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Innovative Experience
Reflective Journal

Boise State University EDTECH Program

Fall 2015

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Weeks 1 & 2 (August 24th- September 5th)

This is the first week of the Innovative Experience. Some of the reflections that follow come from events which occurred before the IE officially began, however, they are relevant to the learning outcomes set in the IE Proposal and were obtained by observations made between the Technology Director and other employees.

During the first week of school there was a visitor to the tech center on the elementary campus. This teacher was obviously upset that her computer had been giving her trouble. I had personally witnessed this individual in the Tech Center everyday for several hours three days in a row. She confided in me that she felt it was unfair that she was not on the list of people getting a new computer this year, stating that she was one of the first to get a computer four years prior. However, because she chose to upgrade to a newer computer the following year, she was in possession of a machine which was in the beginning of its third year of use. She was in the process of explaining to the Tech Director that she was unhappy and wanted a new computer. The Tech Director handled this quite well, he reaffirmed her feelings and made it clear that he understood how she was feeling. He then explained the situation and offered two options that could help the situation. 1. give her a loaner while they fixed her machine or 2. give her another computer of the same make, model and year to replace the one she had. The Tech Director used a calm voice and made no appearance of being agitated. This is exactly what is suggested by Kruse (2013), moving to solving the problem without focusing on the negativity. However, these options were not what the teacher wanted and she began raising her voice telling him that he hadn't understood what she had said. She made it clear that she was what the school would be considered a power user and that she should have been on the list for a replacement. He repeated that he understood and that she was not going to get a new computer. This went back and forth a few times until the Tech Director stated clearly, "I am going to remove myself from this conversation as it is not getting us anywhere." This is in line with what Mills (2014), suggests. It is okay to handle aggression assertively even to the point of walking away (Mills, 2014).   He then restated the options he had offered her again. This action of cutting off the complainer allows the negativity to stop and helps get to solving the problem. In order to ensure a positive outcome here are some steps to follow, "make sure they aren't just venting for a few minutes, make sure you weren't previously encouraging them, make sure they can't switch to problem solving, and then politely shut them down" (Kruse, 2013). She finally gave up and just thanked him for his time.

I learned no matter how transparent you are with your plans to replace hardware, there are still those who believe they are privileged enough to not have to follow the plan. I also learned that dealing with a difficult situation, especially one that is cyclical sometimes requires you to remove yourself politely.

Kruse, K. (2013, June 25). Dealing with difficult people. Retrieved from

http://www.forbes.com/sites/kevinkruse/2013/06/25/dealing-with-difficult-people/

Mills, C. (2014, November 10). How to deal with difficult people at work. Retrieved from

http://www.theguardian.com/careers/careers-blog/how-to-deal-difficult-people-at-work

Weeks 3 & 4 (September 6th - 19th)

These two week have been quite interesting. I had my first shadowing experience at the middle and high school when I went to the science park (SP) campus for a Tech Coaches meeting. This year is a special year at AISG. The area of technology in education, and the technology curriculum is up for review, therefore, the day for the Tech Director started really early with a discussion with the Curriculum Coordinator while on the bus ride to school. After arriving at the school this is what followed over the next two hours.

- We met to discuss this and SharePoint migration to the cloud.
- Set recurring Admin tech meeting at the ES campus
- Checked emails 10 unread and 8 junk mail. This is quite low for the normal.
- 8:15 went to support MAPS testing
  - Assisted 11 students with the login procedures for the online MAPS test. Students were able to do this without assistance. Just here in case.
- Met to discuss the Tech Advisory Committee and hash out the information for the invitation.
- Participation in tech coach meeting. (3 and ½ hours)

It appears that the Tech Director spends much of his time communicating with others, whether through electronic means, or in a face-to-face situation. His communications are usually centered around planning, problem solving, purchasing and administrative duties. While his role does have a technical aspect to it, it appears that it is more than just "tech" related. His role includes technology, economics, social skills, communication skills and knowledge of instruction and learning. Davies (2010), present a conceptualization of leadership in educational technology which involves "the complex interplay between the personal/biographical, the institutional/organizational, and the broader social, political and economic context" (p.58). This definition is much more inclusive of the actual activities of a technology director than one which focuses merely on the technical duties of the role.

