The Shadow Knows: Technology Directing at an International School

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Introduction

The complexity of leadership with its multiple perspectives and definitions (Guthrie, Phelps, & Downey, 2011, Jang & Ryu, 2011) makes it a tough topic to learn. Combine this with the broader perspective required for a leader in educational technology, one that involves the need to remain up-to-date in emerging technologies and current best practices (Davies, 2010) and it becomes a bit more complex. In Technology in Higher Education (2015) it is stated that the leader in Information Technology has to not only have a strong understanding of the organization but they must also bring information systems and technology leadership to the table (Educause, 2015). It is this complexity and my current desire to become a technology director at an international school which led to the creation of my Innovative Experience (IE). This paper serves as the reflective summative assessment for EDTECH 640 Innovative Practices in Educational Technology at Boise State University. The pages below will describe and reflect on experiences, and connect learning to existing research and theory.

Introducing the Innovative Experience

This innovative experience has assisted me in learning about the role and responsibility of a technology director (TD) at an international school, specifically The American International School of Guangzhou (AISG). The experience involved time spent shadowing the current TD, Robert Bauer. The shadowing covered all aspects of the TD's job responsibilities including but not limited to the construction of a technology budget, administrative meetings, hiring new staff, meeting with vendors and other day to day responsibilities. The activities and learning experiences of this IE have been guided by the following learning objectives.

1. Identify the administrative responsibilities of a Technology Director in an International School pertaining to these areas

    1.1 curriculum and instruction

    1.2 yearly budgeting

    1.3 technology use planning

    1.4 technology staff direction

    1.5 technology coach evaluation

    1.6 professional development planning

    1.7 professional development fund allocation

    1.8 the formation and leadership of the technology advisory committee.

2. Identify leadership skills used to motivate tech department to complete projects.

3. Identify communication skills used by the technology director to communicate thoughts and ideas clearly.

4. Identifying difficult situations and how to solve them within the context of the school that will be best for all divisions.

5. Identify methods used to keep up to date with technological advances and what is considered current best practice.

After giving some background information I will take each of these learning objectives in turn, discuss the learning experiences I went through to discover more about them and reflect on what I learned.

Context of the IE and Background of the School.

AISG is an independent, coeducational day school whose mission is to provide an

exemplary education for the children of the expatriate community living in Guangzhou, in order to assist students in becoming model world citizens of high character who can think effectively, analytically, creatively, and critically (Welcome to AISG, n.d.).

The American International School of Guangzhou was the location for this IE. The concept of an international school has yet to be concretely defined. Bunnell (2007) states, "Meanwhile, the universe of 'international schools' continues to defy any defendable consensus definition" (p. 350). However for the purpose of this IE it is important to clarify that international schools are not schools located outside the United States but schools that are considered as institutions which offer either a national curriculum or an international curriculum that differs from the country which hosts the school (Nagrath, 2011). Many times this is an international curriculum such as the Primary Years Programme (PYP), Middle Years Programme (MYP) and the Diploma Program (DP) of the International Baccalaureate Organization. AISG is an IB World School which offers the PYP and the DP. The student body of AISG consist of foreigners living in Guangzhou China.

Information technology defined

To ensure that there is a sufficient understanding of what technology means in the area of technology directing at a K-12 international school the following definitions will be used. According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary information technology is defined as "the technology involving the development, maintenance, and use of computer systems, software, and networks for the processing and distribution of data" ("information technology," 2015). The Association for Educational Communication and Technology defines instructional technology as "the theory and practice of design, development, utilization, management, and evaluation of

processes and resources for learning" (AECT, 2001). These two definitions are used because the TD at an international school has to deal with both aspects of these definitions. The hardware, software and systems utilized to assist in running the business aspect of the school, such as the servers, workstations and the student information systems, their development and maintenance are one side of the technology the TD has to work with. The other side deals with the educational aspect of making use of technology in the learning environment. This would include the procurement of the hardware and software to support learning and also includes making sure a technology use plan, policies and procedures are created and ensuring teachers are trained and supported in their integration efforts.

