CURRICULUM 21

Essential Education for a Changing World

INTRODUCTION

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What year are you preparing your students for? 1973? 1995?

Can you honestly say that your school's curriculum and the program you use are preparing your students for 2015 or 2020? Are you even preparing them for today?

Johnny might not even know that his classroom experiences are not providing him the tools to enter a global economy that changes exponentially. Maria's gap in knowledge about the last 50 years of history is not helping her make sense of the contemporary world she lives in. Is your curriculum replacing older methodologies with new tools for communicating and sharing? Or is the use of technology an "event"? Are your students learning world languages that will be dominant and influential when they are adults? Or are you primarily, and painfully, focused on the next state test based on textbooks from the 1950s? It is no wonder that we are behind other nations in international comparisons of academic achievement when our school structures are fundamentally based on an antiquated system established in the late 1800s.

Myth #3—Too much creativity is dangerous—and the arts are frills. In his book *A Whole New Mind*, Daniel H. Pink (2006) contends that our collective futures will depend on the right-brained thinker:

> We are entering a new age. It is an age animated by a different form of thinking and a new approach to life—one that prizes aptitudes that I call "high concept" and "high touch." High concept involves the capacity to detect patterns and opportunities, to create artistic and emotional beauty, to craft a satisfying narrative, and to combine seemingly unrelated ideas into something new. High touch involves the ability to empathize with others, to understand the subtleties of human interaction, to find joy in one's self and to elicit it in others, and to stretch beyond the quotidian in pursuit of purpose and meaning. (p. 2)

Curriculum should not only focus on the tools necessary to develop reasoned and logical construction of new knowledge in our various fields of study, but also should aggressively cultivate a culture that nurtures creativity in all of our learners. This point seems particularly important as the institutions of school are so difficult to change; the fierce grip of the staid holds back learning and the lives of children. Out-of-the-box—or no-box—thinkers should be valued as we begin drafting creative designs for our curriculum and our schools.

In particular, the arts curriculum is still put on the back seat in our schools, and thus we leave many of our learners there as well. Ultimately, we all lose. An ambivalence and a resentment toward artists prevails as well unless they achieve exceptional monetary success. As Maxine Greene notes, "Artists are for disclosing the extraordinary in the ordinary" (Greene, 1989, p. 215). We need to go out of our way to encourage learners to take risks both in artistic expression and in the realm of creating ideas. That is what intellects do as well. An intellect is a creative thinker and an idea shaper, just as a sculptor throws clay on the table and experiments with forms and materials.

It is not only the children we need to cultivate, but also the responsible adults in our midst who have bold ideas and new directions to consider. In our work to improve education, we need to be bold advocates for creative ideas that are actionable, rational, and constructive.

Figure 2.1 | A 21st Century Pledge: A Curricular Commitment from Each Teacher

A Rationale: 21st century tools benefit learners by . . .

- Providing a visual and organizational tool that enables them to make meaning in "concrete" ways that they can also control with immediate access.
- Developing a different kind of "thinking tool" helps them develop their critical thinking in far more ways.
  - Enables them to make choices and selections more efficiently.
  - Stimulates visual reflection through a highly visual profile.
  - Develops their verbal expression in response to visual stimuli; they exhibit less hesitation when visual is first, in contrast to processing verbal/linguistic approaches (for specific groups of students).
- Increasing engagement because of immediate excitement, control, and interactivity.
- Allowing transfer of engagement and interaction into other aspects of the curriculum, especially when deliberately planned by the teacher.
- Increasing classroom teaching and learning time when intrusive routines can be minimized.
- Increasing the likelihood of completion of academic work during out-of-school time.

What the commitment is *not*:

- The limited and immediate use of a technological tool.
  - Using an LCD projector versus an overhead.
  - Using a computer versus a typewriter.
  - Using an interactive whiteboard versus an LCD projector.

What the commitment *is*:

- An integrated use of technology that enhances content.
- An application to a specific unit of study.
- Evidenced directly in student products and performances.

Each teacher commits to . . .

- Review all current available technological resources in the district.
  - Online resources: video streaming; Internet Web sites and subscriptions; WebQuest creation; Webcasting through laptop.
  - Hardware resources: videoconferencing; laptop labs; digital cameras; digital recording studio.
  - Creative software: Movie Maker; MediaPlayer; video clips via digital cameras.
- Identify at least one specific unit to revise.
- Plan to replace a specific content, skill, and assessment practice with a 21st century upgrade within the unit.
- Share the proposed change with colleagues.
- Learn to use the tool that will be requisite to replace the current unit design with the new practice.
- Revise the unit and begin implementation with students.
- Tolerate a certain degree of frustration.
- Celebrate the victories.
- Review and share 21st century learning openly with colleagues at targeted work sessions through the school year.

To provoke thoughtful reconsideration of these concepts, selected facts, and knowledge in an upgrading review cycle, fundamental questions need to be asked: *What is essential and timeless? What is not essential or dated? What should be created that is evident and necessary?* A knowledge-updating review process is daunting to maintain and cultivate in any field of study, yet it is the bedrock of learning. The ongoing process of challenging accepted knowledge and the cycle of replacing it are the signs of cultural maturation.

Tenets for Purposeful Debate Leading to Content Upgrades

Members of Curriculum 21 review or inquiry teams need to carefully consider each discipline or, if they choose, multiple disciplines in their curriculum maps from a K–12 perspective. In the Curriculum Mapping Review Model (Jacobs, 1997, 2004), school teams regularly review maps vertically or across grade levels to solve a problem and research potential places for revision, which may be focused on gap analysis, eliminating redundancies, or aligning with standards. In this case, the Curriculum 21 team reviews the content entries on maps specifically to address these tenets for upgrading:

- A global perspective is developed and presented in the content area, where natural and viable.
- A personal and local perspective is cultivated so that each student can create relevant links to the content.
- The whole child's academic, emotional, physical, and mental development is thoughtfully considered in content choices.
- The possibilities for future career and work options are developed with an eye to creative and imaginative directions.
- The disciplines are viewed dynamically and rigorously as growing and integrating in real-world practice.
- Technology and media are used to expand possible sources of content so that active as well as static materials are included.