Technology made all the Difference . . . for all Students at Oxford Elementary

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When I was named principal at Oxford Elementary School, a 2nd-3rd grade school with an enrollment of 587 students, I faced several unique challenges. In the process of recommending personnel and determining the needs of the school, I had a conversation with a member of the community. He introduced himself and informed me that he and his wife were very fortunate and had the resources and the desire to assist our school in outfitting several of our classrooms with interactive white boards. After several conversations with our benefactor, he decided to donate enough funds to install interactive white boards in the remaining 13 classrooms. I vividly remember our last conversation in which he stated that people give millions of dollars to colleges/universities and it is a totally foreign concept to give to public P-12 schools. He indicated that it was his hope that his donation would serve as a tipping point for others.

As we began the school year all of our 3rd grade classrooms were outfitted with interactive white boards. I was nervous on multiple fronts. First, I was a brand new principal and wanted everything to be perfect and second, I had just recommended to our board they accept a significant donation for the integration of technology. During my visits to the classroom
I noticed that students who normally would not raise their hand and go to the board were doing so I found the students actively engaged in the learning process.

My tipping point occurred when a teacher requested that I stop by her classroom. When I arrived I found a level of excitement in the room that appeared to be contagious. She walked me through her lesson on the muscular system in which the interactive white board was incorporated. This classroom was a full inclusion classroom with a Down’s syndrome student named Jessica. When the teacher asked the question Jessica stood up, tapped her chest, and yelled “cardiac.” This was the moment I realized that the interactive white boards allowed our 3rd grade teachers to fully engage our students in learning. I realized how important it was to find a way to fully integrate interactive white boards in all classrooms.

I immediately returned to my office and contacted the P.T.A. president and asked if they would be willing to purchase several interactive white boards. They agreed to purchase one board. A week later, I was speaking with our Director of Federal Programs and she informed me that I needed to begin spending the allocated funds. We requested an amendment that moved money from supplies to equipment within our Federal Programs budget and were granted the request and then purchased eight more interactive white boards. The purchase and installation of nine more interactive boards allowed Oxford Elementary to integrate this technology in all 2nd and 3rd grade classrooms. The possibilities for engagement became endless.

We now have full integration of interactive white boards in all of our 2nd and 3rd grade classrooms. What I saw was simply amazing; a new level of excitement in both the students and teachers. Several weeks after the remainder of 2nd grade teachers received their interactive white boards I asked, during a faculty meeting, if there were needs for more boards. Our remedial reading teacher, music teacher, and computer lab teacher all requested this technology. Ironically, our P.T.A. board met the next week and allocated enough funds to purchase three more boards. This allowed us to place 25 interactive white boards in our classrooms during the 2010-2011 school year. No amount of technology integration will ever take the place of quality classroom instruction, but it is certainly a great tool for engagement.

Every time I visited a classroom I always thought about Jessica and cardiac muscle. After careful thought and consideration I made the decision to enhance our inclusive education. I then began visiting with the teachers who would be teaching within the inclusion classrooms to determine their needs. One central theme common in all conversations was the integration of technology. Beginning with the 2011-2012 our inclusion classrooms will be integrated with technology as good as, if not better, than most other classrooms. Every classroom at Oxford Elementary will have an interactive white board and a document camera. Our inclusion classrooms will be integrated with an interactive white board, document camera, four tablets, and they will share an interactive table and a set of student response systems. We will also ensure that they have site licenses for reading, writing, language, and mathematics software that will integrate with the interactive white board. Will this integration of technology allow us to move as Collins wrote, “From good to great?” The technology by itself will not, but it gives our teachers the most modern tools to actively engage and captivate all students in the learning process.
Jessica reminded me why I chose education as a profession; she reminded me that I chose to serve and to ensure that every student in the school has equal access to a quality education. We owe every student our very best and the integration of technology at Oxford Elementary School will allow our teachers to actively engage and captivate all students in the learning process. After reviewing the 2010-2011 MCT2 scores it appears that the integration of technology impacted instruction. Our test scores increased by eight percent during the school year and we attribute some of this gain to the integration of technology.

References