2017-Vision of Education

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 TEAM, Inc. (2006) was created in 1965 “to connect individuals and families with solutions that lead to well-being, self-sufficiency and full participation in the community” (para 1). The non-profit program is located in the lower Naugatuck and Housatonic Valley in Connecticut. One can agree that TEAM, Inc. is successful at serving about 260 children and families in early education because the organization strives to excel in education as well as support families. The program is consistently funded through Head Start, which Lee (2011) stated that “children who attended Head Start had better outcomes in reading and math and had fewer socio-emotional behavioral problems than those who did not attend the program” (p. 699). TEAM, Inc. believes parents are the most influential people in a child’s life and, therefore, work in collaboration with them to be supportive as well as providing educational resources.

 Over time, TEAM, Inc. has expanded its educational program into towns spreading across the lower Naugatuck and Housatonic Valley. Since 2010, TEAM, Inc. has added NAEYC accredited classrooms in Shelton, Milford, and Seymour in addition to those already in Ansonia and Derby. The organization provides teachers with ways to strengthen their own educational background, such as offering professional development and tuition reimbursement towards classes for an education related degree. TEAM, Inc. is successful in serving the clients, the families, because the program’s mission is to create a partnership with families. The Parent Policy Council makes decisions that impact the program, such as deciding on what special activities will be implemented into the program for the students. Also, the program offers families parent workshops and financial assistance services, such as Care4Kids.

 The teaching methods present in the program include educating the whole child. Teachers believe children learn best through hands-on activities and, therefore, provide many educational opportunities for children to work together and learn from their experiences. Technology has been integrated into the curriculum because it has been shown to be beneficial to students. As stated by Li, Atkins, & Stanton (2006) “computer proficiency is increasingly important for school success” (p. 260). Each week teachers provide students with a type of computer technology that enhances the curriculum being taught. Also, a computer program has been implemented to provide students with the opportunity to play and learn on laptops and Apple iPads. TEAM, Inc. believes in providing technological experiences and opportunities to young children to stay current with trends and advances in technology.

 In 2017, TEAM, Inc. will use game-based learning by providing students with tablets. Johnson, Adams, & Cummins (2012) stated that "a swipe, a tap, or a pinch allows the user to interact with the device in completely new ways that are so intuitive and simple they require no manuals or instructions" (p.14). This helps to show how easy it is for especially preschoolers to use tablet technology. It is important for teachers to integrate computer programs into the curriculum because as Collins & Halverson (2010) state “video games and simulations provide excellent sources of how performance-based assessments can be integrated into learning environments” (p.20). Also, this technology is appropriate to use in the classroom because Collins & Halverson (2010) also state that “computer environments can adapt to the level of the student’s ability and the kinds of individualized learning environments that allow students to succeed” (p.25).

 Teachers use analytics by using an online program where they input observations on all subject areas for each student in the classroom. Individual progress reports are created based on observations and assessments inputted into the program, which are shared with parents during conferences. This technology is appropriate to use because teachers gather a large amount of data over time on each child and create reports showing the progress of the child to share with each family. Administrators also use the data from these reports to discuss what materials and professional development is required to better meet children’s individual needs. Through the online program, teachers and educational managers implement and produce high quality education. TEAM, Inc. needs to consistently look towards implementing new components of the online program to stay current with educational trends.

 A concept related to the future of education is futuring. Futuring is the process of thinking of alternate methods of accomplishing a goal or task to obtain a more beneficial outcome. Futuring is an important exercise for the field of education because it causes one to think how it can be changed and improved over time. Education is always evolving and it is important to ensure that the education being implemented is up to date with the current trends, such as implementing new technology. Facer & Sandford (2010) state “education is a future-facing activity” (p. 74). Futuring allows staff and administrators the opportunity to reflect on aspects of the program and decide if there is an alternative way to do something that can provide better results.

 In addition to futuring, scanning is the process of searching for literature that connects one’s ideas and opinions on a given topic. Also, when futuring, one develops a scenario, which is when one brainstorms what an outcome will look like in the future. As stated by Mietzner and Reger (2005), "scenario planning can be regarded as a tool for improving decision making against a background of possible future environments" (p. 224). One scenario to explore is the impact new technology will have on education in the classroom. It has become increasingly important to provide students with technology to stay up to date with new innovative ways to learn. When students use new technology, it allows students to learn much quicker because feedback on performance is immediate and children are able to work collaboratively, such as through computer games and interactive whiteboards. There will be some challenges education may face in doing this, however, there will be many positive outcomes/opportunities.