Leadership in educational technology

According to Technology in Higher Education, 2015 there are three main roles for a TD which include being a trusted advisor, a visionary and a relationship builder. These three main roles open the door to six other roles which will be required on occasion, including being a master communicator, a change driver, a promoter, team builder, coach and an ambassador. All the while the TD also needs to be approachable and sustain balance between work and life. It is obvious that these are leadership qualities which have little to do with technical know how. 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. In fact the role of the TD is more towards ensuring the integration of technology in the learning environment occurs since this supports the

main responsibility of the school. Owen (2004) proposes six leadership strategies for supporting the implementation of technology which include forging strategies, understanding fundamentals, identifying champions, communicating vision and goals, supporting champions and celebrating successes. This type of leadership is not possible with the typical top down structure of management. Davies 2010 suggests that while having one key person responsible for the design and implementation of systems in the business world, whose goal is to make money is possible, it is not possible in schools. This is where distributed leadership comes into play. When the leadership style is distributive in nature, it is decentralized, open and more collaborative (Ancona & Backman, 2010). This approach to leadership helps to "mobilize" the "collective intelligence" and "creative talents" (Ancona & Backman, 2010, p.11) of the teams which make use of it. 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. It is this type of leadership which will assist the TD in fulfilling his/her responsibilities.

Responsibilities of a Tech Director in an International School

The first area I would like to look at is identifying the administrative responsibilities of a TD in an international school pertaining to curriculum and instruction, yearly budgeting, technology use planning, technology staff direction, technology coach evaluation, professional development planning, professional development fund allocation and the formation and leadership of the technology advisory committee. In order to learn about these aspects of the TD's responsibility I took part in Focus On Learning administrative meetings, shadowed (observed TD in his work environment) and had discussions with the TD.

Curriculum and instruction

At AISG the TD is a member of the Focus on Learning Administrative team. This team is comprised of the following members. The Director of the School, the International Baccalaureate Coordinator, the Primary Years Programme Coordinator, the Chief Financial Officer, the Director of Development, the Principals of all divisions, the Assistant Principals of all divisions, the Curriculum Coordinators from both campuses and the TD. Not every member is present at every meeting. 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. Each meeting I attended began with an activity that is made to help the team get to know each other better on a more personal basis. All members were involved in all the topics, giving their input and adding to the discussions. 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.

These meetings are where the FOL team discusses areas of curriculum and instruction. The TD 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 in regards to technology integration into the curricular areas being discussed. This is directly related to Owen's (2004), leadership strategy for supporting technology implementation, of establishing 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" (Owen, 2004, p.642).

Yearly budgeting

To learn about this area of the TD responsibilities I met with the TD and had a discussion about the technology budget at AISG. 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 curricular as well as business in nature. 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 also true for the hardware that creates the network that 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 of the IT budget which in turn supports the goals of the school. 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.

Technology use planning and the creation of a tech plan

The TD at AISG is responsible for the creations and review of a technology use plan (TUP) that lays out how technology will be implemented. He is also responsible for the creation and review of the documents which support this plan and the actual implementation of the plan. In fact, after reviewing the TD job descriptions from five different international schools (See Appendix B) it appears that this responsibility is similar in the international schools who have this position.

To assist with the creation of the TUP the TD at AISG is responsible for the formation and leadership of the Technology Advisory Committee which includes teachers, librarians and tech coaches. The committee is formed on each campus and is responsible for informing the direction of the TUP. The creation of this team of teachers and specialists is another way in which Distributed Leadership is shown at AISG. This type 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.

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 on how technology will affect different areas of the school (Davies, 2010). AISG's team of teachers this year 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 TD is the meeting chair at these meetings and helps to facilitate discussion. This is just one way in which the TD 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" (Standards A, 2009)

Another aspect of the creation and review of the TUP is that generally the plan made must support the main function of the school which is teaching and learning. The School Board is, therefore, interested in the plans and the results of the implementation of the TUP. The TD must create a report to the school board which outlines the plan and budget for the plan, how the plan was implemented and finally the results of this implementation. It is really important that the plan and the report to the School Board includes things such as access, software and proper training. Kleiman (2000), discusses the myth which says computers have a direct impact on improving learning. Basically, having more computers won't ensure better results. It is the purpose of the tool that makes a difference and Kleiman (2000) suggests five things which must happen in order for computers to be effective. He mentions that schools must, "address the need for professional development, technical support, the availability of appropriate software,

classroom management and, curriculum integration (p. 3). The TD must ensure that the TUP covers all of these areas not just the purchase and roll out of hardware. In this way the TD assists in meeting the goals of the school by supporting the proper implementation of technology integration.

Technology staff direction

The TD of AISG is responsible for leading a group of staff hired to provide technical support. These people are most certainly needed especially in educational institutions. Michael (1998), advocates that "technical support is inevitable" (p. 283) especially in an institution where there are possibly hundreds of devices and users. In order for this team to function well the TD must make sure everyone is on the same page. Hall (2008), suggests some strategies to ensure the proper functioning of the team including shared ownership and understanding, effective and valuable communication strategies, and ways for staff to be involved with making decisions. As discussed above this type of working environment is best supported by a distributed leadership model. While shadowing the TD I witnessed a situation where clear communications was needed to ensure the proper steps were taken to solve a problem involving an online software platform. The support staff were unclear who was responsible for managing and supporting this software when issues arose. The TD 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 the "new guy" 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 (n.d.), 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 what they do with the information and technology that matters.

