

Title of Session: The Big6
Moderator: Ferdi Serim
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Room: Arcade Conference Room

BJ: how about if we start with introductions
BJ: I'm an art teacher in Pennsylvania
TeresaMT: I teach first grade in San Antonio, Texas
VirginiaHS: I teach English and Social Studies in an alternative high school.
VirginiaHS: This semester it's journalism and government.
SusanR: I am a K to 8 Occasional Teacher from Canada
BJ: what kind of alternative high school, Virginia?
BJ . o O (you might be interested in the alternative/correctional ed forum that meets in Tapped in on the third Thursday of the month)
BJ: Teresa, while we have Susan here, I should ask you if you know about the K-3 Resources group?
VirginiaHS: This is a choice school. It includes some kids who have been in trouble, but it's not mandated. The students are in class 3 hours a day and are required to hold a job for at least 15 hours a week, so we have two groups of students: morning and afternoon.
SusanR: Teresa, you might be interested in attending the K to 3+ Great Resources session next Tuesday
TeresaMT: I've seen it on the Calendar. I'm going to try to catch it then.
VirginiaHS: Sounds like Tapped in has a LOT of resources.
BJ nods to Virginia
SusanR: Balanced Literacy is the topic..the "word block" is the focus of the evening
TeresaMT: We use the 4-Blocks framework for literacy in our Reading Program. That topic sounds very interesting and relevant.
SusanR: Here is a selection of some of the web sites mentioned in our last discussion
<http://www.snipurl.com/BLwriting>
VirginiaHS: OK, BJ, how do you do that "nod" thing?
BJ: shake your head up and down while typing :nods
VirginiaHS: Right.
TeresaMT nods
TeresaMT: I just wanted to see if it works. It does.
BJ smiles
VirginiaHS: hmm.
BJ: the colon is the emote command
SusanSi nods
SusanR claps
BJ: type the colon followed by an action
VirginiaHS nods
KarenL joined the room.
BJ: Hi, Karen. Welcome!
SusanR waves to Karen

KarenL: Hi, everyone! My name is Karen Lemmons, library media specialist in a Detroit public elementary school.

KarenL: Is this the Sue from K-3?

SusanR: Yep..that's me

VirginiaHS: Hi Karen

BJ: I guess the least we can do is talk a little bit about the big6

KarenL: Hi! I have missed your sessions, but I will do better!

KarenL: Hi Virginia.

BJ: I know Sue has had some experience with the program. Karen, can you help us out with the big6 description?

SusanR: Why don't we get an overview of the BIG 6 Information Problem-Solving Process

KarenL thinks oh dear.

VirginiaHS: You mean we need to define the task for the chat?

KarenL: Okay, I will try.

KarenL: Let me see if I can find Ferdi's book. . .

BJ: <http://www.big6.com/>

SusanR: What do you think the Big6 means

SusanR: in terms of problem solving

KarenL: wrong book.

VirginiaHS: Six steps in the research process.

SusanR: yes..

KarenL: Yes. Define the task or problem I believe is Step 1.

SusanR: yes..

VirginiaHS: Task definition, Information Seeking Strategies, Location and Access, Use of Information, Synthesis, Evaluation.

VirginiaHS: I think our Strategy is to ask each other.

SusanR: Could be..I won't keep you in suspense... <http://www.big6.com>

SusanR: This will give you an overview

FerdiS joined the room.

VirginiaHS: Hi Ferdi!

FerdiS: Better never than late, eh?

SusanR: aha ..he's here

BJ: yay...hi, Ferdi!

SusanR: Welcome Ferdi

FerdiS: sorry about the delay...can you see me blushing from there?

BJ: Sue was just getting the audience warmed up for you!

FerdiS: Thanks Sue!

KarenL: Hi Ferdi!

SusanR: I warmed up your enthusiastic audience by introducing them to the main site <http://www.big6.com/>

VirginiaHS: Well if BJ can nod online, you should be able to blush online.

FerdiS: I have some news to share (which accounts for *part* of my discombobulation)

BJ listens

VirginiaHS: We are all ears.

BJ . o O (good news, I hope?)

