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Use the Force Luke: The George Lucas Foundation

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Using the force of the web, the George Lucas Educational Foundation (GLEF) has developed a web site (1) that is a media rich resource for teachers poised to move to a galaxy far away. The foundation’s mission is “to gather and disseminate the most innovative models of K-12 teaching and learning in the digital age.” (1) The site banner, Edutopia On Line: Envision the Future of Public Education, has a visionary rhythm to it, but two words clearly communicate the intent of the site: Edutopia and public.

Edutopia, a hybrid of the words education and Utopia, declares the vision of the foundation. In the book, Utopia Book II, Thomas More described the island of Utopia as an ideal commonwealth whose inhabitants live in perfect conditions in a communist city-state governed entirely by reason. In 1515, this stood in stark contrast the to the Catholic and Protestant conflict capturing the attention of Europeans. In 2002, the GLEF could be considered Utopia, where educators and communities quietly work to prefect learning; while across the ocean, our state and national governments publically struggle to standardize learning.

Should we expect anything less from the creator of Star Wars? George Lucas was driven to create the foundation because of his unsatisfying learning experiences as a student and his current role as a father. As a student, Lucas describes being bored and unmotivated by curriculum that made no connection to the world outside of school. His educational experiences, like a lot of other students, lacked imagination and excitement (2). He found his excitement in film making which required a collection of creative, technical, planning, and problem solving skills. Here, Lucas uses the framework for film making as metaphor for learning.

The learning environments that are highlighted on the web site are project-based learning experiences. “In project-based learning, students work in teams to explore real-world problems and create presentations to share what they have learned. Compared with learning solely from textbooks, this approach has many benefits for students, including: deeper knowledge of subject
matter; increased self-direction and motivation; improved research and problem-solving skills." (3)

One of the main points Lucas makes is that the technology tools educators now have can fundamentally change the way learning takes place in school. I agree. But, more importantly, what makes the model learning and teaching projects on the GLEF web site effective is that they are based on sound and creative student-driven learning experiences. So, what makes these model projects effective? Lucas might point to three reasons, innovative classrooms (3), skillful educators (4), and involved communities (5). These pieces are the three main organizing themes of the site. Each area has a variety of subtopics that provide information and model examples.

The GLEF has taken a decidedly web-based approach to sharing information about the best practices. The media of choice are text and Quicktime movies. Flash effects don’t exist as content reigns here. Simply read the text and click on the video icon to view the clip. Again, Lucas is consistent with his delivery. A video gallery (1) gives the visitor a chance to view a number of videos from a wide range of topics. Some of the Quicktime movies that profile a number of classrooms are available for purchase through the foundation. These videos cover a number of topics from school leadership to emotional intelligence and are reasonably priced at $15 per video. Books and CD-ROMs that give more detailed descriptions of the model projects are also available.

The foundation does not provide grants. But, for those of you who are looking for funding sources, GLEF has a link to a wide range of organizations that provide funding to educators (7). They divide the web sites into the following categories: web sites with grant information, periodicals with grant information, corporate and foundation grants, government grants, and technology donation programs. The scope is sufficient and many of the sites provide additional links to other sources.

In the past educators have been limited by their tools and pedagogy. This was in part due to the industrial model of education that we have tied ourselves to. George Lucas has made a commitment to change this by providing demonstrations of creative and effective teaching and learning models. Even though the GLEF site does not provide funding sources, it provides something even more valuable, examples of other educators’ successful projects that can spark teachers’ and students’ imaginations and enable them to travel to that galaxy that now seems far away.

References:

(1) http://www.glef.org
(2) http://glef.org/lucas.html
(3) http://glef.org/classrooms.html
(4) http://glef.org/educators.html
(5) http://glef.org/communities.html
(6) http://www.glef.org/products.html
After examine some of the blog articles or blog posts on your website now, and I really like your ways of blogging. I bookmarked it to my bookmark internet site list and could be checking back soon. Pls try my web site as well and permit me know what you think.

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