Technology coach evaluation

Another aspect of the TD responsibilities at AISG is the leadership of the technology integration faculty. At AISG there are Technology Coaches at every division which help to support the technology integration efforts of the classroom teachers. The duties of the TD in regards to these integration faculty span communicating goals and direction to leading the creation of a professional development plan for the teaching staff. Another recent addition to the TD's role at AISG is the yearly evaluations of the Technology Coaches. These evaluations are much like regular teacher evaluations, reflective in nature and require Technology Coaches take an active role in their own professional development and growth. This reflective process allows the TD and the Technology Coaches to improve as practitioners in the field of educational technology. According to Ryan and Ryan (2013) reflection causes the learner to actively participate in the process, therefore, improving professional learning and practice.

Professional development planning and fund allocation

There are many ways the TD supports professional development at an international school. The TD at AISG works as the project leader for EDTECH-GZ, an annual technology focused workshop for international schools within the southern Pearl River Delta region of China. He also works in collaboration with the Technology Coaches to ensure that certain faculty training days and regular professional development opportunities are provided to the faculty and staff. He works in collaboration with other school administrators to allocate a certain amount of professional development funds to workshops and conferences which have a technology focus.

Some examples include Learning 2.0 and 21st Century Hong Kong conferences. These funds are a part of the professional development fund in the school budget. As Kleiman (2000) has discussed just having the tools and access to them is not enough for technology to be effective in meeting the needs of the school's goals. In order for technology to reach its full potential schools must, "address the need for professional development, technical support, the availability of appropriate software, classroom management and, curriculum integration (Kleiman, 2000, p. 3). By supporting faculty PD in relation to technology integration, the TD is ensuring technology is used at the school in meaningful ways.

Communication and reflection

The next area I would like to discuss deals with the following learning objectives.

- Identify leadership skills used to motivate tech department to complete projects.
- Identify communication skills used by the technology director to communicate thoughts and ideas clearly.
- Identifying difficult situations and how to solve them within the context of the school that will be best for all divisions.

All of these are related to the ability of the TD to be an effective communicator. This comes down to the what Hall (2008) suggests is the ability to be a reflective leader. Hall (2008) outlines four steps to becoming a reflective leader. These steps include data gathering, expanding your own information, application of knowledge and the employment of active reflection. According to Hall (2008) active reflection happens when the reflective practitioner reflects on an experience, communicates with a peer about what was learned, and then pinpoints specific strategies for improvement (Hall, 2008, chap. 2 sec. 1).

Reflective Practice has been described as the ability to think about action so that learning can occur (Reflective practice, 2014). Another common definition of reflective learning is the ability for the learner to connect theory with practice and inform future attempts, which provide ways to improve performance (Reflective Learning, n.d.). Reflective practice has its roots in reflective thinking and intellectual growth proposed by Dewy in 1933 (Ryan & Ryan, 2013). Later, in his book The Reflective Practitioner, published in 1983, Donald Schönn introduced reflective practice (Reflective practice, 2014) and asserted how reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action can be influential in professional education (Ryan & Ryan, 2013). According to Ryan and Ryan (2013) reflection causes the learner to actively participate in the process, therefore, improving professional learning and practice.

Farrow (2011) states reflection-in-action "refers to the kinds of tacit knowledge we reveal in the way we carry out tasks and approach problems" (Farrow, 2011, para. 3) and that reflection-on-action "occurs after the fact, and is often conscious and/or documented" (Farrow, 2011, para. 3). While observing the TD it was apparent that both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action were used. The ability to reflect during interactions with other in the school as well as after the interaction has taken place, allows the TD to motivate others to complete task, communicate thoughts and ideas more effectively and solve difficult problems as they arise. This can be accomplished by developing skills in inquiry. Being able to ask the right kind of questions helps the reflective practitioner to practice active reflection to help others while also increasing your own capabilities (Hall, 2008). The TD at AISG is very adept at asking questions and getting to the root of a problem. An example of this was when, the tech department had been receiving several reports of parents not being able to access the videos on class blogs. The TD

met with the Tech Coach and the tech support staff responsible for the blogging platform at AISG. During the meeting he asked specific questions, reflected on the responses and then asked more questions to clarify. These questions helped the Tech Coach and the support staff to reflect more on the issue and through this consultation they were able to come up with possible steps to solve the problem.