 Becta (2008) states “increased parental encouragement of their primary age children’s educational uses of computers in the home” and “demand for increasingly technological skills in the workplace” as new trends (p. 3). The public policy trends that are important to the future of education are stated by The National Institute of Early Education Research (2011) as strengthening “program quality” and “improving staff qualifications” (p. 12). In addition, Straayer (2004) stated “creating a voucher system for higher education” is a budgetary trend that can have an impact on education (p. 27). All of these trends correlate with the way technology can have a positive influence on education.

 When families are involved in a child’s education, it has a positive impact on a student’s learning. Students who are given tools to succeed have a higher chance to excel in a learning environment. Lauman (2000) stated “students who have a computer at home may have the advantage of bringing skills to the learning situation that will set them apart from others who are less fortunate” (p. 198). In addition, Lauman (2000) stated “many students who have expressed that they use a computer at home demonstrate an increased level of comfort and tenacity when using the computers at school” (p. 200). When a parent exhibits a positive attitude to use technology, it has a positive impact on a child’s knowledge of the technology. If parents see the value in technology, they will be more inclined to support and utilize technology that is implemented in their child’s school, such as a program’s website. Computers are pertinent to TEAM, Inc. because they allow students to learn quicker. By 2017, children will be provided with more immediate feedback regarding their performance. Technology will also provide students with more opportunities to work collaboratively with fellow classmates.

 By 2017, companies will expect employees to know how to utilize new technology. By providing staff with the skills to utilize new technology, the teaching staff will have a positive outlook because they will feel confident they know how to use it. If a program spends money to purchase new technology, the staff needs to have a positive attitude towards it to ensure the technology will be utilized and become beneficial to the program. Some technologies that require professional development include using online curriculum. Teachers need to be trained to use the web based curriculum first to utilize it efficiently.

 In addition, by 2017, the level of education that is expected for a teacher to have attained will also have progressed. As stated by Betts, Hartman, & Oxholm (2009) “the demand for higher education degrees by employers is greater today than ever” (p. 11). This idea directly relates to TEAM, Inc. and Connecticut preschools because the National Institute for Early Educational Research (2011) has stated “more state pre-K programs now require lead teachers to have a bachelor’s degree, increasing from 48 percent to 57 percent” (p. 12). This fact ties in with technology because one can more easily pursue a degree through enrolling in an online course. Instead of having to travel to a university, the school is available anytime and anywhere through the internet. The school does not have to be located within driving distance. Therefore, teachers are more likely to complete a degree because of the convenience.

 As a teacher gains professional education, the quality of education that is delivered is more likely to improve, which directly impacts students and families. Students will benefit from a higher-quality education and families will have the opportunity to collaborate with the teachers and, therefore, learn methods to help meet their child’s individual needs. TEAM, Inc. will work towards having all head teachers earn a higher degree, such as a bachelor’s. A budgetary trend related to earning a higher degree is stated by Straayer (2004) as “a visionary new way to increase the higher education enrollment” is through “creating a voucher system” (p. 27). A student can choose the school they would like to attend and instead of directly receiving a loan, the state allocates money and pays the school for the student’s class and, therefore, more teachers may be able to earn a degree.

 Ross-Gordon (2011) state “distance learning, accelerated course formats, and prior learning assessment- were previously uncommon in mainstream institutions or departments, but are increasingly commonplace today” (p. 27). This trend is important to the future of education because more adults can earn a degree by attending school online. Schools that offer online education create an easier way for an adult who is trying to balance work and possibly family progress with their education. Ross-Gordon (2011) also states that “the decision to offer distance education courses or programs was meeting student demand for flexible schedules” (p. 27). The percentage of adults earning a degree has risen due to colleges offering more online degree programs.

 TEAM, Inc. will have to envision ways to improve education to ensure technology is implemented to stay current with educational trends. As stated by Cunningham (2010), “significant relationships exist between global preschool quality and children’s development” (p. 502). It is important to continually analyze and assess components of the preschool program to ensure that high quality education is being provided. The National Institute of Early Education Research (2011) stated “every state should monitor and evaluate the performance of its pre-K program as part of a continuous improvement process. The cost of this proposal is minimal, but it is key to obtaining a high return from an effective program” (p. 13). To stay current and improve educational trends, an educational institution needs to implement technology. This technology includes tablets, laptops, and webcams and will benefit TEAM, Inc. because students, teachers, and parents will utilize this technology.

