An Unknown Future

In preparing this issue of Principal, which focuses on 21st century learning, we sought to answer one overarching question: What do schools need to teach students to prepare them to live and work in a world that we can’t fully envision? We quickly realized that it’s not a matter of what students need to learn, but how they need to learn.

For example, learning in the 21st century isn’t about memorizing concepts from a science textbook, but instead requires a deeper understanding of the process of coming to a desired solution and how these processes can be applied in other contexts.

If you discover only one thing in this issue (although there are dozens of takeaways), it is this: For your students to succeed in the unimaginable future, they must be able to adapt to change, be flexible in their pursuits, and be critical thinkers. Charles Darwin is quoted as saying, “It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the most responsive to change.” With regard to 21st century learning, Darwin’s words are right on target.

The opening theme article by Bernie Trilling explains the significance of inquiry and collaborative learning methods to the process of teaching children how to learn. “Inquiry- and design-based projects rooted in driving questions and real world problems can be the key to unlocking increased student motivation and engagement, deeper understanding and effective use of knowledge, and the mastery of 21st century skills,” Trilling writes.

Tami Benham Deal, Laurence O. Deal, and Nancy Hudson further explore the particular skill sets students should be learning for optimal future success and detail how those skills can be applied in the classroom.

And although it goes without saying that technology will continue to be a significant factor in shaping—or even defining—the future, a fluency in computer skills alone isn’t going to cut it. As Yong Zhao explains, schools should be prepared to teach students the lessons that emerge from the virtual world so that they can be successful in the global world.

In addition to these informative theme articles, included in this issue is a special insert that focuses on the professional development opportunities available to you at NAESP’s 2010 Convention and Exposition in Houston. Find the insert between pages 28 and 29, then pull it out and present it to your superintendent to show him or her the benefits of attending the largest professional development conference designed specifically for K-8 principals and assistant principals. We look forward to seeing you in Houston!

Share your thoughts about this edition of Principal by sending us an e-mail at publications@naesp.org.
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