Tel.A.Vision, students recreating Tel.A.Vision video during Senior year, etc.)

Status of recommendations

- Detailed recommendations are being communicated to Transition Committee, school administration, and Tel.A.Vision developer.
- Tel.A.Vision developer launching new website in July which will incorporate the feedback learned through our evaluation.
- Student evaluators are currently working with the Transition Committee to implement many the recommendations for creating a more receptive and motivating climate when Tel.A.Vision introduced and then taught in classrooms.
- Suggestions and requests regarding continuation of student work group next year are also being communicated to appropriate school staff.