

Inworth Union Free School District

Board of Education Meeting

January 20th, 2013**Social Media & Technology Proposal for Student Achievement**

The authors of Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform, David Tyack and Larry Cuban, recognize hardly anyone considers the invention of the blackboard to be a “highly successful innovation,” yet it was once “praised as a magical new technology of learning.” In 1841, the technological inventor of the blackboard was hailed as “among the best contributors to learning and science, if not among the greatest benefactors of mankind.” Educators are constantly seeking the Holy Grail to guide instruction, further enrichment, and ensure “no child is left behind” through the application of greater innovation for the purpose of achievement (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Most reform efforts during 20th century education were policy attempts designed to address a perception in dismal standards and policy changes through government intervention nationally (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Defining policies in this case are “guiding principles used to set direction in an organization;” the referenced organization being America’s educational system. In this proposal, I will recommend the district adopt a new policy aimed at improving student achievement for all learners through the application of social media and technology.

President Bush and Congress enacted the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2001; it is the most significant reform effort in modern education (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002). The implementation of NCLB drastically altered how school leaders

make decisions aimed at improving school reporting. Data collection policies have been designed to maximize accountability for educators aimed at using data analysis for student achievement. John Messelt, in his paper, *Data-Driven Decision Making: A Powerful Tool for School Improvement*, acknowledges that technology and data are used as powerful tools in developing school improvement policies and driving decisions not directly associated with assessment results. Additional applications of data analysis are understanding technology infrastructure needs and making “informed objective decisions and not costly subjective ones.” As timely and appropriate data analysis becomes increasingly more readily available, discerning school districts and leaders are applying “data-driven decision making techniques, not only to analyze test scores and student achievement but to increase communication and increase student achievement (Messelt, 2004).

The 2011 Horizon Report highlights the use of technology and its promise to offer reliable and valid data-driven digital portfolios towards redirecting instruction as emerging in education. A result of this emerging progression in analysis is evident in policies towards increased data-driven instruction and the use of learning analytics as reshaping formal education in continued efforts to *tinker towards utopia*. Emerging technologies in social media and the increased awareness of digital profiles will modify educational policy and its implementation as it has in the past.

Technological modernism has evolved parallel with social advancement all throughout history. Drawings found on the Lascaux Caves in southwestern France dated from the Paleolithic period as early civilizations migrated out of Africa northward represent some of the earliest forms of technology and communication used by humans.

Early Mesopotamia invented writing in the form of pictograms and eventually an alphabet as the agricultural revolution established larger human populations living in close proximity. The Roman Empire's enormous domination benefited from the invention of the codex and book to communicate. Books remained a principal form of record keeping and communication, for those privileged enough who could afford it, until Guttenberg invented the printing press, offering written language to commonalities and the less privileged. The centuries following mass printing, technological innovation generated the typewriter, electricity, and digital media such as the computer, which has become indispensable to a global society. With computer ubiquitous, the World Wide Web was established and afforded the opportunity for mostly anyone relatively anywhere to collect information and communicate with people they may never know (Kuehner & Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2008).

The development of technological innovation historically has driven information, knowledge, commerce, acquaintanceship, and awareness to various cultures and societies, warranted or unwarranted. Discoveries of new mass media and social media continue to offer groups of individual's conscious and unconscious resolve today just as they did in the earliest of civilizations. The bible conveyed a consistent written message to all people globally and power to those of wealth through possession of knowledge; radio carried "eyewitness" accounts of war in Europe and a common language to its listeners; television offered our first glimpses of walking on the moon and continues to influence our fashion, music, and social life; while computers and the Internet provide immediate intelligence to questions, communication, and the personal life needs of many simultaneously. Twenty-first century modern technology, inclusive of "hand-helds" and

mobile devices, has recently infiltrated mainstream education and continues to challenge the current academic dynamics at exponential opportunities. For educational institutions to best prepare for this systemic change to their core foundation of increased technological inclusiveness, they need to evaluate how they integrate change. This proposal will address system approaches and highlight the impact of technology on the functions of education in Postmodernism and the Information Age. I intend to help inform the way academia can prepare to better serve our students in a Web 2.0 environment of cooperation, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking.

Peter Senge is the author of The Fifth Discipline: The Arts & Practice of the Learning Organization. He is well known for his systems thinking of reducing the fad approach to management and seeks to influence long-term approaches to the learning organization primarily through dialogue. Senge explains “only by changing how we think can we change deeply embedded policies and practices.” These changes are within our sphere of influence, and albeit challenging, we must allow ourselves to learn them and cherish their opportunity to communicate with one another. A modern version of Senge’s principles is allowing ourselves to challenge, communicate, and influence our sphere through the TED (Technology, Education, and Design) Talks by their ability to have “ideas worth spreading.”

TED Talks are known globally as a resource of passion “in the power of ideas to change attitudes, lives and ultimately, the world.” These annual events are internationally known for their dynamic thinking of systemic change possibilities. A key leader in motivating change for educators is Michael Fullan. His Theory of Change states that “change is a process not an event!” Many of the presenters at TED Talks recognize these

“events” will not yield systemic forward thinking change as a result of their presentation, but offer a similar vision to that of Michael Fullan. An “engaged [dialogue] in advising policymakers and local leaders around the world in helping to achieve the moral purpose of all children learning.”

In February 2012, the American Education Research Association published a question and answers in their *Lead the Change Series* with Michael Fullan. Fullan reiterated what he said in his 2001 book, *Leading in a Culture of Change*, that for change to exist we need to “define our roles,” and examine “closely actual practice at the local system level.” As educators we need to examine how we are addressing the needs of our 21st century learners before we address the idea of closing the achievement gap and raising the bar. Addressing the needs of our learners requires whole system reform and ambitious goal setting. Fullan furthers that we need to “use resources strategically.” As technology has advanced so has the method we obtain information either for socialization, information acquisition, or sharing of ideas. Modern social media presents opportunities for schools to use these resources while addressing the needs of our 21st century learners therefore causing systemic change and reduced the gap in achievement by “initiation, implementation, continuation, and outcome.”