I created the invitational letter to request participation in AISG's Tech Advisory Committee. This committee has been an integral part of the planning process for our technology usage and direction. It is apparent that in order for technology integration to be successful multiple voices are needed (Davies, 2010). In fact it is groups such as these which will be beneficial and

influential for sustainable and long term change. The differing expertise for each member provides valuable information to how technology will affect different areas of the school (Davies, 2010). The Tech Advisory committee has been responsible for all major developments regarding technology over the past 7 years. Some of these include the move to 1:1 laptops and iPads, the application of a VPN in order to have a more normalized Internet experience and the support of the Maker Movement in the elementary school.

Something came up at the Elementary Campus, a teacher came in stating that she couldn't add her students to IXL. When the Tech Director questioned the IT support staff they all had no idea who was the one in charge of this service. This was due to one person leaving and being replaced by a new person. It was not clear who was supposed to be in charge. The Director had to ask a series of questions to find out who had been in charge in the past and then directly told the new guy that it was his responsibility. He used language which made it clear that he was the one who was now responsible. Clear communication is needed in this role. In fact, communication is one skill IT managers need to ensure are developed, along with relationship building skills, creativity, simplification and governance. (Kraemer, n.d.) These according to Kraemer, are paramount because the role of the IT department is not just about a managing information and technology it is about what the users experience and do with the information and technology that matters.

I also attended my first Focus on Learning (FOL) administrative meeting. I will attend another FOL meeting in the following weeks and, therefore, will reflect on these meetings in my next section.

Davies, P. M. (2010). On school educational technology leadership. *Management in Education*,

   24(2), 55–61. http://doi.org/10.1177/0892020610363089

Kraemer, R. (n.d.). From Information Management to Experience Fulfillment. Retrieved from

   http://www.educause.edu/blogs/ronkraemer/information-management-experience-fulfillment

Weeks 5 & 6 (September 20th - October 3rd)

I have been able to attend two Focus on Learning Administrative meetings both held at the Elementary campus. The first meeting had many administrators present, including the Principals of all divisions, the Assistant Principal of the Elementary School, the Curriculum Coordinators from both campuses and the Technology Director. The second meeting had greater attendance including all mentioned above and the Director of the School, the International Baccalaureate Coordinator, the Chief Financial Officer and the Director of

Development. The meetings are organized very well with one member serving as the chair of the meeting. This role is a rotating role amongst the administrative team.

The meetings began with an activity that is made to help the team get to know each other better. In the first meeting everyone shared something the others might not know about each other.   At the second meeting we were asked to look at different paintings and discuss how they made us feel. A great way to help foster connection with the team on a personal basis. At both meetings all members were involved in all the topics, giving their input and adding to the discussions. It was clear that AISG doesn't approach leadership in the top down fashion. The administrative team works as just that, a team. The leadership style is distributive in nature, decentralized, open and more collaborative (Ancona & Backman, 2010). This approach to leadership helps AISG to "mobilize" the "collective intelligence" and "creative talents" (Ancona & Backman, 2010 p.11) of their leadership team. Ancona & Backman (2010), highlight five common elements of distributed leadership teams, collaboration which is spontaneous, influence which flows in both directions, change initiated by non-administrators, a shared vision and purpose and shared cultural norms. All of these are present in the administrative team and school culture at AISG. As the meetings progressed I was impressed with how the administrative team was open to all thoughts even to those from a visitor, me. I wondered a bit more about distributed leadership so I did some digging. I discovered that distributed leadership has grown in popularity throughout the educational world and has become a social movement (Hartley, 2007). Further reading opened my eyes to the fact that there is little evidence in the literature to support the use of distributed leadership in educational institutions, however, some reasons for its spread and popularity could be that it is a "sign of the times"(Hartley, 2007 p. 211) This form of leadership resonates with contemporary culture which has moved away from social structure to a network culture. The work environment, with its new knowledge economy, no longer needs bureaucratic structures of management but one that supports flexibility and creativity (Hartley, 2007). Distributed leadership helps to build an environment where faculty and colleagues can create change. This is directly related to Owen's (2004), leadership strategy for supporting technology implementation, Identifying Champions and Supporting Innovation. When a leader follows a distributed philosophy change can happen when early adopters are found, supported and rewarded (Owen, 2004).

Some of the agenda topics covered dealt with the Curriculum Review Cycle (CRC). This year the areas up for review include Fine Arts, Science and Library/Tech. Two main questions were discussed during the meeting. 1.What are the issues or concerns in this subject area that you would like to see addressed in the curriculum review this year? and 2. What questions do you think the review team should be investigating as they undergo the review of this subject area? The discussion which ensued reviewed various areas of the curriculum to meet the needs of our school. The Technology Director was more involved during particular areas but added comments in all topics discussed. His role in these meetings as an administrator is to provide his input. This is directly related to Owen's (2004), leadership strategy for supporting technology implementation, of Forging Strategies, and Communicating Vision and Goals. By

adding his input into the discussion of curricular areas he is ensuring that technology is being incorporated and is a "visible priority" (p.642).

