The Two Most Important Competencies for Millennium Teachers

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THE CENTRAL IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDENT AND THE INTERNET

Of all of the levers for educational reform and improvement in this new technologically rich millennium, clearly the two most powerful are students, whose needs and talents should be at the center of any and all new K-16 reforms in teaching and learning, and the Internet, which will enable every student to touch and feel and know and master this new world. In the process, these two dynamos will become the teachers’ and schools’ most vital resources and energize the reinvention of schooling as we know it. Further, students will become better prepared to excel in our technology-centered society, and add dramatically to the nation’s already impressive pool of innovators and entrepreneurs.

MILLENNIUM STUDENTS

The “Generation YES” Program (www.genyes.org), spawned by the U.S. Department of Education’s Technology Innovation Challenge Grant Program, has clearly demonstrated that the nearly 50 million students in our schools are ready to become the nation’s most plentiful and critical resource for educational reform and improvement. One of the most common clichés in education is that “Our children are our most important resource.” But, we have done little during these days of technology-centered educational change to draw upon and grow their remarkable facility with these new technologies. Students in Generation YES schools have worked magic: they have helped teachers to learn and use the new technologies, become the primary source of technical support for the complex technology infrastructures in their schools, and become the most gifted trainers of both students and adults in before- and after-school programs. They have even become the most effective spokespersons to the community about the advantages of technology for increasing student motivation, attendance, achievement, and success. They have changed the culture of each of the schools in which they have been allowed to flourish. They have made schools places that students want to be in—and sometimes are even reticent to leave at the end of the day!

One of the most plaintive oxymorons heard almost every day from school leaders making excuses for not accelerating their efforts to integrate proven technologies into their management, instruction, and assessment is: “We just don’t have the technological know-how, or the technical resources needed to do much with technology at this time.” All the while, they are surrounded by some of the richest technology-savvy resources in the world: their students. Schools do not need to bring in outside experts to work with the 507 students (average U.S. school size) and 31 teachers (average U.S. teacher-to-school ratio) in their school, when they have 507 students who are already well on their way to becoming experts in how to use and fix a broad array of new technologies!

Learning to work with students as educational partners, especially in technology-rich curricula and instruction, will require the building of a whole new set of “millennium” teacher competencies. It will require a visionary, admiring, and appreciative perspective on the part of school boards, administrators, teachers, and parents toward their understanding of the almost unlimited potential of students to become equal team members. It is this kind of perspective that will enable students to help plan and effectively implement new technology-centered approaches to almost every aspect of schooling—at every level.
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