SusanR listens intently

FerdiS: I just accepted a position with the New Mexico Public Education Department as Program Manager for Curriculum, Instruction and Learning Technologies...I meet with my new boss tomorrow at 9AM and start for real on Monday

KarenL: Congratulations!

FerdiS: Thanks!

VirginiaHS: Wow! Congratulations.

BJ: wow...congratulations!

SusanR: ditto..congratulations

FerdiS: So tonight's topic is near and dear to my heart: knowing our level of 21st century skills

VirginiaHS: How many states have a program like that?

KarenL: are you going to refer to the EnGauge document?

FerdiS: All 50 states have someone who's designated as State Education Technology Director, and I bet I'm it now ;->

FerdiS: EnGauge is one of my favorites, but as far as I know, it's a "35,000 foot" view....what do we measure in real life...how do we know?

VirginiaHS: What is EnGauge?

FerdiS: As a musician, my prejudice is towards "what can you do"

KarenL: is waiting for Ferdi to explain EnGauge.

FerdiS: Virginia, EnGauge is a project running out of McRel (Mid Continent Regional Educational Lab) which makes it an endangered species...all the Regional Labs are being phased out

KarenL: Virginia, I cannot explain it. All I know is that document is often referred to when talking about 21st century skills.

KarenL: Thank you Ferdi!

SusanR: <http://www.ncrel.org/engauge/>

FerdiS: Cheryl Lemke has been spearheading the effort, along with a team of highly talented, dedicated people...it is worth studying. When I was in Wisconsin for a week doing leadership workshops, they had adopted it statewide

FerdiS: as you might expect, about 1/3 of the people were excited

FerdiS: 1/3 of the people were resentful

FerdiS: and the rest were confused

FerdiS: such is life

BJ nods solemnly

VirginiaHS: Sounds like always.

FerdiS: From my perspective, whether you are calling it 21st century skills, like the Partnership for 21st Century Skills does in its MILE guide (link to come)

VirginiaHS: Thanks, SusanR, you saved me doing a search.

FerdiS: or as ISTE does in NETS (flavors available for students, teachers, administrators)

FerdiS: or as ALA does with Information Power

FerdiS: this tower of Babel all boils down to similar realities

VirginiaHS: Will one standard emerge from the many?

FerdiS: Alan Kay, one of the pioneer thinkers, has said "the goal of education is to expose children to the most important thoughts of our time, and the symbolic languages that are used to express them"

FerdiS: or something like that

FerdiS: Kathleen McClaskey has said "it comes down to knowing how to choose and use the tools appropriate to the task"

FerdiS: one standard is not likely in our lifetime on this planet (in Santa Fe, we don't limit ourselves to either)

SusanSi: that is exactly why I am in this chat room now--I am doing a technology grant

FerdiS: So now, as of next Monday, my task is to help people understand what's needed, and my need is to find out where my staff lives on the spectrum of competency that no one has really articulated yet

VirginiaHS: Ah, life on the frontier!

FerdiS: Grants are good...as long as you get them, and as long as you have a strategy for funding your work when the grant goes away

FerdiS: So I have, of course, some ideas, or I would not have invited you here tonight, even though I was the last one to the party

FerdiS: Starting with the toughest: communication and collaboration

FerdiS: the silence and anticipation is so poignant ;->

FerdiS: from the time of drawing on cave walls, we've as a species, longed to communicate

BJ . o O (we're waiting with bated breath)

FerdiS: and we've used whatever tools we had to do so

FerdiS: in the 21st century we have the opportunity to cross what I call the "digital river"

FerdiS: remember the river Styx?

BJ . o O (personally?)

FerdiS: the ancient Greeks saw the passage of "crossing over" as moving beyond the constraints of this mere mortal expression to the eternal...I'm not going that far, but I'm saying that once our expressions become digital, they are more easily able to transcend the limits of time and space

FerdiS: any arguments so far?

VirginiaHS: OK, I think I'm with you.

FerdiS: I want to ask my new staff: if you had to reach 400 people in 15 minutes, could you do it?

FerdiS: and if so, how would you do it?

BJ: listserv?

