

Summary of Intel IISME Fellowship
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Bruce E. Selzler

This was my third IISME fellowship and my first at Intel. I spent the last two summers with the same sponsoring company, and I hope that I will be able to spend next summer back here at Intel. I've enjoyed my stay at Intel, and would very much like to come back some time.

In addition to being at Intel for the first time I've participated in the "blogging" option given to IISME veterans as an alternative to writing an ETP. This too has been a great experience. I've especially enjoyed being able to look into the thoughts and experiences of other IISME fellows. I've participated in blogs and discussion boards in the past and, in fact, have used both in the classroom. But this is the first time I've had the opportunity to use a blogging tool exclusively with my peers. I've found the discussions to be very valuable to me both personally and professionally.

Unlimited communication and the free flow of ideas that allow you to develop empathy for the author or events being written about is one of the most powerful and meaningful uses of technology. Sadly, this is a facet of technology that doesn't often make its way into schools and the class room. I believe that by offering the blogging option IISME is, in effect, urging teachers to take this tool back to class. I also have no doubt that this option is an administrative nightmare for IISME, but the potential benefits are many.

IISME fellowships are interesting for many reasons. However I find that the parallels and what should be parallels, between the corporate culture and the education culture are fascinating. There are many similarities conceptually, as well as in the execution of tasks. However the differences in application create the variables that mean the difference between moving forward and standing still.

The implementation of change in both cultures is a perfect example. While these two cultures have similar goals with regard to creating an environment for success, the process implemented by each culture often produces entirely different results.

The corporate culture, at least the corporate culture of successful organizations, is built around the concept that change and moving forward is a good thing and is, in fact, absolutely necessary for survival. This is certainly true of the tech industry.

I experienced this when I worked for a dot com. And I see it when I work for companies as an IISME fellow. People working for these companies believe that they continue working until their tasks are complete. New directives are integrated into the work system until they become the work system. If this means coming in to work at 7:00 am and leaving at 9:00, so be it. They know that timely meeting attendance is important, and that they are expected to contribute to the team. In fact, not functioning as a productive team member is unacceptable in modern business.

When change comes to the corporate environment it isn't debated, it isn't voted on, and it isn't sent to committee for analysis. "Pilot" programs are rare, and generally when a change in direction is determined to be necessary for survival of the corporate entity it occurs in relatively short order. Successful business' turn on a dime. Failing to do so can mean the difference between success, outright failure, or having to experience a diminishment of influence and ultimately the creation of mediocre products.

The business of education absolutely needs to be able to turn on a dime. I can think of no other social, shared experience among Americans where the changes in culture, technology, and advancements in teaching and learning theory

absolutely dictate a need for swift and far reaching changes on a regular basis. And the idea of that actually happening in a typical school is laughable.

Assuming you can get an educational institution or its membership to change directions at all it's generally more of a "veer" than a turn. And, in the end, more likely just a change in lanes as opposed to direction. What's really disturbing about this is that it's become a norm. It surprises no one, and is generally felt that it's a part of doing the business of education. Sadly, and predictably, this has resulted in a diminishment of influence as well as the production of mediocre products. Something we seem to disdain as a society yet refuse to address in any serious manner.

The obstacles to implementing new ideas and moving in new directions in education are many, some of them external to the industry. The "market forces" that educational institutions have no control over include the political climate, the effect of funding initiatives, and local social and economic issues. However the roadblocks to change and the drive for success within the industry are just as powerful.

Many teachers believe that all change initiatives are doomed to failure from the outset because of bad planning and poor support from the district, state, or community. This can be true far too often. There is also a subset of teachers, and administrators who have a knee jerk reaction to any concept that doesn't represent the status quo. As if there is something inherently noble about resisting change. Unfortunately the status quo is almost always unacceptable when your concern is providing a quality education.

During this fellowship I was tasked with creative projects by both my Intel mentor as well as by IISME. I created, edited, and published materials on a number of Intel's Intranet sites, and, again, I participated in the Blogging pilot designed by the IISME administration. Both of these tasks required the application of a

variety of skills in a creative manner. But one constant I found in both projects was that I had the time to generate quality output. This is quite a different situation of a typical teaching day where most activities and tasks are approached by juggling continually decreasing opportunities to address them.

This isn't to say that those in the corporate world have an abundance of free time or that the problems we face in public education can be addressed simply by creating lots of free time for teachers. Employees at Intel are definitely very busy people who are responsible for multiple tasks and projects. They put in long days and are constantly busy. However they are able to focus on clearly defined goals. And while their directives and goals may change their support structures are designed to positively impact the greater goal of moving Intel forward. This concept is understood by the Intel employee and the corporation provides a working platform and an environment that not only supports the employee but leverages the potential for success.

This education workplace and the policies applied to the culture of work often ensure mediocrity and failure. Long term problems are generally addressed with short term planning and funding. I can think of no significant education "reform" that hasn't been implemented with limited short term support. Generally the support for changes or programs in education dries up just about the time the change or program is actually implemented.

The current small schools initiative is an excellent example. In this program you have funding (not a large amount) for three years to redesign your school schedule to give teachers more individualized time with students, more counseling services for students, more activities for students, access for more parental and community participation in school decision making, greater teamwork opportunities for teachers and departments, more in-service training opportunities for teachers, and ultimately clearly defined pathways for students entire high school experience that focus on specialized career oriented

structures. You can use the grant money to purchase supplies, pay for in-service activities, pay for FTE time for counselors and teachers (essentially buying time), and virtually any activity that supports the program.

These are all great ideas that should be occurring in good schools. In fact I think the small schools program is a good program with good intentions. Although I wish it did more to actually address the number of students a teacher see's in the course of a day. I could see this program having a profound affect on a school if implemented. However, it is very demanding of the entire staff and administration of a school. To implement the program correctly requires a virtual re design of the entire school program and an incredible amount of effort by everyone involved.

Unfortunately the funding for the program doesn't even last though an entire 4 year class of students at the high school level. And once your three years are up, you're on your own. There is no follow up support for the plan, nor is there any planned at this point. It's not surprising that it's difficult to convince a teaching staff that this project is a good investment of time. It has the familiar "oh, another badly planned project" ring to veteran teachers who have seen far too many of these programs come and go. This is yet another good idea that ultimately fails due to poor support, or produces mediocre results due to poor implementation. I don't think Intel would approach the problem in this manner.

But the real problem with this program, as with so many educational reforms, is that it attempts to address fundamental problems by treating the symptoms only. The Small Schools program actually hints at one of the real problems in education with its name and in the opportunity to buy "time" for teachers and counselors. But again fails to support structural and organizational change that empowers participants to leverage those changes for long term school improvement and greater success for students.

Teaching is a profession that requires creative skills. It's possible to learn teaching strategies, adopt methodologies, and recite educational philosophy, but to be a good teacher you must be creative. There is a science to teaching, and a shared knowledge base of fundamental skills. But there is also an aspect of teaching that is more art than science. And to be a good teacher you need opportunities to refine your art in an environment that allows you to engage your audience.

In any creative endeavor there is no substitute for time. If you desire is to produce a quality product. Teachers need support systems and organizational structures that allow them to focus on individual student learning. Not managing increasing responsibilities in a n environment of decreasing opportunity.