Running head: The Leadership Role

The Leadership Role of Instructional Technology Specialists

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Abstract

The Instructional Technology Specialist is a key leader on the road to technology use and integration. This person is the link from standard curriculum to an enriched curriculum that will benefit the students. There are many resources available to schools and teachers to use within each classroom and office. A valued leader must take the reigns and lead staff to an understanding of the importance of technology integration and 21st Century Skills.

As technology continues to become a part of every person's life, it is important to impart knowledge onto students and teachers from the beginning. Schools are no longer just a place for the core subjects of reading, writing, math, science, and social studies. Our education system is giving children more than this knowledge; they are giving them the tools and resources necessary to become successful citizens in today's world. At one point, computer class was a special that many students looked at as a time to play games. This role is changing and in some cases has changed drastically. Computers are now readily available in most classrooms, teachers are using the technology to guide the students and have them create and learn great things. Technology is enabling students to take on a more hands on experience with their learning.

As we progress in today's society, it will become clear that students need to have these technological skills before they get into the work place. Even now, there are careers that require certain skills before candidates will even be considered. Yes, college will offer these courses, but for how long? As society develops, technology skills will be just as inherent as learning to read, add, and subtract. We need all of these to survive.

Quality leadership is essential to make this connection between technology and classrooms more clear and to facilitate the use and need for technology. It is important the person in this role is knowledgeable not only of the technology, but also of the curriculum and how to appropriately integrate technology. He/she needs to be a true leader who has the ability to bring staff members on board with the changes that will be taking place.

A successful instructional technology specialist, must be aware of who he/she is working with, their perceptions of technology, and their opinions on the change that is occurring. This is not an easy task for anyone. There are many types of people in the world who all function differently. According to the Myers-Briggs Inventory, there are sixteen different types of personalities. When dealing with each type, there are certain strengths and weaknesses that one may find. For example, if a person is an INFJ (introverted, intuitive, feeling, and judging) Myers-Briggs defines that person as someone who is quiet, serious, dependable, and loyal. This type of personality may have to adjust how they approach someone who is more outspoken because of their soft-spoken nature, it may be hard for the outspoken person to accept and follow the leadership of the INFJ. Knowledge of specific personality types that are characteristic to one self enables a successful and responsible leader.

The technology specialist's role spans across the district. He/she not only works with teachers, but also works with the administrators. This requires much collaboration and focus on the purpose that needs to be accomplished. Each person will have an opinion and each person will have their own idea of how things are suppose to play out. Technology specialists must take control of meetings where they are leading. The purpose and expectations must be presented before anything begins and it is important for the others involved to know that their opinion is important, but the goal will not change. If the leader is not firm in this, the outcome will most likely be failure. People need to buy into the purpose and the change so that it will become natural and not a burden.

In the article "Instructional Technology Specialists and Curriculum Work" Leigh Ausband includes the following table to outline the work done by technology specialists:

Table 4: Themes and Categories of Curriculum Work Done by Instructional Technology Specialists

Themes	Categories
Curriculum and instruction	Teacher technology portfolio
	Dealing with change
	Promoting the district's curriculum
	Developing curriculum
	Selecting and developing materials
	Improving *and changing* curriculum
	Providing resources
	Envisioning high quality curriculum
	Evaluating instruction
	Providing instructional support
Technical expertise	Integrating technology
	Evaluating and updating policies and procedures
	Providing technical assistance
	Evaluating programs/research
	Dealing with problems and issues
	Providing information on instruction and curriculum issues
	Engaging in personal and professional growth
	Maintaining positive community relations
Program management	Dealing with accountability
	Providing staff development
	Evaluating programs/conducting research
Coordination	Standardizing and routinizing
	Planning and goal setting
Communication	Informal
	Formal
	Scheduled
	Unscheduled

This table is an example of what correct technology integration should look like. Many

teachers think that by using a computer they are integrating technology. They do not

realize how much further it goes. Bitter and Pierson discuss how technology is more than computers. It is also the methods and tools used to support learning (2002). , In the case study outlined by Ausband, technology specialists were supporting teachers to develop portfolios, they provided professional development, they helped to create integrated lesson plans with the teachers. On a district level, they were involved in goal setting, improving and writing curriculum, evaluating and updating policies and procedures that deal with technology, and they were troubleshooting.

The role of the instructional technology specialist spans a great deal of leadership and responsibility that may be met with barriers. Ausband outlines some of these barriers to include lack of time to truly help teachers, a lack of accountability to continue adequate and meaningful learning with technology, and the fact that curriculum heads still focus solely on their content without the integration.

In order to combat some of these barriers, technology specialists need to be flexible and willing to handle what is thrown at them.   The book *The Servant* by James Hunter, a leader is explained as a combination of many things. People are not born knowing how to lead. Everyone is not meant to be a leader. Everyone has his or her own goals and achievement levels. Leadership is something that needs to be worked at and continues to evolve everyday depending on the situations and the ideas of the organization. Once the leader has made an impact, he/she can help the staff go from resistance and remorse to embracing of and acceptance of the changes that need to occur (Hunter, 1998)

The instructional technology specialist should also be aware of the resources that

are currently available to schools and the new technologies that would be beneficial for the district. The local community is always willing to get involved to help the schools succeed in addition to professional organization to which teachers and the instructional technology specialist may be a part of. Through these organizations, funding can be found and used to promote the learning through technology environment that needs to be created. The local community is always willing to get involved to help the schools succeed in addition to professional organizations to which teachers and the instructional technology specialist may subscribe.

Through these organizations, funding can be found and used to promote the learning through technology environment that needs to be created. The government offers a multitude of ways to increase funding for the use of technology in school districts. Classrooms for the future is one of the most recent programs that gives districts resources and technology. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, CFF is changing the way teachers interact with students and it is preparing them for the jobs of today and tomorrow. The local community is always willing to get involved to help the schools succeed in addition to professional organization to which teachers and the instructional technology specialist may be a part of. Through these organizations, funding can be found and used to promote the learning through technology environment that needs to be created.

Organizations such as the International Technology Education Association (ITEA), the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), and even the National Education Association (NEA) all provide great resources for any teacher, administrator, or specialist (Bitter and Pierson, 2002). Each organization offers multiple

publications on current news as well as grants for districts, and even literature at reduced costs. The instructional technology specialist should be familiar with these along with other resources that will allow he/she to better serve the needs of the school community. Having this information readily available and being knowledge about what is out there will prove to be a valid resource when implementing change within a district.

Knowing what is and is not acceptable use for technology within the school district should be of top priority for the technology department.   In the book *Using Technology in the Classroom*, Bitter and Pierson discuss how important it is to develop an acceptable use polity for the district. This policy is critical to conveying rules and regulations onto both the staff and the students in the school (Bitter and Pierson, 2002). As this AUP is developed, the technology specialist should be enforcing it. Teachers should know the AUP and teach it to their students. Copyright is a very large issue in schools. Teachers and students need to be aware of what is and is not legal.

To sum up, the instructional technology specialist is someone with a great deal of responsibility. It is this person's job to create a technological environment that is conducive to learning. Technology specialists work with everyone in the district to train and implement the emerging technologies that the world is demanding. Characteristics of a knowledgeable technology specialist include but are not limited to offering professional development, entering classrooms, developing lessons and curriculum, and encouraging staff to try something different and new. The person in this role needs to keep abreast of pertinent topics, resources available, and what the students need. The instructional technology specialist is a leader who is willing to take charge, try new things, and inform all involved about the benefits and advantages of using technology within the classroom.

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