

Field Experience: Technology Audit

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For this field experience, I conducted an interview a local school division's Director of Technology and Accountability (DTA). I also began the process of updating the division's Technology Strategic Plan (TSP). Since these were two distinctly different—but closely related—experiences, I have divided my reflection into two parts. In the first, I give an overview of my interview with the division's DTA. In the second, I reflect on the process of updating the TSP and how this process is connected to what I learned in interviewing the DTA.

Interview

I interviewed the division's DTA to learn more about the division's approach to educational technology and what devices and services make up the current “state of technology” in the division. I learned that many processes, including keeping an accurate inventory of available devices, are not standardized. This is a small school division and, in the words of the DTA, they were “late to the [educational] technology game.”

This has a good and a bad side. On the good side, they were able to buy better, faster technology at a cheaper cost than many neighboring divisions; their networks and servers will not require updates for many years because many technologies became more robust and standardized between the early days of wireless Internet and when this division began wiring its schools.

On the bad side, the lack of a cohesive vision for implementing educational technology has led to a piecemeal approach. Teachers have applied for individual grants to fund classroom technology purchases, so there are pockets un-inventoried devices throughout the division. The school division has been very supportive of piloting new technologies, but with little follow

through to standardize offerings throughout buildings or grade levels. The DTA did not have a firm knowledge of what technologies might be available at different schools.

TSP Updates

The first part of updating the TSP was conducting a needs assessment to see what strengths existed within the school division, related to educational technology, and what needs might be unmet. I recommended a multi-dimensional approach to this needs assessment: focus groups with parents and community members; a staff professional-development survey¹; and a survey for middle and high students currently enrolled in technology classes throughout the division. My suggestions were met with support and I moved forward with the plan.

Before developing any products, I reviewed the ISTE standards for teachers, school leaders, and students and completed the ISTE technology self-assessment. Using data gathered from this process, and taking into account the information the DTA shared with me, I then developed a survey for students. My goal was to learn more about how students were actually using technology in the classroom and at home to help them learn, complete assignments, or stay organized. Since the division's approach to educational technology was so scattered, it was important to learn more about how students perceived the technologies available to them and what unmet needs they might have related to learning with technology.

I also planned and conducted a focus group for parents and community members. This was not well attended, but the few stakeholders who were present had a rich conversation about the current state of technology in the division and what they would like to see more of. The culmination of my project will be creating a template for the updated TSP, nested within the

¹ The division was already planning to issue a staff survey related to professional development. I suggested we add a few items on this survey specifically targeted to teachers' educational technology learning needs.

division's current Strategic Plan. This updated TSP will reflect not only where the division is currently, but also where they would like to go with respect to student's technology skills and abilities.

Reflection

This was an intense and richly rewarding learning experience and aligned with what I have learned throughout my program of studies at William & Mary, not just in EPPL 550. Throughout my audit of the division's technologies, I was reminded how important it is to be guided by a strategic plan and a central vision. Although this division has just finished the process of updating their overall strategic plan, both their professional development plan and their technology plan had not been updated or aligned with the new strategic plan. These are essential components of a robust strategic plan and divisions cannot afford to neglect them.

There is a lot more work to do before this TSP is ready to be implemented, but even the process of considering how to "plan for the plan" forced me to practice viewing this problem through different frames. Politically, I was in the position of an intern, unproven and unknown to many of the people who I needed to rely on for information. Some in the IT department who did not, at first, understand why I was asking questions about how they were using technology met me with hostility and resistance. They felt threatened in what they rightly considered their turf. Additionally, I had to consider all of the existing policies and procedures—the structures—that bounded the problem of educational technology. For example, there is no way within the current organizational structure, to suggest moving toward a PBL-type instructional model in the high school. Their "straight seven" schedule makes finding large blocks of time for projects impossible. There are no simple problems; it is one thing to say, "We have to make this TSP the

right way.” It is a whole different thing to actually move forward, in any kind of timely manner, doing things the right way.