Teaching has been in my blood since the fourth grade. It started with my teacher sharing his thoughts that I would be a teacher when I was older. Now, years later, it is true. I have enjoyed teaching for the last 12 years. One way I like to give back to Sacramento State, my alma mater, is to be a cooperating teacher for a new student teacher each year. Each year brings new challenges and surprises. For everything I can teach this new teacher, I learn something new myself. Learning is a process that takes a lifetime.

After reading many wonderful articles by Dr. Thornburg, and the novel, *A Whack on the Side of the Head*, by Roger von Oech, I realize that things must be done differently in education. Education needs a whack. Ideally, creating a modern, technology based school would be that whack. This school would have a layout with central hubs for each grade level. Within each hub, students would have desks for individual work, tables for cooperative group work, and comfortable areas reserved for getting away to quietly read or internalize thoughts and concepts. Each student would have a laptop computer with Internet access. The room would be networked, include a TV, and have a VCR. Reducing the class size in all grade levels is essential. Sixteen students is an ideal setting for learning to take place. This smaller ratio between student and teacher will be a tremendous asset to their ability to learn. Flexible pacing is another benefit of the smaller class size.

Having a terrific school though, only happens if you have the staffing to do it justice. Modern technology doesn’t work without capable people to utilize it to it’s fullest potential. Staff development is a big key to the success of this new school. Enthusiastic teachers who are willing to try different strategies, are needed. These teachers need to have a certain command of technology. By pairing teachers in partner teams, everyone will learn more. This is one way that less experienced teachers can learn from teachers with more experience. My school does this already and it is very successful. Another key is grade level sharing. Time each week is set aside to meet as a grade level and plan for future lessons. This time to share is very valuable. New web sites and investigations are shared and ideas are suggested for future projects to meet curriculum standards. A dedicated principal, who plans release days, conference times, and who is enthusiastic about learning is a necessity. A good principal will really make the
difference to a school. In addition to regular classroom teachers, a technological aide is mandatory. This person is trained to troubleshoot the more minor problems that inevitably occur when you work with computers. Ideally, this person will also help out with the teacher to come up with new web sites and software options. In the classroom, this aide can help students with their projects. This new school needs teachers who follow the constructivist model that allows students equal access to information. They need to welcome the opportunity to learn from their students, as well as teach their students.

Curriculum in this “different” school would also need that whack. We need to view it from a new perspective. According to Roger von Oech, we need to help our students overcome the mental blocks and unleash the full potential of their minds. We need to bolster their creative processes to generate and implement new ideas. For so long, teachers haven’t really made children think for themselves, just regurgitate what was taught to them. This new school will encourage thinking skills and problem solving skills. Students will need to explain their thought process in problem solving. Often, they will work collaboratively in teams to share ideas and strategies. This is a great time to work on Science experiments and problems, Social Studies activities and Math problems. They really lend well to cooperative group settings. The ability to work cooperatively is a skill that students will see is mandatory in the business world. This is an asset that is desirable to most employers. Dr. Thornburg reminds us how important it is to have time to share ideas (watering hole), as well as have time to go off by oneself (cave), in addition to the traditional teaching methods (campfire). By utilizing all three learning environments, a student will really blossom. Computers allow technologically fluent students to draw meaning from the search for knowledge. Since it’s easier to get information, they are now able to concentrate on the quest itself. The ability for a child to ascertain the truth of the information they find is another indispensable skill. Assessment will be both formal and informal. Performance based assessment will be used with benchmarks to track student progress. An electronic portfolio of student work will be readily available for parent-teacher conferencing. Self-assessment will also be used as a tool for learning. I’m willing to bet that these students will score well on standardized tests. Students will have access to the class web site to get absent work and check in on future projects and upcoming concepts.

The big question, of course, is funding. A school district will need to be committed to the funding necessary for this school to happen. Additionally, this is the time to go out into the business world for support. Partnerships with community businesses will make a win, win situation. We will be turning out students who will actually be ready to walk into the community and get a job. These businesses will share their ideas on what types of skills will best help our
students succeed in their world of tomorrow. This will alleviate the problem that businesses now face, in the basic training they must provide to just prepare a student for a simple job. This is not a cheap investment. It will take big bucks to make it happen and keep it up. In the long run, we will all win. Our students need to be ready to face the future, and we need to provide the tools that they will need to face this new frontier successfully.

Change is inevitable. We must accept it and then act on it. These remarks that Dr. Thornburg made, lead us to our new future. We need to add value to the education that we are providing for our children. Our hope is to provide lifelong learners who welcome the future and it’s challenges. Current educational trends are stagnating due to the fear of change. Embrace the changes and give yourself an occasional whack to the side of your head to keep your juices flowing.