**The Possible Dream: A Vision for Technology at Griffin Middle School**

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Jonathan Swift said it best: “Vision is the art of seeing the invisible.” Fortunately, after a great deal of study and research into technology integration in general, and at Griffin Middle School specifically, concrete ideas are beginning to emerge.

To develop a sound vision for technology at our school, it is important to reflect upon the school’s current vision plan and then weave technological innovation into the fabric of the existing plan:

Griffin Middle School is a diverse community committed to academic excellence, the development of character, positive social skills and responsibility. To achieve this vision we will: 1) use all resources to bridge the gap between school and our stakeholders and open our doors to parents, business partners, and the community, 2) commit to improving communication between all levels, and 3) provide opportunities for students to make appropriate choices, which guide them to future successes. (GMS Vision Statement)

What a perfect invitation for examining HOW technology can and should be used to enhance and increase student achievement, and WHY we should proceed. Creighton (2003) posits that “our strategic plans (and vision) must be linked to teaching, student achievement, staff development, parent involvement, teacher workloads, and instructional delivery” in order to avoid failure (p.29). In order to successfully integrate technology to a degree which will provide the greatest school-wide impact, we must foster the development of a technology culture at our school, further cultivate and encourage teachers’ constructivist approaches to best pedagogical practices in the classroom, and institute sound professional development to facilitate the building of an authentic, technology-infused, student-centered curriculum which will be meaningful for engaged, 21st century learners.

How does one go about developing a culture of technology in one’s school? Awareness, visibility, and access are the first steps. There are ample opportunities to see technology at work from mini-trainings at staff meetings, to how internal staff communicates, to what teachers are doing in the classroom. There could be newsletters with a “technology corner.” Technology teacher-leaders could be featured regularly in data team meetings or grade-level meetings. Students and teachers could collaborate and share technology training across subject disciplines. A technology bulletin board in teacher workrooms could inform teachers about what’s going on with the latest and greatest technology. Teachers who are comfortable with technology need to reach out to struggling teachers and share what they know. Only by constant “bombardment” will teachers finally acquiesce and begin to embrace new and innovative ideas.

The onslaught of the Common Core standards coupled with the threat of performance pay for teachers based on student achievement is on the educational horizon, breaking dawn. A colossal paradigm shift in the “norm” for teachers is well under way. The time is ripe for a re-VISION of the way teachers approach best practices in the classroom. Gone must be the days of using technology only for drill and practice. Gone must be the days of using technology simply as a reward for good students or a punishment for bad students. Technology is no longer the ugly step sister to a sound education. Rather technology, coupled with a rational, constructivist philosophy, has become the glass-slipper-perfect-fit for increased student achievement. According to Creighton (2003), “Teachers can use technology to engage students in more meaningful learning than is presently occurring…Technology can assist with conveying meaning to students, i.e., accompanied by interaction between learner and other people” (p. 49). Imagine a world in which every teacher embraces constructivist ideals like the following:

* Giving students choice and freedom in exploration of concepts and information, allowing them to take responsibility for themselves and their learning.
* Encouraging students to wrestle with their own interpretation of existing phenomena, moving beyond the usual mode of drill and practice and being provided with opportunities to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate.
* Inspiring students to make predictions or create their own interpretations of solutions to problems and using technology to get them there.
* Allowing student responses to drive instruction.
* Placing the onus on students to engage in questioning and exploration. (Creighton, 2003, p. 50)

Technology, properly applied can get us there! The marriage of constructivist philosophy and technology integration mixed with a comprehensive, interdisciplinary academic curriculum (as with the Common Core), will produce amazing results in increased student achievement. Because of today’s increasing attention to educational reform, teachers must readjust the way they teach in the classroom anyway. What a perfect time to adopt technological innovation as well.

Nothing is more important than ensuring that the curricula which teachers adopt contain authentic, collaborative, higher order, student-centered learning. The first in a series of ISTE’s (International Society for Technology in Education) Essential Conditions, student-centered learning is indispensable in ensuring student achievement. What does this involve? Teachers must relinquish the role of dictator in the classroom and trade out the teacher-focused classroom for the student-focused one. Teachers must embrace the role as a facilitator and guide, while encouraging students to explore, to teach one another, and to produce evidence of their own learning. Teachers must focus on enhancing the curriculum by embedding technology in ways that will deepen student understanding and increase complex, higher level thinking skills. This is not an overnight transformation. Teachers must graduate from a “drill and practice technology use” mentality, to a richer, more authentic use of technology to enhance the learning. The way to accomplish this vision is to create substantive professional development for teachers which will embolden the concept of technology-infused engaged learning. Technology cannot be the end all, be all. As Creighton posits, “technology by itself will not get us where we want to go. It must be driven by teachers and students using technology as a tool to perform at a higher level” (p. 102).

The British philosopher, James Allen, advised his readers to “dream lofty dreams”, and that the “Vision is the promise of what you shall one day be.” Teachers would do well to heed this advice as they move forward in their quest to integrate technological innovation into their classrooms. Developing a technology culture at the school level, implementing constructivist approaches to student-centered best practices, and encouraging meaningful professional development for teachers which will transform student achievement to unprecedented levels all contribute to a vision of what the 21st century classroom needs to be in order to cultivate college and career-minded students. This vision will not only change education, it will change lives.

References

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