Systems change in a school, or any organization, cannot effectively be accomplished without the involvement of all levels integrated into the system. Edward Deming revitalized post world war II Japan using these principles. He understood that for systemic change to be effective, you need to use statistics to see find the errors. Recognizing those errors dictates a change the “first time and every time.” As a public school entity, we see the error and need for systemic reform and recognize that the

tinkering we have been doing for the last several decades since A Nation at Risk has not yielded the successes and growth we need to be competitive in a global economy.

The social dynamics of our fundamental structure have changed over the last century. We see more students living in diverse family environments, more technologies used for communication rather than face to face time, and students of the post-MTV generation seek information and knowledge in a rudimentary fashion with limited depth and contextual understanding. Much of these changes are the result of technology and increased social media infusion (Smithgall, 2010). Communication is easier than ever before, knowledge acquisition is instantaneous and technological growth is exponential.

To best facilitate these social changes Deming suggests we “create constancy of purpose towards improvement and replace short-term reaction with long-term planning,” through the adoption of a new philosophy. Social media is referred to as “blogs, wikis, social networking sites, social tagging, and microblogging. Jeffrey Treem and Paul Leonardi explore the use of social media in organizations. Although traditional communications like email and instant messaging are used for communication, they do not render the change in an organization that the previously mentioned social media forms do.

Blogs, or Weblogs, as they were originally referred to as, were intended to share digitally information you had with others on the Internet while allowing the audience the opportunity to additionally share information back with the host (Will Richardson, 2009). Richardson argues blogs exist for every topic imaginable and allow dialogue between two individuals seeking to share information solely for the benefit of knowledge. (My personal two children have their own blogs they maintain: Leigh is 7 and maintains

www.loungewithleigh.blogspot.com and Parker is 5 maintains

www.parkerbplace.blogspot.com both sites are to communicate with family and friends about their life and experiences). Richardson further elaborates what truly makes a blog distinguished from a more traditional website, is the ability for conversation, reflection, dialogue, and sharing of ideas to exist. According to

<http://www.ebizmba.com/articles/blogs> the most visited blog in 2012 is the Huffington Post with 54,000,000 estimated unique monthly visitors. With that forum for traffic the communication and sharing of ideas is enormous. As a result, the Huffington Post establishes itself as a pivotal resource for information and knowledge. The district proposal will allow increased opportunities for traffic and social media sharing of ideas.

Wikis are derived from the creator of Wikipedia, the online collaborative encyclopedia. The founder of Wikipedia, Jimmy Wales, said “Imagine a world in which every single person on the planet is given free access to the sum of all human knowledge” (Hough, 2012). Through wikis, Wales is attempting to make that imagination a reality. Many schools do not allow direct access to Wikipedia because the understanding that the development of the information on there may not be factual. Social media is designed to foster collaboration and communication through critical thinking (Treen & Leonardi, 2012). As we encourage our 21st century learners to develop information acquisition through social media, we need to consider how we provide for and support them.

Most significantly during the last decade we have seen an increase in social networking sites such as the quintessential Facebook. Facebook has made such a mark as the leader of social networking it often referred as the 3rd largest “country” in the world with well over 800 million members. As social networking expands into all avenues of

life, personal, commerce, government; it is essential as educators we prepare our students for it and learn to embrace it for integration and systemic change.

Social media is defined “as a new class of technologies that may alter organizational dynamics in profound ways” (Treen, et al., 2012). It consists of technology that permits communication in multidimensional approaches as opposed to traditional one to one direct dialogue. It is collaborative and communicative. As a result of social media, information acquisition is available twenty-four seven in our world today (Rasmussen, Nichols, & Ferguson, 2006). Using technology to acquire information should not be considered “a deterrent to the educational process. We grapple with the notion that technology [and information] is just as much a product of social inequality as a conduit through which we can address such an issue” (Akintude, 2006). This notion stems from the need for educational reform to reduce the gap between those who have and those who do not have (Mednick, 1999). More so in the twenty-first century than ever before in history do corporations, governments, and individuals exist in a flattened global society (Friedman, 2005). According to a survey conducted by a global consulting firm, the integration of Web 2.0 technologies exists within 65% of organizations. (Treen, et al., 2012). Flattening of the globe requires us to contend that the world has gotten smaller and possibly and too fast for human beings and their systems to adjust in a stable manner (Friedman, 2005). Policy changes and attempts at technological adaptation are essential for twenty-first century learners. This young generation maturing with computers and the Internet are often referred to as digital natives (Biladeau, 2009).

As digital natives and institutions revolutionize to twenty-first century education, the foundational inclusion of social media and technology is essential. The

immersion and integration of technology in pedagogy has motivated many educational institutions to require technology courses for graduation or certification (Gaudelli, 2006).

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) has 65 references to technology in their standards that are designed to address technology inclusion and infusion in P-12 curricula (Gaudelli, 2006). Society and schools have essentially become dependent upon technology for maintaining, facilitating, and communicating their function of educating. Examples include, payroll development, heating and cooling maintenance, security surveillance, transportation communication, data collection, attendance keeping, substitute calling, assessment analysis, family/emergency contact, and curriculum development.

The attached proposal is for the district to adopt a new philosophy towards social media to improve our communication, address the needs of our learners, and reduce the achievement gap. The proposal will outline the tasks to transform the organization, structure, strategies, communication, decision making and general effectiveness of the organization using social media.

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