These meeting made me reflect a little more on how technology advancement is handled at the school. Almost all of the major school culture changes that have been made in regards to technology have come from a distributed leadership method. Never has the technology director made a unilateral decision and then pushed it to the rest of the faculty. All major changes to the the Technology Use Plan came from communication and collaboration between many different stakeholders. One area where I might add to how things are done is to include members of the parent community in the initial discussions.

Ancona, D., & Backman, E. (2010). Distributed Leadership. *Leadership Excellence*, *27*(1), 11.

Hartley, David. (2007). The emergence of distributed leadership in education: Why now? *British*

Journal of Educational Studies, *55*(2), 202–214.

Owen, P. (2004). Change Dynamics and Leadership in Technology Implementation. *Journal of*

Higher Education, *75*(6), 636.

Weeks 7 & 8 (October 4th - 17th)

This week we had our first Tech Advisory committee meeting. For the purpose of the meeting and to provide an online collaborative space for minutes and discussion I setup a group in Office 365. I also added agenda/minute templates into the groups OneNote notebook and uploaded last years documents for reference. The committee meeting was very positive. All the teachers present had ideas to share. It is this committee that serves as multiple voices for technology direction. As Davies (2010), has stated, it is apparent that in order for technology integration to be successful multiple voices are needed, In fact it is groups such as these which will be beneficial and influential for sustainable and long term change. The differing expertise for each member provides valuable information to how technology will affect different areas of the school (Davies, 2010). Our team of teachers represent the early childhood center, grades 2, 4 and 5 and the library. The meetings assist in collecting data, experiences, thoughts and opinions as well as direct recommendations for technology adoption to be presented to the AISG School Board. The meetings make use of the Horizon Report as a guide and then discuss the information in this report in regards to our schools specific context. The Tech Director is the meeting chair at these meetings and helps to facilitate discussion. This is just one way in which the Tech Director meets ISTE Standards for Administrators, specifically standard 4(a) "Lead purposeful change to maximize the achievement of learning goals through the appropriate use

of technology and media-rich resources" One of the main areas of discussion was guided by a metric presented by the Tech Director. According to the community survey, a larger number of parents and students believe technology enhances learning compared with the teacher population which filled out the survey. This has led the Tech Director to want to discuss how we can ensure that what the IT department does is inline with the vision of the school. According to (*The Technology Director's Guide to Leadership*, 2008), the main role of a technology director is to support the "core function" of the district or in our case the school, which is teaching and learning.

These past few weeks have been quite interesting a lot of the communication between the tech director and I have been through emails. These emails have been either from him to me or I have been included in emails he has sent to others. This is one way in which he has been able to include me in more of his communications; sort of a virtual "shadowing". One of the emails I was included on involves a communication from a member of the Tech Advisory Committee and the Tech Director. In this message the committee member criticizes the Tech Directors minute taking during the first meeting. I have included the email below.

> "I don't know how you will take this, but I have to say it. I'm not really sure why you mentioned certain people by name in the minutes of our Tech Advisory Committee meeting today...I have been a notetaker at many team /department meetings and rarely have mentioned folks by name. It is usually about the discussion..not the people commenting. Sorry, but it just rubs me the wrong way. Sure..I am a bit upset because the comments I made were not credited, but others were..just seems very weird to me. I could not care about the credit...but knowing that others have been, it just irks me. We ALL made valuable comments--not just certain people. A bit unsure about why names were credited, that's all. THANKS for listening...cheers,"

I was very interested in how the Tech Director took the criticism. He took it quite well he basically thanked her for bringing this point up and told her he had cleaned the minutes of any names. He then did something further which I wasn't expecting, he focused on her contributions in the meeting and told her he was glad she was able to contribute to an excellent meeting. This made me think of ("Technology in Higher Education," 2015) where the authors speak of the various leadership qualities required by the technology leader. In this article three primary roles are suggested along with six discrete roles. The Tech Director by fixing his mistake and then thanking the committee member was showing his skill as a "relationship builder" which is one of the three primary roles of an IT leader.