FerdiS: The answer of course, depends upon existing relationships, and if those relationships are among people who live parts of their lives in the digital world, it becomes that much more achievable

FerdiS: listserv, web, cell phone, fax....a database driving the media....the key is preparation and knowing people's habits for communicating.

FerdiS: New Mexico, being the land of Mañana, makes 15 minutes a real challenge (but we didn't say which day, did we?) ;->

FerdiS: Synthesis (our biggest challenge in the Big6) is also a skill worth measuring

BJ wonders how infrastructure fits into the plan

FerdiS: So I'd want people to look at several sources and report back on which made the most sense....this is something we can model with our students by "setting up" scenarios where we evaluate the usefulness of information and distill it down to recommendations for action

TeresaMT: I'm not really familiar with the Big6. What would Synthesis include?

VirginiaHS: Organizing information from multiple sources.

FerdiS: BJ, infrastructure is directly proportional to the "mission critical" aspects of any task. I'm told that on 9-11, the air traffic controllers had the skies cleared in 45 minutes....thousands of planes landed at the closest point they could, so that anyone who didn't comply could reasonably be shot out of the sky. That certainly was not an original part of the infrastructure design.

FerdiS: Thanks Virginia, you're right on. And 5.2 says "presenting the information", after we've organized it in 5.1

VirginiaHS: Well, Ferdi, I am in the class and I've kind of been drowning in Big6 info for a couple of months.

FerdiS: Evaluation follows (how do we know we accomplished what we set out to do in Task Definition? what did we learn along the way that can make us more effective and efficient?

FerdiS: Virginia, we prefer to call it "marinating"

VirginiaHS: But it seems to me that some sort of authority is necessary here.

VirginiaHS: Right. Good word, Ferdi.

FerdiS: So what questions do you have from your own work at this juncture?

FerdiS: While you're thinking, I'm reflecting upon the transition from yesterday (my last day as a music teacher at an elementary school) to today (preparing to help 89 school districts "do the right thing" for 1.6 million New Mexicans) and you can bet I'll be using the Big6 to guide me each step of the way

FerdiS: While you're still thinking, my plan is to ask the perhaps embarrassing and impolite question about any activity we as educators undertake "exactly how does this contribute to preparing out students for real life in the 21st century?"

TeresaMT: I will, definitely, be checking out the web site for Big6 that was given earlier. I'd like to know more about it. Unfortunately, I am in a District that is not real "with it" as far as technology and training, so we need all of the help we can get.

FerdiS: Teresa, that is the situation in most places

VirginiaHS: About the contacting 400 people, it seems to me that some kind of incentive or authority has to be involved. I could send out 800 e-mail and maybe 100 of them get read and 20 answered.

FerdiS: The dirty little secret is this: technology provides no benefit whatsoever until you've figured out what you're trying to accomplish with students...and this is something that most districts can not convincingly explain without resorting to jargon that defeats the entire purpose

SusanSi: we are "digital immigrants" but our students are "digital natives" so it will change--the situation is transitional

BJ: Ferdi, perhaps this was mentioned earlier, but would you need to start with evaluating what you have...what standards are in place and how they are met?

FerdiS: Yes, Virginia....the key is pre-existing relationships, the idea that meaning comes from these relationships and that interactions are valuable

TeresaMT: I agree. It seems as if the goal is to get more and more technology without really training teachers to use and integrate what we have.

VirginiaHS: That's why I like the Big6 emphasis on INFORMATION PROCESSING with technology as a TOOL rather than as an end in itself.

FerdiS: Yes, Big6 is all about solving problems that are information based (and I can't think of too many problems that aren't)

FerdiS: The more we do the steps, the deeper we integrate the process in ways that are compatible with our own ways of knowing the world...and what greater gift could we possibly impart to our students?

FerdiS: The problem with standards is that there are too darn many (maybe I should have said DARN because my font makes it look less polite than that)

KarenL: so true.

SusanR agrees

FerdiS: In jazz, we have standards....but they are tunes that have taken on a life of their own.

BJ nods. But, would that not be a good place to start? weed out the unnecessary 'rules'?