 The technology foreseen in the classroom by 2017 is for each staff member to have a tablet. This technology will provide opportunities for both administrators and teachers to ensure high-quality education is being provided. Teachers will utilize this technology to input observations for each student, write lesson plans, communicate with families through e-mail and Skype, participate in webinars to further their education, maintain student records, and communicate with administrators through e-mail to learn about upcoming events. Administrators will use the technology to collect data through an online curriculum program regarding each classroom and each student. The second addition TEAM, Inc. will have by 2017 is each classroom will receive two tablets for students to use. Students will have the opportunity to read on a tablet from downloadable books and also learn through apps teachers download. The third technology TEAM, Inc. will have by 2017 is webcams in each classroom to provide parents with the opportunity to log on the program’s website to see their child. The fourth opportunity technology will provide TEAM, Inc. is the ability to save money by reducing the amount of paper the program has to purchase because memos, attendance logs, and child information can be inputted on the tablets. The fifth opportunity technology will present to TEAM, Inc. by 2017 is SMART Boards. Whitby, Leininger, and Grillo (2012) stated teachers can use “the interactive whiteboard (IWB) as a means to increase participation in academic engagement for all students” (p. 50). On a whiteboard, students will have the opportunity to be actively engaged in hands-on learning. Whitby et al. (2012) also stated it “increases students’ active involvement in the construction of knowledge and participation” (p. 53).

 Although there are many positive reasons why one should implement more technology into the classroom, there are reasons why including this technology may be challenging. Schools may not be able to afford adding tablets and webcams because it is costly. Daugherty, Klenke, and Neden (2008) state “sticker shock for the physical renovations and the anticipated expense of purchasing new equipment every few years as technology evolves can cause school administrators to reconsider investing in the project” (p. 23). Therefore, when purchasing the new technology, one will have to look towards applying for a grant as well as ensuring that the technology purchased will be able to be utilized for many years to come for its intended purpose. Also, Hillman & Marshall (2009) state “there is a perceived threat that these media will replace more traditional types of learning such as reading, drawing, painting, manipulatives, role play, word or board games, or outdoor play” (p. 260). Teachers will be provided professional development to ensure technology is used to enhance curriculum instead of replacing it. In addition, Becta (2008) states “disadvantaged pupils may be left behind, and yet they are often the very learners most in need of continuity”, which is another challenge presented to those children who do not have the opportunity of having a computer to use at home (p. 20). Also, Becta (2008) states “mass adoption of new technologies tends to be uneven across the system, and there is a tendency for many teachers, often unwittingly or due to other pressures, to merely recreate old pedagogies with new tools, which can be a missed opportunity” (p. 21). Lastly, Becta (2008) states “there is a clear risk that, if unsupported, practitioners will be unable to meet the digital needs and expectations of learners” (p. 23). Teachers will have to be continually trained in how to use technology in the classroom to ensure students are receiving high-quality instruction while using technology.

 If the program does not transform into a future oriented education organization using technology, then the preschool program will not be providing children with up to date methods of teaching. For example Yates (2008) stated there is a “25% increase in the number of students identified as having a disability" (p.8). This trend is important to the future of education because as more students are provided with services to meet their individual needs, the more teachers can become aware of what accommodations they can make within the classroom to create a successful learning environment for each child. The integration of technology can become very influential in achieving this because providing hands-on computer programs, such as on apps on tablets, can allow children with specific disabilities to show the teacher they are learning specific objectives by using the educational programs. For example, if a child is unable to verbally express the answer to a question, the child can show he/she understands by using an educational app on a tablet to communicate what the answer is. As stated by Smedley & Higgins (2005) “computer innovations such as enlarged text, spell checking, and text-to-speech are examples of accommodations that are helpful for students with disabilities.” (p. 114). Therefore, utilizing technology can provide learning opportunities for students with special needs.

 If technology is not used in the classroom, students and staff will be a step behind other organizations that implement up to date technologies. Technology can enhance a program’s curriculum, method of communication via webcams, and provide collaborative learning opportunities for students. If the program does not strive to implement technology, the program will be failing to ensure the highest quality of education is being provided.

 Five ways TEAM, Inc. should prepare for these changes is to apply for grants to receive money to purchase the new technology, teaching staff and administrators to work as a team to implement the new technology, provide professional development workshops to train the teachers how to use and implement the new technology into the classroom, offer parent workshops to inform parents about the new technology that will be used in the classroom as well as how they can use the technology, such as through classroom webcam videos online, and meet with teachers every three months to encourage staff to take online courses to earn a higher degree related to education.

 The first step TEAM, Inc. should begin immediately to start down the path of integrating technology is to apply for grants that will provide the funding to purchase the technology. The next step is to provide professional development to teachers and workshops to families to teach how technology is beneficial to a student’s learning environment and can be implemented both at home and at school.

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