Technology in Higher Education: Defining the Strategic Leader. (2015). Retrieved August 29, 2015, from

http://er.educause.edu/articles/2015/4/technology-in-higher-education-defining-the-strategic-

leader

The technology director's guide to leadership: The Power of Great Questions. (2008). Eugene, Or:

International Society for Technology in Education.

ISTE Standards Administrators. (2009). International society for technology in education. Retrieved

from http://www.iste.org/docs/pdfs/20-14_ISTE_Standards-A_PDF.pdf

Weeks 9 & 10 (October 18th - 31st)

I have been thinking a lot about how we could be doing things differently at AISG. In my honest opinion the technology director does many things well and he has done a great job moving our school forward with technology integration. While reading *The Technology Director's Guide to Leadership* (2008), I came across some things that might assist AISG in strengthening our already strong technology department.   While we have a vision we haven't initiated strategies to promote the vision within the faculty, staff and wider community. According the (*The Technology Director's Guide to Leadership*, 2008) "a major job of the technology director is to create opportunities to promote, publicize and report progress towards the vision." We have a number of ways to share information with all stake holders such as the Tech Talk Blog, the IT Update Blog and parent coffee mornings. All of these help to "keep our accomplishments in front of everyone" (*The Technology Director's Guide to Leadership*, 2008). The problem with what we have done, is that while we are sharing the great things we are doing we never shared the "why". The vision was created and then shared once with faculty. The technology director has made efforts to improve this by getting the vision printed on large signs and posting it on the wall in the various campuses Tech Centers but this isn't having a great impact. One thing suggested in *The Technology Director's Guide to Leadership* which might assist in this area was the creation of a graphic organizer which would clearly explain the vision in a way that most of our community would understand the what and the why.   Another area which might help is to add members to the Tech Advisory committee from the wider community, possibly including parents and students. This would be in line with ISTE Standard A 1B which states, "engage in an ongoing process to develop, implement, and communicate technology-infused strategic plans aligned with a shared vision"

One area which is very important to the technology director position is keeping abreast of the ever changing technological world. ISTE Standard 3 is about educational administrators and their ability to "promote an environment of professional learning and innovation that empowers educators to enhance student learning through the infusion of contemporary technologies and

digital resources"("Standards A," 2009). One way that is helpful in this area is through providing resources, time and access. ("Standards" A, 2009) Our technology director works in collaboration with other administrators and sets aside a certain amount of money in the professional development budget for teachers to attend conferences with a technology focus. The two main conferences the school supports are the Learning 2 conference and the 21st Century Learning Hong Kong conference. Each year the school sends up to 10 people to each of these conferences paying up to $1000 towards the cost of travel, registration and accommodation. Another aspect of standard 3 is standard 3d which is about "staying abreast of educational research and emerging trends regarding effective use of technology and encouraging evaluation of new technologies for their potential to improve student learning" The technology director has done this in the past by participating in a regularly held Tech Director Job Alike gathering usually held in Hong Kong. He also used a list serv and the Tech Director Ning to help stay up-to-date with what others in the region were doing. Recently he has also begun using social media to assist in his learning process. He is an active participator in the China Edu Tech WeChat group which has 100 members from around China. By using all of these resources he keeps up-to-date with technology in education.

The technology director's guide to leadership: The Power of Great Questions. (2008). Eugene, Or:

International Society for Technology in Education.

ISTE Standards Administrators. (2009). International society for technology in education. Retrieved

from http://www.iste.org/docs/pdfs/20-14_ISTE_Standards-A_PDF.pdf

Weeks 11 & 12 (November 1st - 14th)

I met with the technology director regarding the budget. He spoke with me about the main areas of the budget which included software, hardware and services. Software components included, educational software licenses that are used school wide or across an entire division such as IXL, Typing Pal and VoiceThread. Also included in this area are fees for operational software such as Office 365, Aspen, Atlas Rubicon and Blackbaud. The hardware part of the budget included items such as iPads, laptops, network routers, network access points, servers, cables, and other hardware needed to keep the network up and running. The services section mainly included contracts with outside vendors who provide either services or staff who support the maintenance of the network and other hardware used in the school. This section also had a fund set up for other services such as IT audits and inventory consultative services which may be needed.   Other smaller areas of the budget included a miscellaneous section which included things like iPads cases, headphones, external microphones and other smaller items which don't fit in the other larger sections of the budgeting codes. I learned that budgeting for IT involves not just the purchase of technology for learning such a computers, tablets and the applications for use in the classroom but also technology that supports the creation of a network which