TeresaMT agrees

FerdiS: Any capable musician knows as many standards as she/he can commit to heart and soul...but it is the process of improvisation which keeps it out of the realm of "rote learning" such as our high stakes tests glorify

BJ . o O (or, on a positive note, identify the primary most important ones?)

FerdiS: Rules can help, but they become a dead end when not contextualized with the process of "case based reasoning"

FerdiS: knowing when to apply each rule, in other words

FerdiS: in the 21st century, that's what we're challenged to do

VirginiaHS: Yes our school is trying to go to a standards based system, where students earn credit by what they can do rather than how much time they spend in class. It's a great idea, but we are trying to define standards for reading, writing, math, behavioral, employability, and now I want to add the info processing. It's all good, but there's so much to keep track of.

FerdiS: what can't be automated is being "outsourced"

FerdiS: reasoning, combined with communication and collaboration, has a much longer shelf-life than anything else we can prepare our students for, because it embodies "learning how to learn"

FerdiS: and that is the only job any of us will have for the rest of our lives

FerdiS: So with the Big6, we start small

FerdiS: maybe we provide well crafted tasks that open our students to exploring questions for which there are no answers in the back of the book

KarenL: that sounds like a plan.

FerdiS: maybe these tasks challenge kids to brainstorm how they might solve the problems, where they would turn to find the needed information, how they might know if they're getting trash or treasure?

VirginiaHS: And no web page to copy and paste from.

FerdiS: maybe if they care about what they're asked to do (because it is truly meaningful) they might engage the materials more deeply, put more of themselves into their efforts because they, and at least one other person, cares about how it turns out?

VirginiaHS: Until they learn to get real information and process it.

BJ: since teachers tend to teach in the way in which they were taught, how do you propose to provide pd for educators to implement this meaningful engagement?

KarenL: I like that idea. I would love to implement it. How can we do that in the midst of state testing and a preassigned curriculum?

FerdiS: How many of us get real information, and where do we get it from? how many of us recognize when we're being fed "surreal information"?

FerdiS: great questions...let me try to address each

FerdiS: The Big6 course is a way for teachers to experience learning in a new modality, where learning about the Big6 is quickly replaced with "learning through" the Big6...resulting in instructional design that supports new ways of teaching and learning.

This is done in community, not in solitary study

TeresaMT: Are the Big6 strategies appropriate for use with elementary students? I teach first grade. Will I be able to apply them?

FerdiS: Teresa, there is a special version called "the Super 3" for younger kids: Plan, Do, Review! It's all described on the Big6 website, cited previously

FerdiS: The earlier we get started, the deeper the learning, and the better the results as kids go up through the grades

TeresaMT: Thanks. That sounds great. I think I have heard of these 3 steps.

VirginiaHS: And I like the way the questions are phrased for the elementary Big6. I even use them with my high schoolers.

FerdiS: Finally, it is not necessary to do the Big6 in each and every activity we do....introducing each skill at some point throughout the year, having kids learn to use the "vocabulary" provides them with a language for framing their development of critical learning skills

FerdiS: Yes, they're simple enough for adults, too ;->

FerdiS: I'll share with you, hopefully in July, the results of the assessment tool for 21st century skills that I'm building, guided by the Big6....June is NECC and I'll be off then (you're forewarned BJ ;->)

BJ nods to Ferdi

FerdiS: I'll catch up with you when I get the transcript, so I can see where everyone is from and what you're doing....thanks for coming tonight and staying with the session even though I appeared to be doing my Sly Stone imitation!

FerdiS: I'm just hangin out

KarenL: That's cool!

BJ: Thanks, Ferdi. Congrats again on the new job

VirginiaHS: Thanks, it's been fun.

FerdiS: Thanks BJ...it is exciting, scary and a whole lot more ;->

BJ understands.

TeresaMT: Thanks. It was interesting and I got some new information to look into.

FerdiS: Thanks Virginia...it was great "seeing you" online

KarenL: New Mexico is blessed to have you.

FerdiS: Thanks Karen

SusanR: Thanks Ferdi! Good luck!

BJ waves goodnight

KarenL: Goodnight everyone!

FerdiS: Goodnight!