Chapter X
Leading the Art of the Conference:
Revolutionizing Schooling through Interactive Videoconferencing

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the role of leadership in interactive videoconferencing. Interactive videoconferencing provides the opportunity for schools to bring content-area experts from anywhere in the world into the classroom to engage students in real-time learning. The effective integration of interactive videoconferencing into classroom practice requires leadership. This leadership is rooted in a belief in providing world-class, student-centered learning through interactive videoconferencing. It is a vision that is results-driven in terms of measuring student learning, and realized through instructional leadership that is committed to collaboration, professional development, appropriate technical support and infrastructure, and the use of research to support practice.

INTRODUCTION

Under-challenged students and over-challenged staff can render both American and global school organizations aspirants for minimal standards. The bar set for most standardized testing scenarios is a narrow level of competency, whether it is in mathematics, science, history, or language literacy (Rothstein, Jacobsen, & Wilder, 2006). It is, therefore, no surprise that if school organizations strive for mediocrity, they fall short of the mark for many or at least some of their students.

Advancing curriculum, enriching content, and accelerating learning are viable outcomes through the appropriate use of technology, interactive videoconferencing in particular, in the classroom.

Broadening what is learned with measurements, rather than narrowing what is learned to meet immediate objectives, is the more appropriate vision for schooling. Engaging students in content is a key element in approaching the realization of such a vision. Engaging the learner, in light of technology advancements, should not be confined to the four walls of the classroom.

Real-life, content-area experts in all fields of endeavor practice their craft daily and are seldom sought by schools. In the near and certainly distant past, it would not have been feasible, practical, or possible to bring experts from distant locations into classrooms with any regularity. Both the technology and models for instructional delivery, however, now exist to bring content-area experts into the classroom, in order to engage students in real-time learning.

Organizations do not advance based on what exists but rather on its application. It is a fact that students can engage in real-time learning, through interactive videoconferencing, because the technology and models for instruction now exist; yet this fact remains a concept until it is practically applied. Introducing and sustaining any new application within an organization is a function of leadership.

Advancing the goals of any organization requires leadership and often requires change. Effective change within an organization requires leadership that is capable of building consensus and/or managing conflict (Heifitz, 1994). Introducing, supporting, and sustaining a learner-centered culture (Senge, 1990) in schools must include a responsibility to explore non-traditional methods of content delivery. The concept of imbedding learner-centered, content-delivered technology can be bottom-up or top-down (Senge, 1990), but ultimately requires the formal leadership of the organization in order to be effective.

Leading the art of interactive videoconferencing emanates from a passionate belief in a vision for world-class, student-centered learning. It is a vision that is results-driven in terms of measuring student learning and realized through collaboration, professional development, technical support and infrastructure, and a commitment to research to support practice. It is a vision that has evidenced success in theory, practice, and outcomes.

Leading the art of interactive videoconferencing is a function of instructional leadership, (i.e., the principal). Instructional leadership is central to the successful integration of technology into a school's curriculum (Granger, Morbey, Lotherington, Owston, & Wideman, 2002; Staples, Pugach, & Himes, 2005; Wetzel, Zambo, Buss, & Padgett, 2001). To ensure that a tool such as interactive videoconferencing is not merely an "add-on", the principal must take on the role of leading faculty and staff in a collaboration that focuses on integrating technology-delivered curriculum. It is also the role of the principal to provide professional development opportunities and support so that teachers can develop their capacity for leadership and collaboration as well. Staples et al. (2005) identified teacher leadership as a vital component of successful technology integration into a school. Teachers acquire an understanding of the use of technology that surpasses that of principals because they apply it in their classroom practice. Collaborative leadership can support and sustain the use of technology in education long after its introduction.

The interactive videoconference is a powerful learning and teaching tool. It is a lesson that is the culmination of a series of planning activities. The interactive videoconference is a lesson, facilitated by a teacher, which engages learners with a content-area expert from a distant location via a technological connection between the two organizations. It is visible and audible to all parties via a monitor or screen or projection device. The content-area educator may provide a demonstration or present artifacts or documents as a part of the lesson. Through preplanning, learners physically may have items in their home environment which are germane to the lesson. Museums are natural partners for schools since,

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