allows connection to the Internet and software that supports the goals of the school. What this means is that the technology budget is not a one time deal. Devices will need to be replaced regularly. New applications and software will also need to be updated to fit the needs of the learning occurring in the school. This is true for the hardware that creates the network all of these devices are connected through. Michael (1998), when discussing best practice in IT management defines the technology budget as "the extent to which financial resources are made available to meet technological goals" (p.285). Since technology is not a one time purchase it is important that there is money to support the goals the IT budget. In fact if a school wants to have consistent progress it is dependant on the amount of stable funding made available to support the tech budget each year. Having a portion of the annual operating budget earmarked towards the IT budget builds a solid foundation for proper IT planning and shows teachers and staff that the school leadership supports the technology vision (Michael, 1998).

The fact that a strong base to good technology planning is a steady income stream from the operational budget shows me how important it is for a Tech Director to have support from the other administration. The technology plan cannot only come from one individual. In order for teachers, staff and the wider community to fully realize the importance technology plays in the educational environment the entire school administration, from the assistant principals all the way up to the school director and members of the school board must support the technology goals in words and in action by providing funding to the technology budget.

Michael, S. O. (1998). Best Practices in Information Technology (IT) Management: Insights from

   K-12 Schools' Technology Audits. *International Journal of Educational Management*, *12*(6),

   277–88.

Weeks 13 & 14 (November 15th - 28th)

As a part of my IE I spoke with the technology director about his job description. He shared the document with me. As I read it over I began wondering if other schools also had similar duties. I gathered the job description of the Technology Director from 5 schools total and compared them. Below is a table that shows the comparison. I got these descriptions from job postings and from asking my own personal learning network to share with me.

Comparative Table of Tech Director Responsibilities from 5 Different International Schools						
Responsibility	BCIS	BIFS	ISH	AISG	NIS	

Leadership						
Reports to school director	<	<	<	<	<	
Manage tech support staff	<	<	<	<	<	
Collaborate with system managers/network admin	<	<	<	<	<	
Lead/work with tech coaches/ integrators	<	<	<	<	<	
Support integration	<		<	<	<	
Lead and coordinate creation/review of TUP, Tech Vision and Policies	<	<	<	<	<	
Maintain budget for IT	<	<	<	<	<	
Assist with recruitment of IT support staff	<	<		<	<	
Oversee acquisition of hardware and software licenses and ensure compatibility	<		<	<	<	
Provide positive public info regarding school IT initiatives	<		<	<	<	
Conduct evaluations with all IT faculty and staff	<			<	<	
Work with Admin to stay involved with school's strategic plan and board policy related to IT , goals and standards.	<	<	<	<	<	
Create positive IT culture in the school		<	<	<	<	
Collaborates with marketing/webmaster to oversee website and public web-based portals		<		<	<	
Assists with Data interpretation (community surveys, MAPS, IB results etc.		<		<	<	
Training/Professional Development						
Work with other integrators and admin to coordinate IT PD	<		<	<	<	
Provide leadership to support integrators with student learning	<	<	<	<	<	

	BCIS	BIFS	ISH	AISG	NIS	
Work with HR manager to coordinate IT PD for support staff.	<	<	<	<	<	
Stay up-to-date with new applications, hardware, and innovative approaches to learning	<	<	<	<	<	
Improve his/her own competency through school PD	<		<	<	<	
Works with marketing or IT integrators to create and hold Parent informational meetings		<	<	<	<	
Network Administration						
Work with network admin or vendors to support network maintenance	<	<	<	<	<	
BCIS = Beijing Community International School BIFS = Busan International Foreign School ISH = International School of Helsinki AISG = American International School of Guangzhou NIS = Nanjing International School						

It is clear that the Technology Director has many responsibilities pertaining to various areas in the school. According to all of the job descriptions I looked at there were some main responsibilities that all technology directors at the various internationals schools need to accomplish. The following are the most prevalent.

- Provide leadership in creating and reviewing vision and policies for technology usage at the school which support the school's mission and objectives
- The creations and review of a plan (technology use plan) that lays out how technology will be implemented
- The creation and review of the documents which support this plan and the actual implementation of the plan.
- Providing leadership to the faculty and staff that help to implement the plan, including tech support staff and instructional integrators or coaches
- Work with vendors or other staff to support the creation of a network that supports the plan
- Work with others to provide technology professional development to faculty and staff
- Keep up to date with changes in the field and improve their own skill set
- Work with administration to stay involved with school's strategic plan and board policy related to IT, goals and standards relating to education and the operation of the school