Keeping up-to-date

Another responsibility of a TD in an international school is to identify methods used to keep up to date with technological advances and what is considered current best practice. This was one area when comparing the job description from other international schools which every school required. The idea of lifelong learning is commonplace in international schools. It is common for people to continue their education well into adulthood (Baker, 2014). According to Ranieri, Manca, and Fini (2012) lifelong learning is defined as continual process of updating "knowledge and skills" in order to meet the changing circumstances of life (p. 756). Trust (2013) states that "professional development is viewed as a career-long, context-specific, continuous endeavor" (p. 205). The TD at AISG participates in yearly formal PD opportunities but also makes use of the Internet and the ability to connect with others as a way to stay current. He is a member of the China Edu Tech Group in WeChat which is a chat forum with over 100 members ranging from technology support staff to technology directors. This group is very active and discuss items ranging from collaborative platforms to bandwidth issues. He also is a member of the Office 365 Network in Yammer and of the Tech Director Ning community. These online resources form his own personal learning network (PLN) where he connects with other professionals in the field. Trust (2012) has stated that "Many teachers have extended their

learning by developing online professional learning networks (PLNs)" (p.34). His PLN is one way in which he uses informal learning to maintain currency.

Final thoughts

Being a TD at an International School is a complex leadership position which has many intertwined responsibilities. In Technology in Higher Education: Defining the Strategic Leader the authors state, "The IT leader occupies a unique position at the center of massive change, making this role both a challenging one and one that will continue to evolve in the coming years" (p.27). This role is so complex that no one person could master all of the technical issues that might arise. It is therefore, important to build a great team of people to support the implementation of technology (Educause, 2015). The most important aspects of the position comes down to people skills and leadership qualities. The ability to ask good questions, empower others to take action. A great model for IT Leadership is presented in Technology in Higher Education: Defining the Strategic Leader. This model is a series of concentric circles. In the center of this model is the word strategist which is surrounded by three roles, visionary, trusted advisor and relationship builder. The next circle includes, ambassador, master communicator, promoter and persuader, team builder, coach and change driver. The three circles are enclosed with a final circle labeled human (Educause, 2015). In my opinion, the TD at an international school is not a job where a high degree of technical skill is needed. It is a job where distributed leadership skills which assist in creating the right kind of relationships and team building allow for change to occur.

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Appendix A

Organizational Background

AISG's Mission Statement is "Nurturing Students to Aspire and Achieve."

To better assist administration, faculty, staff, and the greater AISG community, in understanding the mission statement, some core beliefs have been decided upon. These core beliefs, along with the Expected Schoolwide Learning Results, help the school fulfill its mission.

Core Beliefs

AISG Believes:
Every student has the right to learn in a secure, healthy and positive environment.
Every individual has intrinsic worth and should be respected.
Learning is a life-long process.
Students, parents, teachers and the entire school community share responsibility for learning.
In the value of open and honest communication.

Expected Schoolwide Learning Results (ESLRS)
In addition to meeting the curricular standards (subject area knowledge, skills and understandings), and in keeping with the school's Mission, AISG students are expected to:

Standard 1: Learn with Enthusiasm, Self-Direction and Perseverance
Standard 2: Communicate and Collaborate Effectively
Standard 3: Think Critically and Creatively to Solve Problems
Standard 4: Demonstrate Global Understanding and Citizenship

Organizational History

In 1981, The American International School of Guangzhou, located in the Dong Fang Hotel, began as the American School of Guangzhou (ASG), serving the children of the American Consulate. From 1985 to 1987 ASG expanded enrollment, moved to the Garden Hotel, and was accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges to provide instruction in grades kindergarten through eight. From 1994 to 1998 ASG's enrollment increased, the school moved to a purpose-built building, the high school was added and the school was reorganized legally as a non-profit corporation in the U.S.A. ASG also changed its name to American International School of Guangzhou and gained official recognition by the People's Republic of China as a school serving expatriate children. From 2001 to 2004 AISG receives authorization from the

International Baccalaureate Office to present the Middle Years Program, and the Primary Years Program.

Governance

The AISG Board of Governors, authorized by the Articles of Association and the By-Laws, governs AISG. The board's main functions are to hire a Director to oversee the running of the school; create, approve and maintain policy; and ensure the school is adequately financed to accomplish its stated mission and objectives.

Appendix B

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	<	<	<	<	<	
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