

Monday, September 24, 2012

**Answering the Learning Challenge**

***Creating the Driving Question***

Dr. Matthews, superintendent of Novi Schools, came to our room the second week of school to challenge our students to make their learning transparent to the community. What an amazing entry event to what will become a yearlong **Project-Based Learning (PBL)** Unit for our students!

Our 4th grade students developed their first driving question as a class. A driving question is basically the thesis of a project. In the past, my students were quick to revise my driving questions for other PBL units, but for the first time, they found it within themselves to find the words that would give them purpose in their learning and using 21st century skills. Their driving question in response to Dr. Matthews' challenge is...

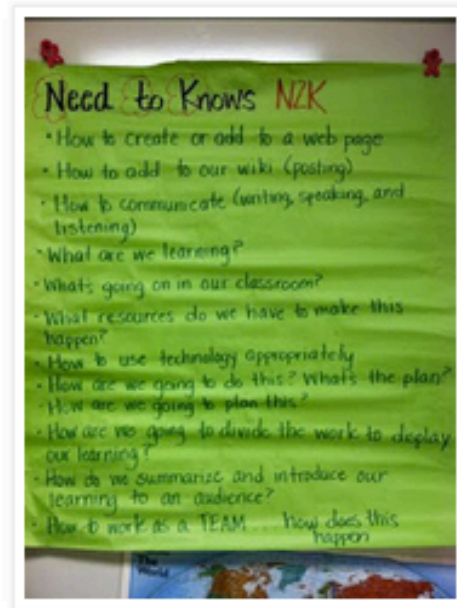
How can we as students communicate our 21st century skills to Dr. Matthews, our parents, and our community leaders?



Click to see and hear rough footage of Dr. Matthews' Learning Challenge with the students.

### *What do we need to know?*

The students in our class looked at that driving question and asked themselves "What do we need to know to answer it?" Here is what they answered...



We need to know...

- **how to create a web page.**
- **how to add to our wiki (by posting).**
- **how to communicate (writing, speaking, and listening).**
- **what we are learning.**
- **what is going on in our classroom.**
- **what resources we have to make this happen.**
- **how to use technology appropriately.**
- **how are we actually going to do this. What's the plan?**
- **how are we going to plan this?**
- **if we are going to divide the work and if so, how.**
- **how we are going to summarize and introduce our learning to an audience.**

As I read the above list over and over again, all I could say was "out of the mouths of babes" or in this case, 9-and-10 year old children. Without the fancy jargon, they summarized our district curriculum plans and then some. From the Leader in Me to technology integrated instruction to clear outcomes of learning, those 4th grade students pretty much stated "This is what we need to know, Mrs. Lee, to be the 21st century skilled learners we are challenged to be".

### ***Making it happen: The First Steps***

These past three weeks resembled previous years. We focused on establishing a culture of excellence and developing the routines of classroom life. Creating the reading life in reading workshop was a must. Similarly, decorating the writers' notebooks and nurturing the writing workshop model was a necessity. This next week will be setting the norms of math workshop. Routines and rituals....except, this year we need to answer a specific question, our driving question. So we started.

### ***We need to know how to use technology appropriately.***

In Social Studies, we spent time learning about Digital Citizenship using materials from Edmodo and **Common Sense Media** (which is also a great resource for parents too). Using Edmodo as a primary platform this year, we discussed appropriate language and etiquette of an online learning community.

### ***We need to know what we are learning.***

This will be a skill that we'll forever be working on. That is the whole idea of being a reflective learner and the idea of metacognition, thinking about our thinking. Self-reflection through discussions and journal writing help the students gain ownership over their learning. As a teacher, Novi's Atlas Rubicon gives me direction to what my students need to be learning and the Essential Questions for understanding. Assessments during (formative) and at the end (summative) of each unit will also give my students and me the answer to "Did they understand what they were supposed to?"

***We need to know how we are going to do this. What is the plan?***

Each student had to respond in writing to this question specifically. Many responses integrated what I had taught them already -skills in using a wiki, Edmodo, skyping, Google Docs, webpages, and digital documentation (through digital stories or audio recordings). What I realized that this step would need my guidance. I still needed to be their coach and mentor. So, knowing what resources and expertise I had and readily available, I proposed four project teams to get us started in answering the driving question. The project teams and the project managers for each team are...

- **Community Outreach** - Delaney, Abhinav, and Mark
- **Classroom Superstars**-Miles, Arun, and Tristan
- **Animoto Projects**-Gaby and Alaina
- **Weekly-Review Blog**-Sydney and Yiou



Our Project Managers

Each project manager will meet with me to develop questions and the projects for their groups. As we begin this journey, the rest of the "Need to Knows" will be addressed and answered. Through a blended/flipped learning environment where we use Edmodo, skype, and other technology tools, we'll be on our way to answering the driving question, "How can we as students communicate our 21st century skills to Dr. Matthews, our parents, and our community leaders?"