

Y2K to Today...Let's Learn
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Y2K...then the next seventeen years (yes, that does seem incredible) raced by us filled with energy, bright ideas, new technology, grasping at traditions, all centered around so many impactful world and personal events. It was seventeen years ago that in public education, as well as business and government, the phrase 21st Century was attached to so many practices. K-12 education was immediately confronted with defining and building "21st Century Classrooms." Each of those new classrooms needed to be filled with "21st Century Learning"...and beyond. Each mission-like phrase was empowering, pushed educators across our nation and state to grow in new ways, and met the smart demands of our students. As we continue to embark on another successful school year, reflection on this journey should mark our investment.

Recently, I read an article that shared a frustrated tone, that after seventeen years, the working definition of a 21st Century Classroom and 21st Century Learning should by now be mature and well anchored. I certainly understood the author's intent for defining what "best practice" should look like...at the same time I would argue, 21st Century Instruction and Learning should never be asked to find a defined "landing spot." Instead, I would confidently hope our instructional practices and guided learning evolve and grow by each of the descriptors that opened this article's first sentence.

During the school year, it is a privilege for me to return to my teaching roots and visit the amazing classrooms in our district. Powerful teaching and learning is truly the guiding light, and I greatly enjoy the opportunity to share, compliment, and support our teachers and students in that daily exercise of building a future. While I have seen classroom instruction connect with students in new ways, I have also seen so many traditional practices of teaching excellence that ring true today as well. While I hope we never find that landing place for 21st Century Learning, I do believe there are some guideposts that mark an effective classroom in 2017.

To begin, the classroom should be a Collaborative Environment, i.e., students and teachers working in concert to find new ideas and integrate diverse views of thinking about the complexity of a literary passage or the equation that might help a small group solve a future sustainability issue. A second area is Technology Integration, i.e., more than calendars, to-do's, and e-mail...but rather a seamless tool to share, develop, design, and create with their classmates, teachers, and others who make up the powerful learning environment. Next, we should hope to see different forms of Reflective Writing. Reflective writing allows for students to reinforce their learning in long-lasting ways...and it helps breed a unique brand of creativity and personal expression...your ideas matter!

An *Inquiry Based* approach to learning is empowering. The opportunity for students to approach a new topic or challenge in the context of answering a question is a cornerstone in all best practice models of teaching and learning. *Engaged Assessment* is another key guidepost in today's classroom. Students perform better when they have a stronger connection to the material they are studying moreover, they need to understand what is expected of them and just how to demonstrate their mastery. The use of portfolios, rubrics, and formative assessments are examples of just a few resources for achieving this.

Lastly, and quite possibly the most important, is the teacher serving as the *Lead Learner*. The flexibility to impart key fundamentals and then deftly shift to a "side-by-side" guide with their students to support the inquiry model that needs to challenge and support a student's journey. The teacher as "Lead Learner" in the classroom is a model that will forever transcend a 21st Century calendar and the expectations of an era.

Wishing everyone an engagingly successful journey as the 2017-18 school year continues...filled with "21st Century Learning!"